

Safety measures at workplace

Frame rules, ensure oversight and their compliance

DEATH of two construction workers by falling from an 18-storey building in the Motijheel Commercial area of the city only exposes how insecure our workers are at the workplaces. And more particularly, it is the construction workers who face the worst kind of risks.

In the Motijheel incident, as the report goes, the victims were painting the high-rise building at its top floor. But the window platform on which they were standing to do their work was a decrepit one and they fell to the ground along with the rusty platform to their death.

The first question that comes to mind is, who is responsible for the tragedy and who allowed the use of such an old platform at a high-rise construction site in the first place. And if one is to go by the version of the site supervisor, as mentioned in the report, then the victims themselves are to take the blame for the accident, for it is one of them who supplied the window platform as part of the sub-contract for painting the building. However, this version of the accident has been contradicted by some of the workers at that site. The report further states that the steel wire that was attached to the widow-cleaning platform was also rusty.

The contradictory versions on the cause of the fall aside, what is of concern here is was there none to look after these safety-related problems at the construction site in question? For it is not only an issue of safety of the construction workers at the construction site of a high-rise building. Just to think of the situation, if say, some passers-by or onlookers were also standing at the spot where the iron-platform crashed down? In fact, it is not simply an issue of safety of only the construction people involved. The area surrounding such a high-rise site should also come under the purview of the safety issues at a construction site.

To all appearances, in spite of the raging construction boom all around, whether in the capital city or elsewhere, the safety-related issues have presumably never crossed the mind of either of those in charge of the construction sites, or of the government. For reports on such deaths of construction workers or unsuspecting pedestrians passing by under-construction buildings abound. Even this year some 70-construction workers have died in accidents under similar circumstances, while the figure was 100 last year.

While we would be waiting for the result of the police investigation to trace the exact cause of the incident, we would in the same breath also expect of the authorities concerned to take urgent measures to ensure safety at the workplaces, especially at the construction sites. On this score, the government would do well to consult with all concerned to form a set of rules and standards to ensure workers' safety at workplaces, as well as ensure strict oversight and compliance of the same.

Bangladesh ranked 88th

Not that good, but still encouraging

BANGLADESH has been ranked 88th among the "best" 100 countries in the world by the Newsweek, an international newsmagazine, which undertook the rather interesting survey. The rankings are based on indicators like education, health, quality of life, economic competitiveness and political environment.

Though the 88th position does not speak very highly of our achievements, but it is still good news that we have found a place in the upper half of the nations across the globe. Two other countries in the region have done better than us Sri Lanka has been ranked 66th while India finished 78th.

The indicators that the survey is based can of course give a clear picture of how a country is functioning. Education and health are two areas where a developed and a welfare-oriented country has to perform very well. Sri Lanka and India have an edge over us in these two sectors and that has pushed their positions up the scale. Quality of life is also a sore point in our scheme of things with the rich-poor gap being too big. So, we are still grappling with many socio-economic challenges which if met in the right manner should push us further up the ladder.

Economic competitiveness is something that all developing nations are trying to achieve to survive in this age of globalisation. Bangladesh was performing reasonably well in RMG, but recent developments might have lowered our position in the international market.

Political environment is perhaps the most important pointer of how a country is being governed. It is a yardstick of democratization and fulfillment of the basic rights of people. Bangladesh has had a democratic government for nearly 20 years, except for brief periods when caretaker governments took charge. However, political environment of the country is still not stable or tranquil enough to be compared with the mature democracies in the western world. Political acrimony or even intra-party conflicts still stand in the way of consolidation of democracy.

On the positive side, the country maintains a healthy growth rate of GDP and encourages foreign investment in the true spirit of open market economy.

The peaceful Nordic countries have finished ahead of even the most advanced western countries. That only shows that social stability and peace are two of the most important criteria used by the Newsweek for judging a country's performance. It is true that social stability contributes to enhancing the quality of life. However, for obvious reasons some societies are more volatile and less predictable, but that does not mean that they cannot be the very best in the world.

Bouquets not, brickbats

Mr. Blair does not deserve bouquets; people like him are as dangerous to humanity as was Saddam and as is Bin-laden, and, instead of being allowed to roam freely around the world, should be at The Hague accounting for his actions that has rendered the world even more dangerous than it was before March 20, 2003.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

TONY Blair, the ex-British prime minister, was in Bangladesh recently, on a private trip. The world knows him as the Bush acolyte who was instrumental in instigating the Iraq war, and is the cause of thousands of civilian deaths -- a war that is still taking toll of civilian lives.

In a country that is in the process of trying its war criminals, that a person accused by many in his own country of being a war criminal, should be allowed the honour of meeting our highest executive, and all the panoply of a VVIP visit, is humiliating.

Many of Blair's countrymen, including famous English lawyers, have spoken of Blair being a very good candidate for standing in the dock at The Hague. In spite of the Chilcot Commission, where he gave a very unconvincing and subjective appraisal of the rationale behind what everyone, except Bush and Blair and a few of their hawkish cohorts, consider an illegal war, informed opinions suggest that he could still face prosecution for war crimes -- and many feel that he should.

In this regard the two leading lawyers in Britain, Sir Michael Wood and Elizabeth Wilmshurst, had testified to the Commission that the invasion was against international law and amounted to a "crime of aggression." And Human Rights lawyer Sir Geoffrey Bindman has said that there was a case for taking action against Mr. Blair for waging an unlawful war.

The purpose of his visit to Dhaka had

to do something with the Blair Faith Foundation. I understand that the foundation aims to promote respect and understanding about the world's major religions. Religion and faith are based on morality which Mr. Blair can hardly lay claim to, and certainly no institution, set up by one who has the blood of thousands of innocent people in his hands, should be dignified by our association with it.

The illegality of the war is not in doubt, and it is partly Blair's position, that Saddam was about to build the bomb, that led to the bypassing of the UN, Resolution 1441 notwithstanding. It was a war where the worst form of falsehood, deceit and lies were resorted to, and evidence manufactured, to support falsehood.

Eliza Manningham-Buller, former MI-5 chief (2002 to 2007), has testified to the panel that there was no credible intelligence linking Iraq to the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States or of links between Iraq and al Qaeda.

The excuse Blair has offered is that his judgment was made based on the intelligence assessment at the time, but even if it were not the bomb he would still have gone for the occupation of Iraq because he felt that regime change in Iraq had become necessary.

Preemption and regime change have been added to the diplomatic vocabulary. And in this regard I find no difference between him and Bin-laden, who wants regime change too in many countries in the world, and is going about in his own way in trying to achieve his aim, killing innocent people in the process,



Feeling the heat.

just as the way Blair and Bush killed in their quest for regime change in Iraq. Iraq was occupied not to free the Iraqis or bring democracy to that country but Saddam had to be removed because he was the only one that could pose a threat to Israel.

It is true that Saddam was a tyrant, and he killed thousands (one million according to Blair, but figures are odious when it comes to human lives) of his countrymen. But who provided him with the weapons and the chemical bombs? And, in manner of speaking, the Iraq-Iran war was sponsored by some western countries, and Saddam was a proxy aggressor against Iran.

Iraq is in a shambles after eight years of "liberation." The US drawdown has left behind a void. The political stalemate of the last five months shows no sign of resolution. Maliki is in no mood to hand over to Alawi, in spite of the fact that he has won two fewer seats in the election than his opponent. Violence in Iraq is increasing; in August the US forces suffered the largest casualty in any single month.

And what has the illegal war achieved? It has increased threats to the UK as events have shown. It has radicalised many Muslim youths apart from the fact that the invasion also allowed Osama Bin-laden to move into Iraq "in a way he was not before."

Reportedly, Mr. Blair has been altering his travel plans, avoiding more than 50 countries in the world, which had enshrined the crime of aggression into their law, and would therefore be unsafe for him to visit. One is not sure whether Bangladesh has done the same, if not, it is a pity.

Mr. Blair does not deserve bouquets; people like him are as dangerous to humanity as was Saddam and as is Bin-laden, and, instead of being allowed to roam freely around the world, should be at The Hague accounting for his actions that has rendered the world even more dangerous than it was before March 20, 2003.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc (Retd) is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

'Mosque' will only matter in Republican primaries



Protest against Ground Zero Mosque.

So there may be political rewards for some Republicans who focus on the "mosque." Given the intensity of opposition among Republicans, and the lack of interest among independents, the opportunity is to distinguish oneself in a Republican primary, and perhaps for Republican nominees to excite their base in Novembers.

BEN ADLER

AS soon as President Obama endorsed the Muslim community's right to build an Islamic Cultural Center two blocks from Ground Zero, the political speculation mill started churning. Republican operatives crowded about how Obama was taking a position that only a minority of Americans hold. Others shook their heads in disbelief at how Obama apparently just doesn't understand the real Americans in the Heartland who know better than New Yorkers what should be built in New York. Democrats murmured to each other that this would cost them congressional seats this Fall.

A week later, as the political fallout from the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy reveals itself, it looks as if everyone may have overreacted. It is not exactly true that Obama took an unpopular position, nor that he partially retracted it

the next day, when he said that he is not taking a position of the wisdom of the project. While only a minority of Americans think the Park51 plan is a good idea, they are evenly split as to whether its developers have the right to build it. So when Obama said that he supports the right to build the Cordoba House, but clarified later that he did not say that he supports the choice to build it, he was not expressing views any more contradictory than those of a significant number of Americans. And in expressing his support for the right to build religious structures anywhere that they meet local land-use regulations, in accordance with the First Amendment, he was not expressing an especially unpopular position.

Nor is it clear that the average swing voter, beset by economic insecurity in a nation at war, is as obsessed with this as the punditariat. As Greg Sargent noted last week, the polls suggest that this is not

the issue outside the Beltway that Charles Krauthammer would lead you to believe. When Gallup asked poll respondents what they thought of Obama's comments, "while more disapprove than approve, a huge chunk -- 41 percent -- didn't know enough to form an opinion." And the 34 percent who disapprove are heavily concentrated among Republicans. But they also are more likely to strongly disapprove than supporters are to strongly approve. Rasmussen Reports found that only 22 percent of Americans say they are following the "mosque" story "very closely."

So there may be political rewards for some Republicans who focus on the "mosque." Given the intensity of opposition among Republicans, and the lack of interest among independents, the opportunity is to distinguish oneself in a Republican primary, and perhaps for Republican nominees to excite their base in Novembers. Case in point: as the *New York Times* reports, New York Republican gubernatorial aspirant Rick Lazio has injected some life into his flagging campaign by cutting commercials about the "mosque."

According to the *Times*: "As the Republican primary for the governor's race approaches, Mr. Lazio is making his vigorous opposition to the project a centerpiece of his candidacy, assailing it on the campaign trail, testifying against it

at public hearings, denouncing it in television commercials and even creating an online petition demanding an investigation into the center and its organizers." Of course, when New York faces a gridlocked, incompetent and corruption-riddled state legislature that can barely bring itself to address New York's massive projected budget deficits, and the governor, whoever it is, has no power to prevent the project's completion, this may seem an odd campaign issue. But it is making people remember that Rick Lazio exists, which they would otherwise be liable to forget. Could this help Lazio reduce the 30-point gap between him and likely Democratic nominee Attorney General Andrew Cuomo? Maybe, but there's no way that in a Democratic state it will be enough to overcome Cuomo's advantages in fundraising, name recognition and organization. Nor is it clear that, beyond getting himself on Meeting the Press, Lazio is actually moving many votes. "I don't think it's a ticket to Albany in November," Lee M. Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, which has polled New Yorkers on the issue, tells the *Times*.

Republican candidates for the presidency in 2012 may also look to drive up their support, or at least get some free publicity, in the primary by attacking the "mosque." Indeed, the intensity on the Republican side is so strong that conservative blogger Robert Stacy McCain thinks Newt Gingrich eradicated his chances of being the GOP nominee by backing out of speaking at this weekend's anti-"mosque" rally in New York. McCain writes:

In the space of five days, Gingrich has gone from comparing the mosque to a Nazi sign at the Holocaust Museum to quitting a protest against it.

Make an enemy of Pamela Geller? Be my guest, Newt. Nice presidential campaign you had there.

Geller is a conservative blogger who has been fanning the flames of the "mosque" controversy. I strongly suspect that, should Gingrich run, this will prove far from a fatal misstep on his part. One would think that the party of moral values would have a bigger problem with Gingrich's serial infidelities. But, while McCain is almost certainly vastly overstating the importance of this particular story, it does say something about the potential power of anti-Islamic politicking in the Republican primaries that any ambiguity in Gingrich's otherwise stellar anti-mosque armor could be, even theoretically, so damaging to him.