

Whither disaster risk reduction?

Savar collapse questions our accountability

Dhaka is already recognised as the most unplanned city in the world, but what makes it more vulnerable a place to live in is the fact that geographically the city is located in a high risk zone for earthquake and a massive disaster might hit this metropolis anytime even if there is a moderate earthquake.

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WE the people, who are involved in the disaster management program, often feel proud to be global leaders in disaster preparedness. Moreover, many countries in the world consider Bangladesh as the voice of disaster affected people on the global platform. However, when we experience such unfortunate fatalities like Rana Plaza, we question ourselves, how ready is our country to face both natural and manmade disasters waiting to strike? Perhaps, the answer is, not the one we will be hoping for.

The building collapse at Savar again has reminded us that we are not learning from our mistakes. And also that we are not safe anymore because it is too late to right the wrongs we have already done. The same could happen any time anywhere causing hundreds of casualties

and enormous economic loss in a matter of few minutes. Rana Plaza is just one building that took hundreds of innocent lives; there are thousands other buildings which have already been constructed and more are also under construction forcing thousands of people to live in such unsafe condition. As long as the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) is not taken with necessary gravity, and unless there is no strict monitoring mechanism adopted by the concerned authorities on the implementation process, we are consciously moving towards further catastrophe. The media reports are worth mentioning that Rana Plaza was not constructed following the guidelines of the BNBC.

According to media reports, the death toll has crossed 500 with over a thousand injured. The nine-storied infrastructure housed five garment factories, a market and a branch of BRAC Bank. What is even

more disturbing is that hundreds others are still. Nowadays building collapse seems to have become a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Even we do not seem to have a sense of surprise with such news. Not sure though if it is because we already know about the large number of multi-storied buildings being constructed defying the rules for safer construction or it just has turned into a approved practice. Bangladesh has approved the BNBC which places legal obligation to all urban constructions. The purpose of the BNBC guideline is to establish minimum standards for site selection, design, construction process, quality of materials in use, and occupancy and maintenance of buildings in order to safeguard, within achievable limits, life, limb, health, property and public welfare. But it is unfortunate having to admit that we are far behind as far as effective implementation of BNBC is concerned.

Dhaka is already recognised as the most unplanned city in the world, but what makes it more vulnerable a place to live in is the fact that geographically the city is located in a high risk zone for earthquake and a massive disaster might hit this metropolis anytime even if there is a moderate earthquake. A study shows that about 78,323 buildings will be completely destroyed if an earthquake of 6 magnitude shakes Dhaka.

Returning to the case of Rana Plaza, there have been some drawbacks in the entire system. The owner of the building did not follow the Razuk approved guideline while constructing the building. But the most alarming thing is, Razuk was aware of the matter and did not take the issue seriously (Source: News channel Ekattor). According to the rule, the owner should take endorsement of the design from Razuk which is the authority to approve the plan and design for any construction. As far as commercial placement is



Debris being cleared at Rana Plaza disaster site.

concerned, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Associations (BGMEA) also has an important role in the planning and designing process of garments factories; for instance, they review the plan and give approval for the site of garments factory construction. However, BGMEA did not play their part as reviewer. This particular building was constructed in an unsuitable place filling a marshy land. Adding to the underlying risk factors, the building collapsed due to the structural failure rather

than foundation failure (according to the civil engineer, News Ekattor), which means quality materials were not used in the construction of the building. So a garments factory should never have been permitted in such a risky building where thousands of lives are at stake. Lack of awareness is also harshly visible in this case as there are reports that they have observed the crack in the column of the building prior to the occurrence and brought the issue into the notice of the management and the local government. The UNO also visited the site but did not take any initiative to stop work at the factory.

Government has established national disaster response coordination group for effective and smooth running of response program but as far as emergency response is concerned, we have observed lack of coordination at government level during Savar disaster. We could

not establish sufficient facilities in the hospitals to provide services to the affected people. We have seen that a coordinated search and rescue operation from the Armed Forces Division, Fire Service & Civil Defence and trained and local volunteers was not sufficing the need of the hour as the rescue team has been struggling and facing challenges to rescue the trapped victims from the rubbles due to lack of appropriate equipment. However, the government has promised to provide the affected people with food, shelter, relief and necessary rehabilitation facilities. According to the Disaster Management Act, the government should ensure compensation to all the victims and their families for such human induced disaster.

Very often we have been observing almost the same cases in the country. In 2005, the collapse of the Spectrum sweater factory in Dhaka killed 64 people and injured 80. In

November 2012, more than 100 workers died in a fire at the Tazreen Fashions Ltd. near Dhaka. Therefore, the question remains how long we will allow such incidences to take place without any strong consequences to detect and take steps against the ones who are to be blamed.

The accountability of the government to provide justice is also ensured by the Disaster Management Act 2012. Thus, proper investigations for each and every incidence are needed and the responsible people must be brought to justice under the Disaster Management Act. The government needs to make sure that any individual or organization does not go unpunished for violating the rule as clearly mentioned in the chapter five (Offence and Punishment) of the Act.

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Abiding by safety standards imperative

MD. ATIKUR RAHMAN

INDIVIDUALS or commercial constructors build homes for private abode or commercial accommodation. In all cases safety of dwelling is important. It is builder's or contractor's responsibility to construct complying with the standard engineering requirements and building codes set by the respective authorities. But the responsibility of government does not end with the setting of codes. One believes that the government should always be there to strictly enforce the building codes, and in case of non-compliance, the authorities should take maximum punitive measures. Since non-compliance cannot only cause hazards to the owners, but more to the dwellers to the extreme extent -- costing life. The recent Savar building collapse painfully proves the case -- more than 500 lives lost.

The building codes are regulatory requirements concerning safety and quality of construction, use of space and



Savar tragedy: Human induced disaster.

others. For example, in an earthquake-prone area the buildings should not be very high and the design and structure must consider the points of higher earthquake resistance. Big and tall buildings (i.e. academic building, hospital, hotel, industrial and commercial offices) require dilatations every 15-20 meters so that in a heavy earthquake, only part of a building collapses not the whole.

Moreover the quality of materials used in construction

and electric wiring and gas connection should pass at least the minimum safety standards. Adequate entry-exit facilities, and emergency exits, fire extinguishers are also very important in establishments like factories, hall rooms, discos, party centres. In case of wooden or wood panelled house, wood must be coated with fire-resistant paint. In large apartments, office buildings, hall room and lobbies of hotels, fire-barriers made of rubber and steel should be used

to prevent spreading of fire. In areas of frequent hailstorm, skylights must not be used, and if used, must be protected with steel shutters.

Many constructors often tend to ignore even the minimum safety requirements to minimize cost which jeopardises people's life. Many private home builders do not know details of the responsibility of the government to disseminate such essential information and monitor the compliance by builders, developers and contractors. However, builders cannot avoid their responsibility anyway.

In conclusion, as elsewhere in modern world, the government is ultimately responsible for its entire citizens' safety and good life. It is government's responsibility to enforce strict building code. So that the negligence of government agencies does not jeopardise people's life like the Savar tragedy any more.

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WATER FOR LIFE

Bangladeshi NGO wins UN award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

WATER is the most important part of our environment. Had there been no water, there wouldn't have been any life on the planet. But judicious use of such precious element as prudence demands has not been maintained. To the extent that experts expressed apprehension that the next war might be on possession of water sources. For it is no more as available as it was at the beginning. With population increase the resource has attained a disturbing level of scarcity.

In such a situation governments and NGOs are



working for water management and distribution to the needy as much possible. In Bangladesh also government agencies as well as NGOs are helping implement

water related programmes. One such NGO, Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP) has of late also received 'Water for Life' Best Practices

Award 2013 from UN World Water Assessment Programme. There has been a competition among 46 organisations engaged in water programme implementation from Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, Caribbeans, North America and Oceania. DORP secured third place in B category.

The NGO is implementing water related 'Health Village: WASH Perspective' programme in coastal, marshland, shoal and flood prone areas of Barguna, Bagerhat, Sirajganj, Lakkhipur and Kishoreganj districts. There is further need of implementing more water related programmes in many other areas of the country.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh					
Ministry of Home Affairs					
Admin Section-2					
Invitation for Tender (International)					
1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Home Affairs.			
2.	Procuring entity name	Ministry of Home Affairs.			
3.	Procuring entity code	3-2201-0001-6807			
4.	Procuring entity district	Dhaka, Bangladesh.			
5.	Invitation for	03 (three) Nos. 15 Seater Microbus.			
6.	Invitation Ref. No.	44.000000.020.20.001.12-402			
7.	Date	29 April, 2013.			
8.	Procurement method	OTM (International).			
9.	Source of funds	GOB.			
10.	Tender package No.	G-01.			
11.	Tender publication date	04 May, 2013.			
12.	Tender last selling date	16 June, 2013 (during office hours).			
13.	Tender submission date and time	17 June, 2013 at 2:00pm (BST).			
14.	Tender opening date and time	17 June, 2013 at 2:30pm (BST), tender shall be opened in presence of tenderers/tenderer's authorised representative (if any).			
15.	Name & address of the office selling tender document	Counter No.-1, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.			
16.	Receiving tender document	Ministry of Home Affairs, Room No. 319, Bhaban No. 8, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.			
17.	Opening tender document	Conference Room, Ministry of Home Affairs, Room No. 206, Bhaban No. 8, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.			
18.	Identification	Location of delivery	Price of tender document (BDT)	Package No.	Tender security amount
	Supply and commissioning of 3 (three) microbuses for Ministry of Home Affairs	Dhaka	1500.00	G-01	BDT 2,50,000.00 or equivalent US dollar/others
					Completion time in weeks/ days/ months
					Stated in the schedule of requirements
19.	Name of official inviting tender	Md. Firoz Sarker.			
20.	Designation of official inviting tender	Senior Assistant Secretary.			
21.	Address of official inviting tender	Admin-2, Ministry of Home Affairs, Room No. 317, Bhaban No. 8, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.			
22.	Contact details of official inviting tender	Senior Assistant Secretary, Admin-2, Ministry of Home Affairs, Room No. 317, Bhaban No. 8, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka, Tel: + 8802-9574516 Fax: + 8802-9574528, E-mail: sasadmin2@mha.gov.bd			
23.	Special instruction	(i) Intending participants shall have to apply for purchasing tender documents to the undersigned. The bidder should have valid trade licence, bank solvency certificate and income tax certificate, VAT registration and experience certificate. Each tender must be accompanied by a bank guarantee issued from any scheduled bank of Bangladesh located in Dhaka city amounting to the abovementioned tender security money in favour of Senior Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka. (ii) No deviation from the tender specification will generally be accepted. In case of minor deviation or updated version of any product offered to be supplied, the tender must mention them in the remarks column of their technical specification submission sheet. If the tender does not comply with this instruction, the tender may be rejected. (iii) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders, at any time prior to contract award.			
GD-1750		Md. Firoz Sarker Senior Assistant Secretary			