

Faulty constructions go on as building code not enforced

TAWFIQUE ALI

Despite widespread anomalies in the construction sector in the capital and elsewhere, Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) has been lying ineffective for months because of the government's indifference to it, said sources.

The BNBC is a complete set of codes to ensure safe construction, accountability of the professionals and protection of urban environment. It addresses all the safety concerns like fire hazards, stability and strength of a building and quality of construction.

According to the BNBC, the government is supposed to designate authorities and appoint required number of 'building officials' to enforce the code. Existing agencies like Rajuk and Public Works Department may be designated to enforce it.

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...cies to practise the code.

The DCC sweepers' colony building at Dayaganj would not have collapsed if the BNBC was followed during its construction, said an expert preferring anonymity.

The building code was made legally binding upon any builders through a gazette notification on November 15 last year to ensure quality construction of buildings, safety of the occupiers and pro-

...the building rules of 2006 ensures compliance with the BNBC for time being.

"But adequate number of building officials and designated authorities are required for comprehensive and strict enforcement of the code," he said.

A top government engineer said practitioners of the code, including engineers, architects and planners, have to be practising technical professionals. He

resistant measures the BNBC has provisions for proper structural design, load assessment, foundation, precautionary measures, safety during construction, fire exit, air ventilation and others.

As per BNBC, a building official will be a technical hand like engineer, architect and planner who will approve building design and monitor a construction process.

certificate to use the building.

Professor Sekendar Ali of the Civil Engineering Department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) said that the building code is crucial for making buildings strong, safe and environmentally sound.

"Unless the BNBC is followed, a building is likely to be flawed with design fault, poor construction and absence of quality control," Prof Ali said. "In absence of the code even a mason can erect a building," he added.

There are innumerable 10 to 12-storey buildings in the capital city constructed on 10x20 square inch columns that can support at best a six-storey building strength-wise, he said.

President of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh Mubasshar Hussain said that enforcement of the BNBC needs designated authorities and massive publicity.

BNBC, a uniform code of building construction, has been made mandatory for any building construction work in the country under The Building Construction Act of 1952 to ensure accountability in the management of over all building construction.

The act provides for punishment with seven years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 50,000 or both in case of violation of the BNBC and Building Construction Rules of 2006.

In absence of the BNBC, it is almost impossible to hold anybody responsible for a disaster because of faulty construction of buildings, said the Rajuk chief engineer.

Experts said several buildings have collapsed in the city in recent years due to faulty design, non-engineering construction and overloading. No professional architects and engineers were involved in construction of those buildings.

A group of architects, engineers, planners and other professionals designed the BNBC in 1993. Initially, a government circular was issued to follow the code in construction. It became legally binding through a gazette notification on November 15 last year.

Law enforcement agencies have arrested five commercial builders recently in the city on allegation of using poor quality materials and anomalies in construction.

The civil engineers, architects and planners involved in any construction work will be legally liable and answerable for any lapses in their professional responsibility.

A builder has to submit the total structural design along with geo-technical report to a building official under BNBC for permission of construction and obtain certificate at different stages of construction and occupancy

however said that most of the Rajuk authorised officers and members are non-technical.

In absence of BNBC being enforced appropriately, it is easy for a builder to follow a faulty design and use low quality construction materials, said experts.

According to the experts, any building constructed in compliance with the BNBC would be safe, durable and economic.

Apart from having earthquake



In this city of concrete jungle how many high-rises followed proper building codes?

ther appointed any building officials nor delegated any agency officially to bring the code into practice.

Secretary to the Housing and Public Works ASM Rashidul Hye said that Rajuk member (planning) Nasir Uddin deals with BNBC and he could respond to its status.

Nasir Uddin said that in fact, the ministry has to appoint building officials and delegate agen-

tection of environment.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) has requested the works ministry to empower it to enforce BNBC in Dhaka but the ministry is yet to make any response in that regard.

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon said the process of approving building design by authorised officers and building construction (BC) committee of Rajuk under



The main building of Officers Club.

FOCUS ON CLUB CULTURE

Officers Club is a symbol of 'unity in diversity'

General secretary Shafique Alam Mehdi tells the Star City

Shafique Alam Mehdi, General Secretary of Officers Club, Dhaka and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Communications spoke to Fida-e-Tashfia of Star City, on the club's past, present and future.

bers, and we celebrate all the national days with great fanfare. **SC:** Besides its many benefits for the individual member, do you think the club has any role as a social organization? **SAM:** The club has a very impor-

programmes are reserved for members, but does it have any kind of involvement in the wider society?

SAM: Officers Club Dhaka is not just a club for private enjoyment; it has many philanthropic activities as well. We regularly conduct blood donation drives, and collect supplies to give to flood-affected people. We celebrate occasions such as Youth Day with all our member's families, because we understand the importance of youth.

SC: Apparently, there have been some physical expansions to accommodate the club's growth in membership and involvements?

SAM: As the club has grown in size, it has come to require more space. We wanted to preserve the original building, because it is a legacy of the past. So we built a new wing behind it. This 5-storey building that we are sitting in was completed in September 2005, using a grant from the government.

SC: Does the club still rely on the government for its running costs?

SAM: No, now we are financially self-sufficient. The hall in the new building has become a hugely popular place for social functions like weddings, and that is now our main source of income. Rather than taking money from the government, we now pay them lakhs and lakhs of VAT.

SC: What are your plans for the future?

SAM: At the moment, the only addition we are thinking about is the construction of a separate passageway for members to access the club facilities when there are weddings going on in the hall. Of course, we will continue to improve our services in every way possible, and as an executive board, we will try to establish transparency at every tier.



SHAFIQUE ALAM MEHDI
General secretary

Star City (SC): How did the Officers Club Dhaka start?

Shafique Alam Mehdi (SAM): Officers Club Dhaka was founded in 1967, by a group of officers who wanted a facility that would provide recreation and entertainment for people like themselves. Initially, there were only a few members, but the numbers picked up quickly. By mid-1968, there were 127 members, and today the number has climbed to over 3000.

SC: What would you say, is the specialty of this club? What sets it apart from all the other clubs with similar facilities in Dhaka today?

SAM: It is, and always has been, different from other service-oriented clubs in this city in that its membership is confined to Class I government officers and their family members. Whereas at other clubs membership often depends on wealth or social status, any Class I officer from any cadre can join the Officers Club, and hence it is completely homogeneous.

SC: Has the club's aims and offerings evolved with time?

SAM: Originally, the club was solely a place for sports and entertainment. Tennis, cards and billiard were among its earliest attractions. With the passage of time, our activities and services have naturally expanded and diversified. We now have facilities for hard court and grass court tennis, badminton, squash, table tennis, basketball. Among our most recent additions are a state-of-the-art health centre and a heated swimming pool. We have a new library, through which we hold certain educational programmes. There are also many cultural functions for mem-

tant social utility. It fosters interaction between people of different cadres, and we all enrich each other. I myself have been a member since 1991, so I can tell you this from experience. The environment is very harmonious. I think Officers Club Dhaka is a symbol of the concept "unity in diversity".

SC: But doesn't such a diverse membership make the club prone to conflicts?

SAM: No, problems or disputes are very rare. Perhaps it is because we are all government officers, there is a lot of discipline in the club. And even if there is any problem, there is a system for addressing it. The club's ex-officio chairman is the cabinet secretary, and as the general secretary, I am the chief executive, but there are many other elected members of the executive board, who run 11 sub-committees that are responsible for all the different aspects of the club. If anyone has a complaint, they can go to the relevant sub-committee. The way the club is run is very disciplined.

SC: The club's facilities and

Where 'sweet' rain brings bitter sufferings

Lack of sewer system causes waterlogging in Ahamednagar, Paikpara, and Shah Alibagh in Mirpur

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Residents of Ahmednagar, Paikpara and Shah Alibagh in Mirpur are suffering from waterlogging that severely disrupts life in their neighbourhood.

They demand permanent solution to the problem through regular cleaning of the drains and establishing a sewer system in the area.

"Even a little rain causes severe waterlogging in this low-lying area. Waterlogging causes traffic jam, leading to immense sufferings of the residents. School going children suffer the most," said Murad Hossain, president, West Ahmednagar House Owners' Association.

"The situation is extremely bad and it is worsening every day," added Murad who has been living in this area for the last 35 years. "During rain ground floors and under-

ground water tanks of most of the houses go under water. People living near the Salemuddin Market are the worst sufferer. Waist deep water is an everyday experience for them during the monsoon"

"Drainage system in the area is not adequate and it is not regularly cleaned. It has been around two years the drains were last cleaned up. Now it is severely clogged. Cleaners of the city corporation would not clean even an inch without bribe," alleged Murad.

Ahmednagar, Paikpara and Shah Alibagh are in ward no 12, 13 and 14 of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). When asked about the problem, Shirin Rukhsana, ward commissioner (reserved seat-6) of the area, said, "The area is being neglected for a long time. With the meagre yearly budget it is not possible to solve all the problems."

"The area is not under Rajuk master plan. There is no sewer

system. The streets are very narrow and they need massive repair work. We have to improve the alleys first, then we will be able to establish sewer system in the area," she added.

"We also need more cleaners for the surface drains," Rukhsana said. The area is situated under DCC zones 7 and 8. Executive officer for zone 7 said the situation has worsened because there is no sewer system in the area.

The surface drains of the area are connected to the sewer that flushes water out of Mirpur section 1 and 2. "Mirpur is a vast area with huge population. Sewer connected to that area always overflows. Moreover, Ahmednagar, Paikpara and Shah Alibagh are low-lying areas. Water from the drain cannot push its way up to the sewer system," he said.

He also blamed the house owners for covering the surface drains

with slabs.

"Rainwater from Ahmednagar, Paikpara and Shah Alibagh are usually pumped out into the Kalyanpur canal. Pumping alone cannot get rid of the water," he added.

He mentioned that earlier the rainwater used to lead its way to the Kalyanpur canal through retention ponds in the area. Nowadays roads and houses blocked all the ways. Houses are built in lower grounds than the roads so when it rains houses become inundated.

"The only solution that can ease the situation is to build a sewer system that directly connects with the main sewer on Darus Salam Road or to drain the water through a long pipe in the Kalyanpur canal," he said. "We are working together with the Dhaka Wasa to find permanent solution to the problem," he added.

