and some dishonest officials.

"In some areas the chairman of the municipality is issuing okay certificates to risky construction. This must be stopped," says Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Khan psc. "RAJUK says they do not have enough manpower to inspect all buildings. They may outsource the job to skilled and trained engineers. We have to develop volunteers at the local level. Retrofitting of structures can reduce vulnerability of risky buildings. The Japanese are doing it. Our responses must be customised keeping with the local conditions. Many have complained about why we have not asked for foreign assistance. If the foreign experts came, the first thing they would do would be to stop the operation and secure the area by isolating it from the crowd. By that time, a lot of the people trapped inside would have died."



Giving a lifeline to a victim gasping for survival. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

It is not easy to stay focused and remain calm in the midst of the wailing of the wounded, the sirens of ambulances, whistles of the volunteers and overpowering stench of rotten human bodies. The doctors and students at a nearby medical college never experienced anything like this before.

Dr. Shahariar Ahmed, at Enam Medical College and Hospital at Savar says, "Our students worked around the clock to provide medical care to victims. Victims admitted to our hospital are in a better condition now. Even the amputees are doing better. We thank our students and people of all walks of life for their support."

Many believe that BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association) has done little to improve, among other things, working conditions and workers' safety even after so many deadly accidents at several garment factories in recent times. BBC on April 25 commented "A number of factory owners have gone into politics, gaining seats in parliament, becoming ministers, with many BGMEA members joining the two major political parties. Garments entrepreneurs are reputed to be some of the most generous financiers of political parties."

Syed Sadek Ahmed, Direcor, BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association says, ". If the government agencies give someone permission for construction without checking the facts, how can BGMEA be held responsible? If the building was not made using proper materials, is it the fault of BGMEA? We have implemented a crash programme in each garment factory. We have formed a team comprising an owner and nine mid level managers in each company. They receive training on fire safety and other safely related issues. So far we have been able to implement it in only 160 factories."

There are an estimated 5000 garment factories in the country.

Those who were buried in mass graves were denied the dignity of a proper funeral. They did not get respect they deserved as human beings—in life or in death. Some volunteers realising that have gone beyond their duty to help the victims.

Imam Jafor Shikder, Director, Youth and Volunteer Department, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society says, "Red Crescent Youth volunteers alongside the army are packing decomposed human bodies although it is not their job. They are doing it out of their commitment to helping those in need. They are doing it beyond their call of duty. More Training programmes can be arranged in the area of first aid, rescue and response. The government issued a gazette notification through the Ministry of Education to the effect that each school has to develop volunteers who will be able to assist government agencies in natural or man-made disasters. We need more vehicles, walkie-talkies, flash lights and masks. The good hearted people helped us a lot."

With the state organs riddled in corruption and incompetence, the only hope at this moment may very well be the goodwill of the resilient people of this country. The sacrifice of people of all socio-political stripes during and after the collapse of Rana Plaza will be remembered for a long time to come. This may happen again. The country needs to be prepared for that. ■