

DCC DAYAGANJ BUILDING COLLAPSE

# Telltale accounts of negligence, defiance and corruption

TAWFIQUE ALI

Use of substandard construction materials and negligence in treating the foundation soil might have caused the structural failure of the newly built six-storey building on Friday night in Dayaganj sweeper colony in Sutrapur, said civil engineers and geo-technologists.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) sweepers for whom the building was built alleged that the authorities undermined the lower level employees like them in developing the house that collapsed days after completion.

"The incident clearly suggests authorities' negligent attitude to us as a community of lower social echelon," said an elderly woman living in a tin-shed in the colony.

The building collapsed only a week before it was supposed to be open for 60 families of the sweeper colony. Top engineers held DCC responsible for the incident, as DCC never obtains Rajuk approval for the plan of any of its buildings.

This is a structural failure apparently because of poor quality of building materials, said a top civil engineer of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet).



Poor quality building materials caused structural failure and cracks in the walls and columns of the newly built six-storey building in Dayaganj sweeper colony in Sutrapur.

**the city that was**

Bara Katra, in south Chawk, close to the river Buriganga, was a prominent building in Dhaka during the reign of Mughals. In 1822 Doylee wrote: Bara Katra was a pompous, huge and beautiful. Shah Suja wanted to build a his own palace in Dhaka. But Shah Suja did not like the Bara Katra after it was finished, he donated it to Abul Kasem, the chief architect.

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The incident is similar to that happened to Spectrum building in Savar, he said.

There are two reasons behind such failure, said a top engineer of the public works ministry. One is that the foundation soil was originally a ditch or a waste dumping ground and it was not treated adequately before construction.

Usually, incineration is applied to settle organic soil layer by layer over time. Any soil must be tested properly before construction to determine its load bearing capacity.

"But in this case, it appears, authorities ignored such measures and soil treatment remained inadequate, as the building was meant for a sweeper colony," he said. Use of substandard building materials might also be the reason behind the incident.

"Three elements -- proper design, quality materials and consistent supervision -- are crucial for construction of a building," said the engineer.

Structural weakness and geo-technical fault are on the list of probable reasons behind failure of the building, said Prof Sekender Ali, head of civil engineering department of Buet and leader of an expert team assigned

to find out the reasons for the collapse.

"We have to detect exactly what triggered the failure," he said. It might be geo-technical fault of inadequate piling or structural fault or substandard construction materials.

Prof Ali said that the five-member team, comprising two professors of Buet, one engineer from army, one from Public Works Department and chief conservancy officer of DCC, would look into what was the condition of foundation soil and whether the piling was adequate in keeping with the soil condition.

A detailed and comprehensive examination of building materials used in the building and soil test would be carried out at Buet.

Experts said that geo-technical test (soil test) carried out randomly here and there is not reliable. Negligence to such vital tests, to save a little amount of money, may result in catastrophic consequence.

Building owners and other concerned have a tendency to get soil test carried out at a cheaper rate. Technical tests done in this manner are usually inaccurate and unreliable.

One can get a soil test done at a cost of around Tk 2,500 to 3,000 per boring in the market. But it costs Tk 30,000 if carried out at Buet.

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POISON IN FRUITS

## All that glitters is not good!

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

table. Mangoes and other fruits take a little longer to ripen.

"After using ethylene, green fruits look ripe and attractive due to a bio-chemical reaction. But the fruits remain raw inside in most of the cases," he added. "Artificially ripened fruits do not taste good, which means the nutrition value decreased."

Vendors blame wholesale traders for the use of chemicals. Zafarullah, a fruit vendor at Karwan Bazar, said, "I have heard about the use of chemicals in fruits but I don't know whether the fruits I'm selling have it or not."

"We buy ripe fruits from wholesale traders and just sell them," he added.

However, another fruit seller said use of chemicals has decreased to a certain level due to recent drives of mobile courts.

Dr MA Sobhan, research consultant, Policy Research for Development Alternative (UBINIG), said wholesale traders are mainly responsible for the use of chemicals. They try to hasten the ripening process so they can speed up the sale.

"Weak laws are the main reason why the practice escalated to such an extreme level. However, in the context of recent political situation and drives conducted by mobile courts many business men are refraining from this unethical practice to some extent. Most sellers in the fruit markets seem aware of the ill effect that chemicals have."

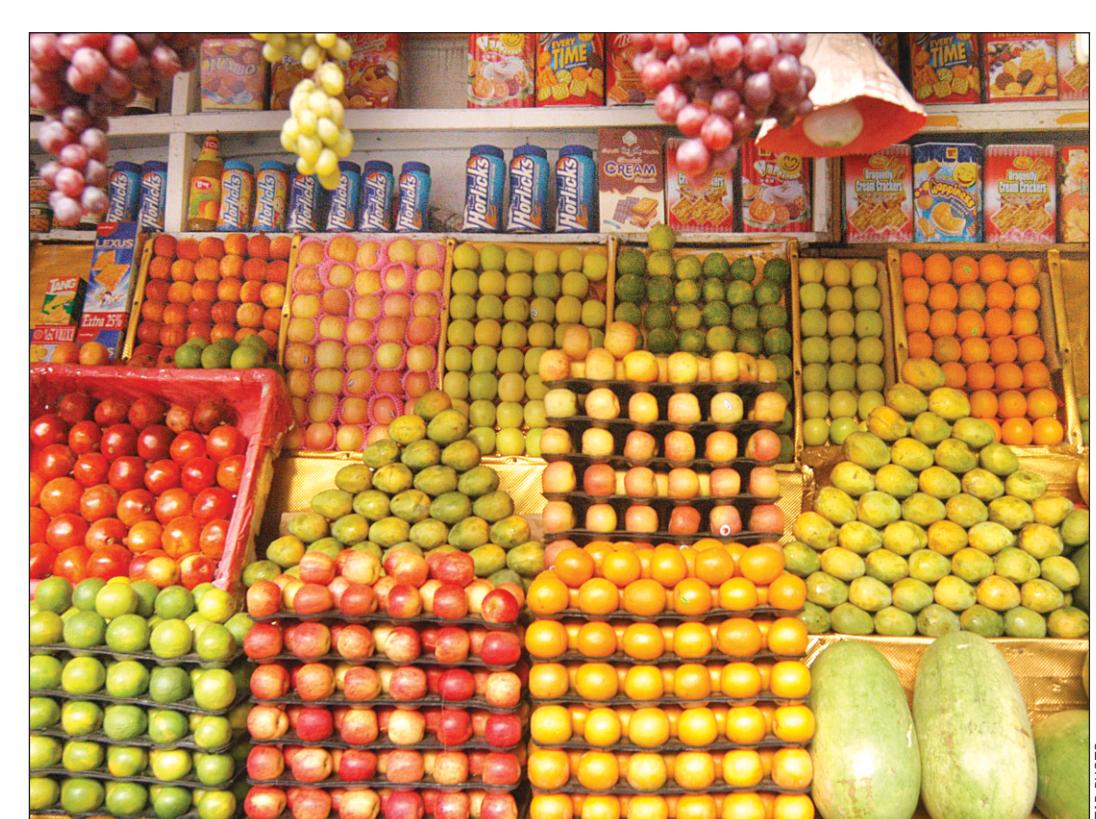
Sobhan said that all ripe fruits produce ethylene oxide naturally. But the chemicals used for quick ripening of fruits are very harmful. Calcium carbide is extremely hazardous to human existence of excessive ethylene in food can even cause cancer, he said.

Ethylene enters the bloodstream if someone breathes air containing mists or vapours with the compound. It can also enter bloodstream through skin. So the traders or sprayers who spray the chemicals can also get lung cancer, damaged eye membrane and also asthma.

"It would be wise to wash the fruit properly and peel it before eating," Khan said.

Magistrate Rokon-ud Dowlah told Star City that since summer fruits have just arrived in the market his mobile court has started a crackdown on the use of chemicals. Last Thursday the court visited Karwan Bazar and sentenced three fruit vendors to six months' jail and collected Tk 1.5 lakh as fine for using chemicals in fruits.

The magistrate said that use of chemicals and toxic colour in fruits can be punished under Bangladesh Pure Food (Amendment) Bill, 2005. Highest penalty under section 44 (7A) is Tk. 50,000 fine or one-year rigorous imprisonment or both. For the same offence second time punishment is Tk 2 lakh fine or 2 years' jail or both.



Green fruits look ripe and delectable after using chemicals.

### KHOKA'S CORNER



The footpath on the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Bangla Motor intersection has been dug up to install underground fibre optic cable of a private mobile company. Thousands of pedestrians are risking lives every day walking on the city's busiest thoroughfare. The authorities could temporarily demarcate the stretch of the road for facilitating pedestrians for a safe passage.

STAR PHOTO

### MITFORD HOSPITAL

## Washing laundry in polluted Buriganga

DURDANA GHIAS

Severe water crisis in Mitford area forces the 1000-bed Mitford Hospital authority to do the hospital washing in the stinking contaminated water of the river Buriganga.

Four people employed by a contractor wash several hundred pieces of hospital bed sheets, mops, gowns, towels, mosquito nets every day, most times in the dirty river water as the Wasa supplied taps run dry. The hospital is also devoid of an in-house laundry facility that prompted the hospital authority to employ a private contractor to do the job.

Rahman, who had been washing clothes of Mitford Hospital for the last 25 years, said that water crisis is one of the big problems they face while washing clothes.

"Very often when we do not have supply of Wasa tap water we have to wash those in the river. But the drapers used in Operation Theatre are washed

again in a separate place and sterilised. Badly stained and soiled sheets are washed in the middle of the river," he said.

"We feel bad washing these clothes in the river but what can we do? Yesterday [Sunday] we did not have water all day," said Rahman.

The workers said that they faced further problem as the hospital has no fixed 'house' to wash clothes.

"PG and Dhaka Medical have their separate places to wash clothes but in Mitford we do not have a separate place to wash them. We have to resort to the river when we do not have tap water but if we had a separate reservoir we would not have to go to the river," said Babu, another worker.

"Especially during the four months of lean period when water level decreases the pollution is at its worst. Sometimes the sluice gates are opened after an interval of a few days bringing in more polluted water. We are left with no alternative other than using that contaminated water. Sometimes we buy water at Tk 5 per pitcher to wash. We desper-



Workers dry mops and cleaning rags used in Mitford Hospital.

ately need the reservoir," said Rahman. On an average around 500 pieces of clothes are washed at the hospital every day.