

Rana Plaza disaster, two years on

Poor show in compensation and rehabilitation

WITH a mixed bag of feelings we note that though the garment industry has managed to rise above the Rana Plaza shock over the course of two years since the collapse the victims are still reeling in despair for want of adequate financial support and rehabilitation.

The tragic incident took a toll of more than 1100 lives and left many injured, amputated and missing. Unfortunately, there is still debate over the number of missing workers. According to government sources, the number of unidentified victims is 62 while CPD puts it at 85. Obviously, the families of unidentified victims are out of count.

Initially, there were various initiatives to support the victims and their families which have gradually lost momentum due to lack of coordination and guaranteed provision for compensation. Though the victims were promised sufficient financial support to cover their monthly expenditure as well as medical expenses the amount received by them falls short of requirement and varies from person to person. The government is yet to include uniform provisions for compensation under the labour law. On the back of inadequate financial support, lack of comprehensive rehabilitation scheme has left the victims and their families in perpetual hardship. Only some victims are employed locally but they get below what they used to earn from regular work.

We urge the government to immediately finalise the long overdue compensation provision and ensure financial support for Rana Plaza victims accordingly. There should be a special rehabilitation scheme for the injured workers compatible with their physical handicaps. Although our garment industries have improved a lot in terms of infrastructural compliance there is more to be done to enforce international labour standards to protect workers' rights, particularly their right to form unions.

Women councillor contenders want to work for a better Dhaka

Let's hope they are given the opportunity

IT is with mixed feelings that we note the promises articulated by contending women councillors for Dhaka north and south city corporation polls at a Prothom Alo roundtable. Mixed because while we hail their pledges to make the cities safer for women, among other things, we cannot help but feel skeptical about how politically empowered they will actually be.

The fact that there are no women mayoral candidates is in itself very disappointing. Political parties are not making enough efforts to ensure a robust participation of women in local government. As for the women councillors, the low number of contestants compared to their male counterparts speaks volumes about how skewed the representation is.

At the discussion, activists pointed out the need to provide basic amenities for women in slums and fair wages for women garment workers, issues that have been ignored for years. The pledges given by the women ward councillor candidates included greater security for women, providing day care centres and forming citizens groups to prevent sexual harassment of women and girls. They also promised to introduce a more efficient garbage collection system, better drainage, proper lighting of the streets and freeing parks from illegal encroachers.

In the event that many of these candidates do get elected for the regular positions as well as the reserved seats, we can only hope that they are given the required resources and authority to deliver on their promises of a cleaner, safer, more liveable city. The government must play a proactive role to make sure that happens.

COMMENTS

"THUMBS UP" (April 20, 2015)

Touchstone

Tigers roared their way to victory. Congratulations. Go tigers, go!

"Dhaka-Ctg train trip gets faster" (April 18, 2015)

Bashir Uddin Aanib

This is a good initiative by Bangladesh Railway. We wish it will continue in the upcoming days. We have to improve our railway sector.

Javed Hosen

We really need a quantum leap to develop the railway, not incremental changes. Imagine the benefit of a two hour trip to CTG by trains that can also carry cargo. People should be able to live in CTG and work in Dhaka.

"China offers Bangladesh soft loans of \$15-20b" (April 17, 2015)

Dev Saha

Great deal! Hopefully, not much strings attached to this huge loan.

Zman7

Looks like a good offer for infrastructure-building projects, particularly after the 'betrayal' of the World Bank to offer the promised loan for Padma project.

"Hundred years of death, destruction and destiny" (April 17, 2015)

Sundar

A wonderful article. It is really a wonder how the beast and beauty cohabits in our heart with mutual agreement.

Sideshow overcast major show

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

this may be pretty interesting for a fish watcher but for the victim it is obviously a misery. The same may hold true in human affairs.

Political leaders' long, rankling memories of each other are too well known to be repeated to bore you with. So, let me confine myself to how short public memory can be, and more to the point, how this is being helped out by most unlikely quarters -- the ruling party. Obviously, the BNP-led alliance wants to get the people to forget their resentment over 92-day long blood-spilling, burning orgies in a ruthless series of oborodh and hartals. Khaleda Zia's motorcade bashing three times in a row while campaigning for BNP-backed candidates for the DCC polls has given her exactly that handle. She is acquiring an underdog image as her alliance's unrepentant violence ruthlessly played on the people escapes public questioning. Up to peaceful showing of black flags has had its precedents in democracies and thus is acceptable. But to let attacks take place on her motorcade, especially when her party joined an electoral process is being seen as a window of opportunity for normalisation of politics.

Such a show force, one hopes, should not be replicated; considering it sends across negative signals about the steady progress of the electoral process. On the one hand, ruling party leaders and ministers encouraged the BNP-led alliance to participate in the polls, the government and EC allowed their weighty candidates to throw their hats into the

electoral ring and the electoral run up is gathering pace; on the other, there are these avoidable dampeners.

What needs serious reflection is the fact that if the people were allowed to reach their verdict without interference, the outcome would most likely be eloquent, mature and decisive compatible with the aspirations of right thinking people.

The Dhaka North City Corporation has 23 lakh and the DCC, South has 18 lakh plus voters. The size of the electorate allows for intimate house-to-house campaigning by the candidates.

From the points of view of the EC, administrations and the security personnel, the whole exercise seems to be highly manageable and easy to monitor. The media would be at hand. Importantly, US, UK, Japan, Germany, Sweden and Canada have evinced interest in sending observer groups as have some international election watch bodies.

In today's watchful world, rigging, especially in such small constituencies, has to be ruled out. But tension-ridden environment may discourage voters to come out and cast their ballot.

One potential downside of multiplicity of candidates with competitive profiles lies in splintered voting. Resultantly, the mayoral winners, in particular, may not be ably representative of the corporations. The same may happen to the councillors.

Of paramount importance

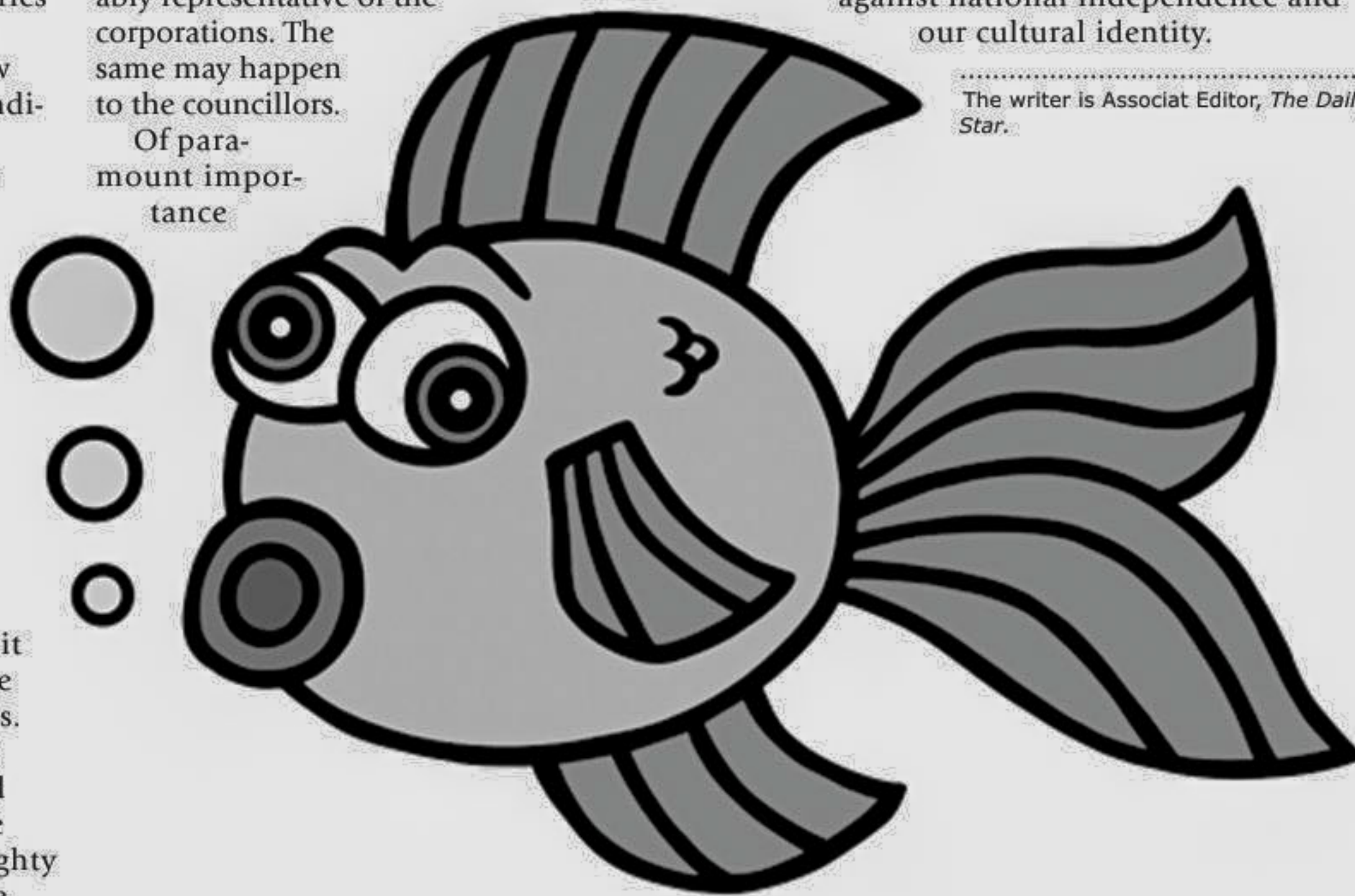
is the fact that Dhaka and Chittagong are the nerve centres of national politics. The way the election goes and the result it produces, one hopes, will be a precursor of participative elections in the country.

The festive atmosphere associated with such polls should be consciously allowed to flourish. To this end, the filing of cases and counter cases between contending parties should come to a stop.

It is worthwhile to note that reportedly, local BNP and its alliance leaders in some northern districts have joined Tablig Jamaat and gone for 40-day chilla (special prayers) to evade arrests. Also at Mithapukur and Pirgachha in Rangpur, a Bangla news report would have us believe, houses of fugitive Jamaati leaders have had portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Hasina displayed to ward off police visits.

Strangely, the nationally outrageous Pahela Baishakh sexual assault has been a matter of some wild political speculation, as an offshoot of fertile imagination of some politically-charged minds. A former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University saw in it a deliberate ploy to discourage women voters from casting their ballots. A ruling party top brass while critiquing police lapse, blames it out on forces arrayed against national independence and our cultural identity.

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Raising Son

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

to out-run the chasing dog.

Thus, the canine is 'enticed' by the low hanging fruit and based on its 'natural' instincts, comes running and then rests its fangs deep into my rear.

Flawed reasoning of a true story? Not at all, considering the direction of blame in the case of a sexual harassment or assault. Besides, men are to be heard, and women are to be seen, at least when we're facing the silver screen. Sub-continental movies show the hero singing and following the not too happy heroine and eventually winning her (and her rich father) over after tormenting her (and the viewers) for three hours. Moral: 'pursue' the woman hard enough and she will eventually fall in love. It's all based on our conventional wisdom -- when a girl says 'no', she really means 'yes'.

Our sexual predators are taking this flimsy message as a flimsy excuse to conveniently ignore the fact that there is a big difference between showing something on screen and promoting it. After all, what can three hours

do to influence the mind while there is the long 21 other non-movie hours left of business as usual with the father calling the daughter a curse or the husband, in view of the son, likening the wife to an illustrious lady of the street (he may actually like the latter).

Does this mean chivalry is dead? Not at all. We open the door for the woman, then shut the door behind us before taking the 'no' for a 'yes' with no CCTV cameras in view (like having one really matters...). Oh wait, the mobile phone video camera is always handy in case we want to make a fast buck from blackmailing...

Ah, the influence of the movie. I'm sure then we see a surge in law school applicants after *The Paper Chase*, a stampede to join the Navy after *Top Gun*, or a plethora of swash-buckling after *Bonnie and Clyde*. Ok, the last one is a bad example, considering the deadly Ashulia bank robbery.

It's just the movie reel, not the movie real. We know that -- are we just selectively and conveniently morons. The movie directors know this. Otherwise, the sexual harassment scenes would display at the bottom: "Inspector General's Warning: Such pursuits in real life are harmful for the criminal record and can even cause imprisonment."

And so, we welcome the Bangla New Year at Shuhrawardy Udyan -- business as usual. Just like the Abhijit incident, the synchronized attacks on the women are deemed as mere 'student vs. student' engagements, off limits to law enforcement who later get flak from higher ups anyway for doing their jobs. Too bad the victims (can we call them so now please?) are not US citizens to warrant the FBI making another trip to the

same area. Then again, we're still waiting to see their last trip report as we here continue on at our own sweet pace -- taking five days to acknowledge that the April 14 incident happened at all.

There is hope though, just wait till 2055 when the April 14, 2015 sexual harassment perpetrators are caught and tried, if at all, considering that the nation is now trying the crimes of 1971.

But there are the *Good Samaritans* -- those who came to the rescue instead of just gawking or flipping out their mobile phones to

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capture videos (could have served as evidence) and were rewarded with broken bones. Then there are the ones in the virtual world whose rewards are death threats.

Yet, we have the audacity to hope that we don't have to hope to cope the grope.

We have raised our daughters -- it is time to raise our sons.

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Why isn't the government doing anything?

As a young woman of 20, I find it appalling and at the same time, hilarious, how the DMP officers are saying that nothing happened at TSC on April 14th, when Facebook and all other media sites are buzzing with news and photos. The question that came to my mind is, why isn't our government doing anything about it? I have always seen the government talking about protecting girls, but what about now? Why are they silent? Are they waiting for something more drastic to happen?

Girls are being harassed when travelling by bus or train to go to school, college, university

or work. People pass comments no matter what a girl is wearing. Even if she wears a burkha, it makes no difference and she is subjected to verbal and physical assault. To the people who are trying to suppress the incident on 14th with money and power, I want to say, have you got the slightest idea of what those women are going through? Can you imagine the pain of a woman when her clothes are torn off in front of hundreds of people? No one will understand the agony she faces within. I would like to urge the family and relatives of the perpetrators to come forward to the authorities and inform them of the wrongdoings of their son, brother or friend.

Shranya Fairuz
On e-mail

Moja Losss? getting death threats for protest

Moja Losss? is a Facebook page which raises its voice against injustice in a satirical way. It protested the sexual assault on women on Pahela Baishakh. It spotted the criminals, posted their photos and demanded punishment of the barbaric acts but now life threats are leading them to leave the field.

In today's Bangladesh, we do not find many to raise voice against injustice. I don't know whether Bangladeshi media is smart enough to understand the importance of a page like Moja Losss? or not. Whoever from higher authority who has some good sense and the power to ensure them protection or is reading this, do something.

A true fan of Moja Losss?
BRAC University