

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

e-mail: starcity@thedailystar.net

Rangs floor collapse calls for scientific highrise demolition

TAWFIQUE ALI

The latest incident of floor collapse of the Rangs Bhaban reminds the authorities of the necessity of following a scientific and safe method in demolishing any high-rise building.

Experts said the authorities have neither carried out any survey nor taken any safety precautions before going for demolition of the 22-storey building in the city.

As a consequence of the 'unplanned and unprofessional' handling of the demolition work, several labourers were killed and many injured when the floors collapsed Saturday night.

According to witnesses' account, part of the building's 17th floor caved in at about 9:45pm, resulting in collapse of all the subsequent floors downward to the 3rd floor.

The experts said the authorities consistently ignored, since the very beginning, all the warnings, precautions and suggestions for safe demolition of such a high-rise building.

They believe that excessive load of piled-up debris might have caused the accident.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, an engineer and an expert in the field and vice-chancellor of Brac University, said the authorities should have taken adequate precautions and ensured engineering supervision considering lives of hundreds of labourers and other staff.

"It was a very unprofessional handling of a huge demolition

work," Prof Chowdhury said. "The incidents manifest total lack of engineering supervision in the work."

Demolishing the upper 16 floors keeping the six at the bottom intact is really a difficult job, he said. "The authorities should have demonstrated adequate professionalism and taken more precautionary measures, which are evidently absent in this case."

In case of demolishing even an ordinary building, there must

be an approved methodical statement (demolition plan) on how the job will be carried out. But in case of Rangs Bhaban, demolition contractors were engaged without any plan, sources said.

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon could not be contacted for his version in this regard.

Sekandar Ali, a professor of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), said normally

load-bearing capacity of a floor is 250 to 300 pounds per square foot. But in this case it seems that load of debris was much higher.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakhha (Rajuk) started demolishing interiors of the upper 16 floors of the 22-storey building on August 3, a day after the government won a legal battle in the Supreme Court in favour of dismantling the floors.

But inadequate safety measures and lack of engineering

supervision in the demolition work resulted in the death of a day-labourer Sohrab Hossain, who fell off the 12th floor of the building while demolishing an inner wall on August 8.

Following the death of Sohrab, former chief engineer of Rajuk M Emdadul Islam cautioned about the possibilities of further accidents and casualties if the work was carried on with the conventional demolition method.

Islam, who is a fellow of the Institute of Demolition Engineers, UK, suggested controlled demolition (blasting with explosives) of the building.

Professor Sekandar Ali said that any demolition work must be carried out as per a plan and sequence prepared and supervised by engineers. He also said that labourers on the other hand should have insurance coverage.

President of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) Mubasshar Hussain said the safe way was to knock down the floors one after another from the top removing instantly the debris of the preceding floor, instead of piling it up on the lower floors.

"Authorities should have explored other options like using explosives. Demolition is a highly technical job. But the demolition of Rangs Bhaban was being carried out as a mere labour-dependent job," he said.

"The disaster that have occurred manifests that the authorities did not have any demolition survey and plan," Husain said.

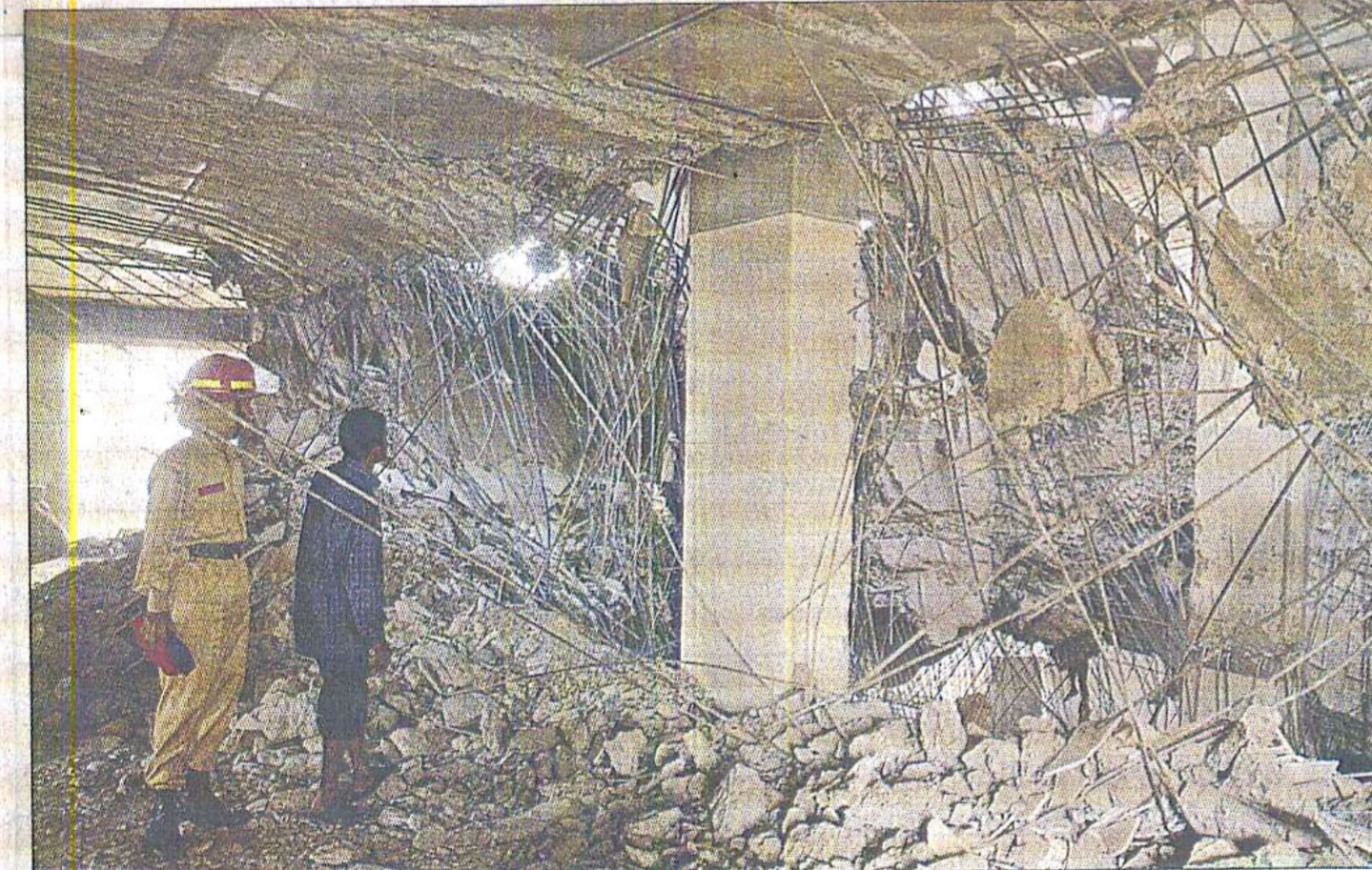
According to Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC), all the demolition works shall be done on approval by a building official or an engineer 'having experience in demolition of similar magnitude.' The code also asked for a detailed survey of the building to be demolished and of the surrounding buildings.

Shamsur Rahman, Rajuk authorised officer concerned, said the contractor of the demolition work carries out the work even at night to meet the deadline. But he could not say whether the contractor has permission to carry out demolition at night.

Rahman said that an engineering team of Rajuk and the contractor's own staff are supposed to do constant monitoring of the demolition work.

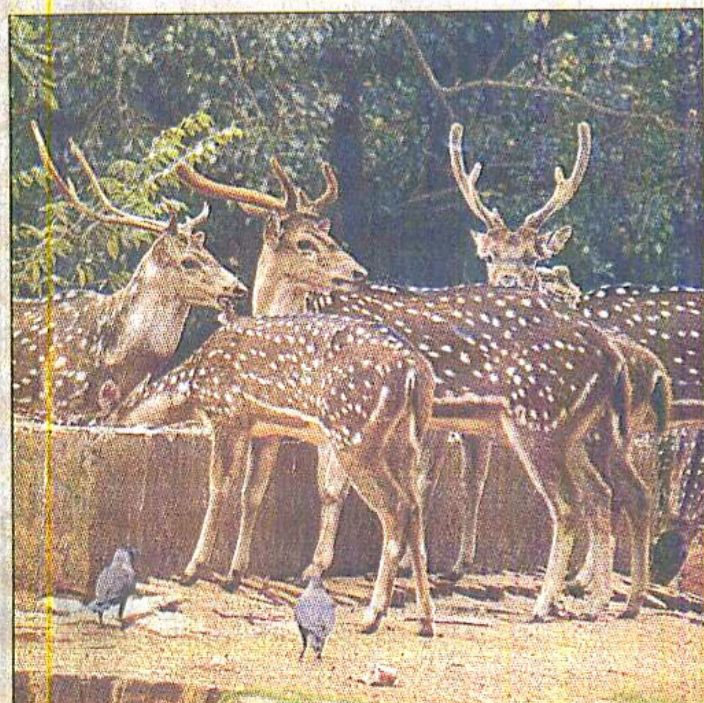
But site engineer of Six Star Ziaur Rahman said that usually no engineer from Rajuk or the contractor's firm stays at the site during the night shift demolition work.

Raqib Hasan, an associate professor of civil engineering at Buet who is on the government-instituted three-member probe committee, said it would take time to ascertain the exact reason behind the collapse.



A relative of a dead labourer, top, breaks down at the Rangs Bhaban, floors of which caved in on Saturday.

Ten spotted deer to be flown 'straight' to Kuwait today



CITY CORRESPONDENT

The 10 spotted deer from Bangladesh is finally going to Kuwait today after a failed attempt on Saturday, said zoo officials.

On Saturday, the animals were transported to Zia International Airport from Dhaka zoo and loaded on board a Kuwaiti air force plane. But the animals were brought back to the zoo as the Mumbai airport authorities denied stopover of animals at the airport, sources said.

The deer are being sent to Kuwait under an animal exchange programme between the two countries.

After deducting the 10 deer being shipped out to Kuwait and four other killed in virus infection in November, the deer population at the Dhaka Zoo will now stand at 130.

"The 10 deer, after being cap-

tured with tranquilisers, will be put on observation in quarantine. We usually keep them there for two days to see if they are physically alright," said a Dhaka Zoo official.

"But in this case, we did not have enough time due to the incident at the airport. All the commotion of tranquillising the animals, transporting them back and forth and putting them in or taking them out of wooden boxes will put the animals under a lot of stress," he added.

"Instead of stopping over in Mumbai, the plane this time will go straight to Kuwait," he said with a sigh of relief.

The Dhaka Zoo was supposed to receive 22 animals from Kuwait and Nepal in 2006 under animal exchange programmes.

So far, Bangladesh is the only country that is sending animals to adhere to the programme. The

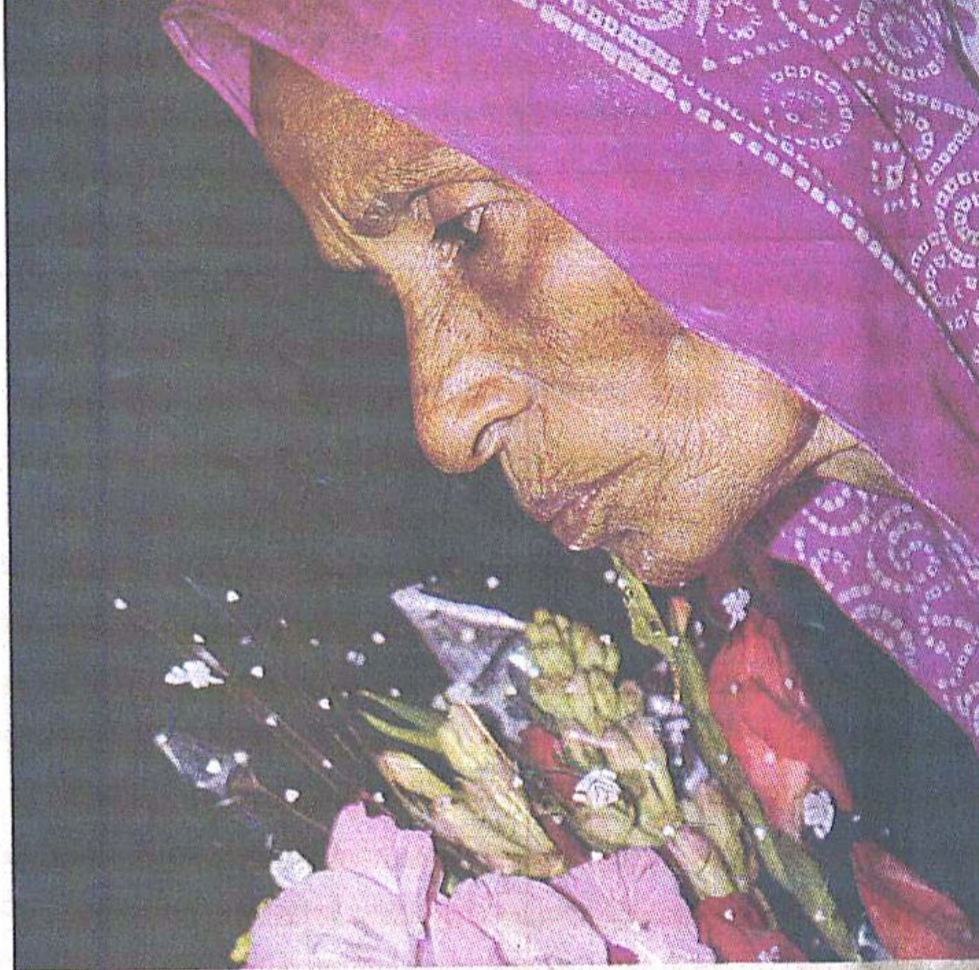
other two countries are yet to follow.

The Dhaka Zoo is laid out on about 186 acres of land where it showcases a wide variety of different species including 55 mammals, 72 birds, 32 fish and a good number of reptiles.

Its collection of mammals includes elephant, Royal Bengal tiger, cheetah, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, zebra, different species of monkeys and chimpanzees and more. Various species of snakes and crocodiles are on display here under reptile category.

Within a few months, around a hundred more animals from eleven different species including giraffe, zebra, chimpanzee, impala, kudu, elan, lemur, horse, donkey and several species of monkeys will be added to the Dhaka zoo at a cost of around Tk 6 crore.

FACE OF A FREEDOM FIGHTER



Women freedom fighters reminisced their wartime memories at a reunion yesterday. Like in the past they were honoured and feted while every December they reiterated their demand for the trial of war criminals. The programme was jointly organised by Mohila Muktiyoddha Sangsad, BNPS and IED at the Chhayanaut Bhaban.

KILLING FIELD AT MIRPUR BANGLA COLLEGE

Students join hands to salvage history

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

"It came as a shock to us when we first found out that our college ground was used as a killing field during the Liberation War," said M Zahiruddin, a 2nd year BSS student of Mirpur Bangla College.

"When we visited the Jalladkhana memorial, we saw the name of our college in the list of killing fields engraved on a marble plaque there. We were really overwhelmed to realise that many Bangladeshis breathed their last on our college ground," he added.

This revelation inspired Zahir and his classmates do something worthwhile -- they formed a committee tasked with digging out more information about the forgotten killing field and mass grave of Bangla College.

Rather than wasting time by just hanging out with friends, these enlightened youngsters decided to make the best use of it by engaging themselves in salvaging the history and the remains of the nation's martyrs who are resting in peace underneath the college ground.

The pack of young researchers tracked down an issue of an old newspaper, the daily Purbodesh, in which existence of a killing field inside the Bangla College compound was mentioned.

The January 8, 1972 issue of the newspaper, stored in the National Archives in Agargaon, published a report on finding human remains, skeletons and pieces of clothes in the back of the college where many families gathered with the hope to identify remains of their missing loved ones.

The students also located a book that narrates the existence

of a killing field inside the college boundary. Sukumar Roy in his book 'Ektorer Badhyabumi O Gano Kabor' mentioned about the killing field on pages 23, 170 and 172.

"There are large fields in the front and back of the college. We have very little clue about the exact location of the killing spot or the mass grave. That's what we are working on to find out now," said Zahir.

"We want to resurrect the memories of the martyrs from oblivion and pay the respect they deserve by building a memorial on the college ground," he added.

The students of the college have hung a banner near the college entrance requesting information from eyewitnesses about the killing field or the mass grave. They have also opened up a book to record all the eyewitness accounts.

Established in 1962, the first campus of Bangla College was located at Bakshibazar in old Dhaka. The college was relocated in 1965 to its present 19-acre (57 bighas) campus at Mirpur.

The Bangla College students in their effort to pinpoint the exact location of the killing field or the mass burial site on this huge piece of land also contacted local freedom fighters for their account of the history.

Aga Khan Mintu, a distinguished war veteran from the Mirpur area, could only give a vague recollection of the history to the students.

The college had only one academic building surrounded by vast open fields and trees with barbed wire fencing all around. The campus was closed during the war and was used as a camp of the 'Biharis', said Aga Khan. After the war was over, human

remains were found at many locations at Mirpur including on the Bangla College campus, the freedom fighter went on saying that more buildings were added on the campus in course of time, occupying the open spaces around the college.

"After all these years, it's hard to pinpoint the exact location [of the killing field]. As a nation, we are not very keen on preserving the history. Somewhere down the line during all the construction work, the mass graves as well as the history were buried," Aga Khan lamented.

Around 15,000 students are currently enrolled at Bangla College that has a large playground in front of the academic buildings and in the back, it has a pond and a small backyard.

Sabina Yasmin, a 1st year student of Bangla Department at the college, said, "It's hard to believe that the same lawn we sat on, roved about or walked by in the past year has a hidden story to tell. It now feels weird when I walk over this green field."

Zahir's classmate Sirajul Islam Mukul said, "I now feel uncomfortable every time I walk by this lawn thinking that I might step on the bodies of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for our nation."

Mofidul Haque, a trustee of Liberation War Museum, said, "The young generation taking the time to learn more about their history and searching for a very important piece of evidence is really a wonderful sign."

"They have the most powerful weapons -- the passion and the spirit, which can help them achieve the unattainable. The liberation war museum will be there next to them during their journey," he added.

Some of the students of Bangla College working to retrieve the remains of the martyrs killed and dumped in 1971 on the college campus.



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