



Lessons Never Learnt

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Last year, the collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar that claimed 1,127 lives and left over 2,000 workers seriously injured has shocked the nation. But with the maximum number of structures in the cities being made of concrete saving lives becomes difficult. It has also led to questions about our ability to manage a disaster of such magnitude.

Most researchers are disappointed that even after three major urban disasters between 2005 and 2013, Bangladesh is yet to take measures to ensure better disaster management by procuring high quality rescue equipment and ensuring training sessions towards efficient rescue work. Better measures are necessary in this regard as the 23rd meeting of the Social Compliance Forum for RMG at the secretariat has revealed that faults related to workplace safety and other compliance issues were found in at least 700 export-oriented apparel units out of 2,400 factories that are recently inspected in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Last year on April 24 after the deadliest structural disaster at Savar, more than 2,000 local volunteers, including some 1,000 soldiers and firefighters, rushed to the site. However within an hour the rescuers faced a shortage of rescue equipment not to mention any proper knowledge of using such equipment during rescue operations. Rescuers did not even have basic gear like gloves and helmets at their disposal, forcing them to seek for these to the common public through the media and the social networking sites.

While talking about the shortage of equipment, the Director of Operation and Maintenance of the Fire Service and Civil Defense Major Mohammad Mahboob praises the rescuers while admitting the limitations. "We thank the common people because their contribution to the operation was unbelievable," he says.

A high official of the Fire Service and Civil Defense requesting anonymity says that during the Rana Plaza rescue operation, they have found a major shortage of necessary modern equipment. A lack of decision making ability among the firefighters was also exposed at that time. "Before the devastating experience, only the officers of Fire Service knew how to handle a disaster," explains the official. "So now we are preparing all the firemen to face any situation. Our department has already submitted a plan to purchase heavy rescue equipment at Tk 162 crores for smooth rescue operations during any disaster."



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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Abdur Rajjak, a volunteer who worked at the Rana Plaza disaster site, shares his experience, "It was an unimaginable and impossible task to rescue people, as we had literally no equipment. Fire brigade did not have additional equipment such as gloves, glasses and helmet for the volunteers." He believes that the overwhelming emotion to help those trapped inside made most rescuers to