

MOST HIGH-RISES LACK SAFETY MEASURES

Few know use of fire-fighting tools, no drill for residents

DURDANA GHAS

Many of the city's high-rise apartment and office buildings do not have proper fire safety measures like fire exit and firefighting equipment.

In most cases, residents and staffs of apartments and offices where such equipment are available do not know how to use them. Due to lack of training they cannot operate a fire extinguisher in case of an emergency.

Visiting some apartments this correspondent found hoses are curiously curled inside flashy glass-cases and date-expired fire extinguishers are displayed like showpieces at the buildings.

But most of these fire extinguishers are date-expired. The management of the buildings could not say specifically when these were refilled last.

"I have seen fire extinguishers at my apartment. But I don't know what will I do with them if there is a fire," said Shaila, a resident of Kalabagan.

Most people are not aware of fire safety.

"I don't know how to operate the firefighting equipment and to tell you the truth I never cared," said a service holder at Karwan Bazar.

"In my office the fire safety buckets containing sands are being used as trash bins and large ashtrays to dump cigarette butts," he said.

There are some apartment residents who are aware of the fire safety but they do not get expected support from the building management.

"Six months ago an electric short-circuit took place on a floor of our apartment. Following the accident the management and residents became aware for a few days but after that everything died down again," said a resident of an apartment building at Green Road where 90 families reside.

"Two months before that incident I had told the management of the building to refill the fire extinguishers but nobody paid heed as they are busy to



Most residents of high-rises even do not know how to use a fire extinguisher (inset). File photo shows people trying to escape fire at BSEC Bhaban over a year ago.



perform other 'important' tasks," he said.

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"We don't even know how to handle the fire extinguishers because there was never any fire drill," he added.

In most cases buildings do not have fire exits.

"If there is fire in my building

there will be no other way for me to escape other than jumping from the roof," said a resident of Mirpur.

Most apartments in the city do not practise fire exit drills and refill fire extinguishers regularly.

Asked, engineer of a 20-storey apartment at Panthapath said

there had been no fire drills since the construction of the building.

Asked about the expiry dates of the extinguishers he could not specifically say when those should be refilled.

General Secretary of an apartment at Green Road admitted that they have never arranged

fire drills for the residents. About the fire extinguishers, he said, "Some of them are refilled." But he did not specify when.

However, residents of that apartment said the extinguishers were last refilled in 2005 and all of them are date-expired.

Neither the fire brigade nor the Rajuk has any list of the residential apartments lacking fire safety measures.

Abdul Mannan, director, Development Control, Rajuk, said they do not have such list. "There is a monitoring team under the works ministry that inspects garment factories only," he mentioned.

Director (Operation) of Fire Service and Civil Defence Major Sheikh Shahjalal, said that no survey has been done on how many buildings lack fire safety due to lack of manpower and organisational capacity.

However, they have records on warehouses that have taken fire safety licence.

About the fire drills of residents and office staffs he said that everybody should have this training from their sense of responsibility.

"Buildings more than 7-storey take fire clearance certificate from us. The building owner is supposed to take the certificate. If he does not approach us or if we are not informed that the construction is over, then the certificate is not given and the building remains undetected unless we get a complaint and go for an inspection. If we find anomaly, then we declare it an illegal structure and inform Rajuk about it. But we cannot punish him," said Major Shahjalal.

"We cannot inspect all the buildings due to shortage of manpower. Dhaka city grew but the number of fire stations did not increase since 1982," he added.

Asked about 'inner fire exit' that some apartment buildings have, he said that this is the first time he heard this term.

Residents of some apartments said one of the two or three staircases of their buildings are used as 'inner fire exit'.



Nuisance of thunderous noise from car stereos

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Just after midnight, Modhubagh resident Julfikar Ahmed jolts out of his sleep by a thunderous noise roaring out from speakers attached to a car in the adjacent street.

He tried to get back to sleep but the pounding music kept hammering in his ears. Putting a pillow over his head did not help either. It seemed the ground was quivering.

Julfikar silently wished for the car to leave his neighbourhood. It was not before a piercing and shrieking half minute when the boisterous sound finally started moving and slowly died out.

"I get this loud music problem even at 2-3 o'clock in the morning," said Julfikar. "Listening to music is one thing, but invading into another person's ears with loud bellowing is quite another," he said.

Countless fellow Dhaka dwellers share his sense of displeasure.

"A lot of people tend to drive their cars in streets with car stereos blazing at full volume. They show little consideration for others," said Ashfaq Hossain, a Dhanmondi resident.

A good number of these cars are modified with high-end sound systems that make even shrill horns sound like a whimper.

"I myself used to have a 500-watt sound system in my car, but I was always conscious of who could hear my music. I would never turn it up so loud that it may become irritating for other people," Ashfaq said.

Experts consider loud car stereos as one of the major sources of noise pollution.

"The most powerful sounds we encounter include jets taking off, loud amplified music, gunshots, and chainsaws. Just a single exposure to these sounds can damage our ears," said Dr Mahbubur Rahman, an otologist and private practitioner.

The Environment Conservation Rules 1997 specifies the standard limit of sound in residential and commercial areas. The standard is 50 decibels in residential areas at daytime and 40 decibels at night. The standard unit in case of mixed area, meaning mainly residential but also used for commercial and industrial purposes, is 60 decibels.

Loud car stereos may exceed both forms of decibel limits. They may raise the decibel level up to 100, which is equal to the noise produced by a chainsaw or pneumatic drill.

"Listening to loud music while driving can seriously hamper reaction times and cause accidents. People may take up to 20 percent longer to perform physical and mental tasks when in contact with loud music," said Dr Rahman.

Immediate or not, noise pollution has grave effects both on the physical and mental health. Continued exposure to noise damages one's hearing ability. The louder the noise the less time it takes to cause loss of hearing, he added.

"Loud music also pumps up the adrenaline, which can lead to dangerous and fast driving and aggressive behaviour," Dr Rahman said.

"It should be illegal to drive a car when the music is so loud that the driver cannot hear another car's horn," said a traffic sergeant.

However, loud car stereo lovers have different views.

"It is so insignificant and people who moan about them are simply looking for things to complain about," said Shahriar Ahmed, an undergraduate student.

"People should not waste time of policemen to stop cars with loud music, when there are far greater concerns and dangers in the world we live in today," he said.

"When somebody is playing their car stereo it generally implies they are driving and therefore cannot be subjecting anyone to their noise for longer than 30 seconds at a time. If they are parked near your house, it might be a problem. But it's rare," he said.

Criticising playing of car stereos at high volume, Tahmina Islam, a schoolteacher said: "I find car stereos playing at full volume really irritating."

Sources at the Traffic Department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said the new trend has yet to become a major issue.

"Although use of loud car stereos is not that extensive, it is still a major source of noise pollution. We will take actions against such car drivers if we find them creating nuisance for others," said Jasimuddin, joint commissioner of DMP Traffic.

DCC to recycle wet market waste

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dhaka City Corporation has taken initiative to produce livestock and fish feed by recycling waste generated from poultry markets and slaughterhouses in the city.

The Tk 5.66 crore project aims at managing wet market waste to control urban pollution and increase bio-security at kitchen markets, DCC officials said.

Beginning in July this year, the project will go on for ten years.

Azmat Ali, veterinary officer of DCC and one of the officials of the project, said that animal waste produced at the wet mar-

kets is considered as one of the worst forms of waste responsible for severe pollution in the city.

"The project will help establish a better bio-security system in the kitchen markets and prevent bird flu and other zoonotic diseases transmitted from animals to human," he said.

"Our experience during the bird flu outbreak reminds us that a proper waste management system is essential in the kitchen markets. Traders involved in the livestock and fish business are unaware of the situation they are causing," Azmat said.

He explained that these waste are generally used by poultry and

fish farmers as feed but they use them without processing that increases the risk of diseases.

"The waste will be purchased from the waste collectors. This will add value to waste and encourage traders to manage it properly," Azmat said.

The owners of poultry and fish farms will benefit from this initiative as they will get safer feed and the wet market waste will be managed properly at the same time.

The poultry and fish feed (protein, blood and bone meal) are made from stomach contents, intestines, skin, blood, bones and fish scales found at

the kitchen markets and slaughterhouses.

DCC will provide the land worth Tk 2.4 crore for the scheme titled 'Project for the management and recycling of wastes originated from animals, poultry and fishes in the wet markets and in slaughter houses in the Dhaka city'.

The rest of the expenses, Tk 3.26 crore, will be provided by the private implementing agency. DCC has selected Rahbar Traders to implement the project.

Rahbar traders will operate all the functions under DCC's supervision. The project has provisions that DCC can take it

over, if necessary.

DCC may ask for additional funds from donor agencies if the project succeeds.

The project will be implemented on two bighas of land allocated by the corporation near the DCC sanitary landfill at Matuail. The implementing agency will develop the land by building a boundary wall and the main structure.

It will collect waste from 40 markets and five slaughterhouses. The plant will have the capacity to process around 4,700 kg waste a day to produce around 1,466 tonnes of livestock feed a year that will bring Tk 3.24 crore as annual income.

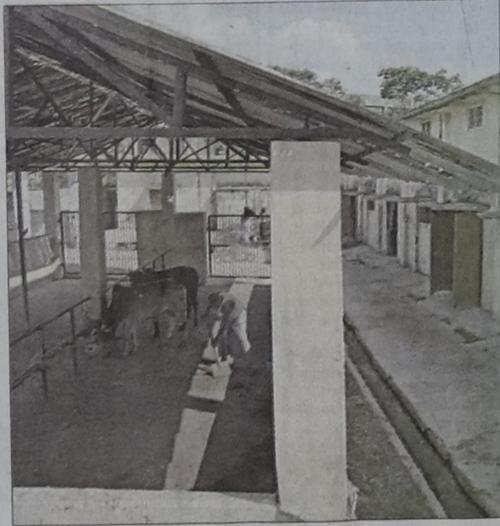
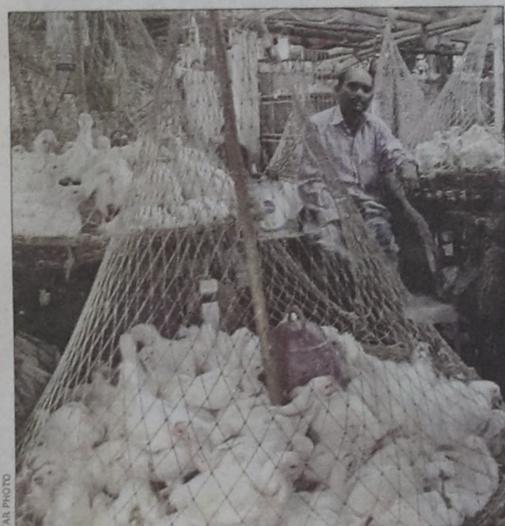
The corporation estimates that the total waste generated by the wet markets of Dhaka city could be five times more than this amount.

DCC will get 30 percent of the total income while the implementing agency will get 70 percent. The maintenance cost of the plant and wages of the employees will be provided from the income of sale of the end products.

The facility will have a mechanical boiler, a natural gas-run oven, two grinding machines, one sealing machine for packaging and liquid waste disposal system.

Three pick-up vans will be used for collection of waste from the poultry market and slaughterhouses and for transport of end products to the markets for sale.

The corporation hopes that the plant will start commercial production within three years.



Waste from poultry markets and slaughterhouses to be recycled to produce livestock and fish feed.



A woman waiting for her turn in a line of Open Market Sale (OMS) for rice with her baby in the sweltering heat at Hazaribagh yesterday. The hungry baby was sucking its mother's finger but the mother did not have the time for attention.