

DCC market had no fire-fighting tool

Say fire department officials

HELEMUL ALAM and TAWFIQUE ALI

Dhaka City Corporation Market in the capital's Gulshan-1 had no fire-fighting equipment that could have helped reduce the damage done by yesterday's fire. Its condition was hazardous too.

Despite warnings by the fire department and Buet experts, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and the market authorities did not retrofit the building, nor did they install any fire-fighting equipment.

"We repeatedly asked the market authorities to keep fire-fighting equipment like extinguisher, but they did not bother to do anything regarding

the safety matter," said Mohammad Shahin, a wire house inspector of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The equipment not only helps fight a fire initially but also prevent it from spreading further, he added.

Following the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse, a team of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) identified some portions of the market as faulty and suggested retrofitting it upon a detailed analysis.

DNCC was supposed to carry out the task.

Many residents of Gulshan area who visited the popular market held

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City market ravaged

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Although some shop owners managed to save some items, owners of 309 shops at the collapsed portion known as DCC "Kancha Market" could not.

The collapsed portion first tilted around 4:00am and then gave way around 8:00am, witnesses said.

The fire came under control around 5:45pm. Over a 100 firefighters from 22 units took part in the operation, said Major Shakil Newaj, director (operation) of the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Two units from the navy also joined the efforts within two hours after the fire broke out.

Firefighters were struggling to fully douse the flames till 1:45am today.

The extent of the loss is yet to be determined, but market committee officials put it at several hundred crores.

Sher Mohammad, chairman of the DCC Kancha Market Businessmen's Association, said, "We are sure it was an act of sabotage. Otherwise, how could such a big building come down?"

But Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq ruled out any such possibility.

Asked to comment on the businessmen's claim, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia avoided a direct reply, telling reporters on the spot, "Let's douse the fire first."

The fire service formed a seven-member committee to find out the cause of the fire. The committee will submit its report in 15 working days.

Thick, black smoke spiraling out of the building also entered adjacent markets and houses.

Shopkeepers at the nearby Gulshan Shopping Centre said some of their goods were damaged by the heat and the smoke.

By last night, goods of over 700 shops the Shopping Centre were taken out and kept on the street, halting traffic on Bir Uttam Mir Shawkat Road.

The first to respond were three fire service units from Baridhara. They reached the spot around 2:40am within 10 minutes of being informed, officials said.

But SM Talal Rezvi, chairman of another association of the market, claimed a security guard informed him about the fire before 2:00am.

The first responders ran out of water soon, he said, adding that had the other fire service units responded sooner, the blaze could have been contained before it spread to the other parts of the building.

Fire service Deputy Director Shomor Biswas said they could not douse the inferno sooner because of the collapsed part of the building. Firefighters could not enter it to contain the blaze.

Also, there is no open source of water nearby, which made it difficult for them to control the fire initially. Later, they used the water from the Gulshan Lake, about 700 metres from the market, said Major Shakil Newaj.

"Fire service vehicles have fixed quantity of water. So when it runs out, we need to collect water from outside sources. It took us time to carry water from outside," he said.

He also said the market lacked its own firefighting system.

But Md Salauddin, finance secretary of the market committee, said they had their own fire extinguishers. But the fire spread so quickly that they had no chance to use those.

As the firefighters were battling the fire in the morning, businessman

YEAR	FIRE INCIDENTS	DEATH TOLL
2015	17,488	68
2014	17,830	70
2013	17,912	161
2012	17,504	210
2011	15,815	365
2010	14,642	63
2009	12,182	118
2008	9,310	229
2007	9,196	160
2006	9,542	91

SOURCE: FIRE SERVICE DEPARTMENT

Nurul Islam said, "It's only a two-storey building on the main road and with lakes nearby. Why is it taking so long for them to douse it?"

His shop that sold various items, including crockery and clothes, has been badly affected. But he could not give an estimate of his loss as he could not enter his shop.

Like him, a few hundred businessmen were staring helplessly all day as the fuming flames engulfed their shops, their means of living, one by one. Many tried to salvage whatever they could during the blaze and smoke. Some could, but most could not.

Yousuf, owner of Bhai Bhai Confectionary there, said he invested all his life's savings in the shop.

"It's been burnt to ashes. I don't know what to do now," said the visibly broken man.

It could not be immediately known what compensation policy the market has in place in case of such an incident.

ACC finds proof

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"Mridha didn't follow the directives of the headquarters [railway's]. He held the recruitment test on his own," said the ACC official.

"We've found proof of recruitment of one person who couldn't pass the exam. But his test score was increased and he was appointed," the official said without disclosing the recruited employee's identity.

In August last year, the Supreme Court upheld a High Court verdict that directed a Chittagong court to accept the corruption allegations against Mridha in a case filed for irregularities in recruitment process and to start his trial.

After that, the ACC appointed an investigation officer who submitted the supplementary charge sheet before the ACC. The ACC would submit it before the court soon.

The commission had filed the case with Kotwali Police Station in Chittagong on September 13, 2012, against several people, including Mridha and teachers of Khagrachhari Women College -- Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, Zahirul Islam and Tapan Kumar Das -- in connection with indulging in irregularities in the recruitment process at BR.

Mridha was sentenced to five

years' imprisonment for earning wealth illegally and concealing this information on his statements. He was suspended on April 15, 2012, a week after he was caught at the BCB gate. The money had allegedly been collected from railway job seekers.

The then railway minister Suranjit Sengupta had to resign over the cash haul, following allegations that the money was being taken to his Jigatola home. Suranjit refuted the claim.

The cash haul, which came to be known as railwaygate scandal, later exposed widespread irregularities in the recruitment process at different levels of Bangladesh Railway.

SC stays

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the VAT from January this year.

The court came up with the judgment on the ground that VAT on English medium education is discriminatory since no VAT was imposed on fees of other institutions, and that such discrimination is a violation of Article-17 of the constitution.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam appeared for the NBR while Advocate AM Aminuddin argued for the writ petitioners yesterday.



Chief of Army Staff General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiuul Huq, second from left, watches the test firing of air-defence missile FM-90 at Nidania Ad Firing Range in Cox's Bazar yesterday.



PHOTO: ISPR

Helpless, they watched

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here," Amena, 45, told The Daily Star outside the market yesterday morning.

"All our savings and investment are gone overnight," said the mother of four as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Around her, hundreds of people, including shop owners and their employees, had gathered along with fire fighters. Together, they were trying to douse with water the fire that had spread to the nearby building known as "Paka Market" around 7:30am.

Taslima Begum, another victim, looked totally stunned as well. She was too upset to talk.

"What can I say? This fire has made us bankrupt," she said amid a great noise of generators used for the rescue operation.

Ignoring the danger, many shop owners dared to go inside the market to bring out whatever they could from their shops.

Aged around 60, Abdul Hannan, a scrap metal dealer, showed the correspondents a bundle of Tk 50,000 that got completely burnt inside his shop locker.

Many shop owners sat haplessly at the stairs of the "Paka Market" that houses more than 200 stores selling various items like clothes, cosmetics, baby products, furniture and groceries.

The entire DCC Market that housed around 550 shops was quite popular among customers as the products there were cheaper than in other markets in the area.

"One could get almost anything in the market. This is a great loss," said a local, Suman Mandal, standing near some furniture brought outside the building.

The furniture and other products brought out from the market were kept on the adjacent streets, blocking the traffic.

Talking about the losses, traders said the market was a "wholesale hub" for many imported items. "Almost every shop had quite expensive products," one of them said.

SM Talal Rezvi, chairman of a traders' association, Gulshan-1 DCC Paka Market Baboshai Samity, said the losses in the incident would amount to nearly Tk 200 crore.

"We could meet all our necessities by the income from our shop," said Runa Ahmed of Reya Enterprise that used to sell imported garment products, footwear and ladies handbags.

She feared that she would alone face a loss of Tk 1.5 crore.

Runa said she used to sell products worth Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 every day.

"My husband is now in India to buy some products. He is very anxious and repeatedly asking me over phone about the condition here. But I could not tell him the real scenario," she said around 3:00pm.

While Runa and her son Alif Istiaque were waiting in front of the "Paka Market", some traders were trying to recover goods from the backside of the market through holes on its wall.

"I could see nothing. Smoke engulfed the entire market. All the products have been burnt to ashes," Faizul Islam, who could go to the first floor, said.

One of his three stores was in the kitchen market that caved in. The others - music store Soul Touch and electronics shop Snigdha Electronics -- are at the "Paka Market".

He said his shops had insurance

coverage until 2005. Later, he did not maintain any insurance.

"We would have been in better position if we had insurance for our shops. I could recover nothing. Everything is gone," said Altaf Hossain, a ladies footwear store owner.

He said he had taken a bank loan of Tk 5 lakh and that he had an insurance against it.

Faizul said easy and low interest loans would help the traders restart their businesses and overcome their losses.

Many traders, including Amena's husband Liton, have sought compensation from the authorities concerned to do businesses elsewhere.

"We have no capital and no means of earning our livelihood," Liton said.

2,367 guerrillas

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Deputy commanders of the guerrilla force formally surrendered their arms to Bangabandhu at Dhaka National Stadium on January 30, 1972.

The government-in-exile in 1971 and the government led by Bangabandhu recognised members of the guerrilla force as freedom fighters, the petitioners said, adding that the names of the members of the guerrilla force were published in government notifications.

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs in July 2013 published a gazette declaring the guerrillas, including Comrade Moni Singh and NAP President Prof Mozaffar Ahmed, freedom fighters. The two were advisers to the government-in-exile.

In October 2014, the government revoked the gazette.

A top performer in nutrition

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In the basic human needs dimension, Bangladesh performs best on nutrition and basic medical care and has most opportunity to improve on the shelter component. In the foundations of wellbeing dimension, Bangladesh scores highest on access to basic knowledge but lags behind on the environmental quality component.

In the opportunity dimension, Bangladesh is strongest on personal freedom and choice and has the most room for improvement on access to advanced education.

The nutrition and basic medical care has the smallest number of countries which did well and Bangladesh is one of them.

In health and wellness, Bangladesh is also one of the top-performing countries. The top performers here include Japan and Italy.

The 2016 Social Progress Index covers 94 percent of the world's population.

In South Asia, India and Pakistan have also been grouped in the "low

social progress" category and they were ranked 98th and 113rd.

Sri Lanka, ranked 83rd, was the only country in the region included in the lower middle social progress group. Afghanistan, which came in at 132nd, was classified as very low social progress country.

Overall, Bangladesh is an underperformer in components of personal rights, tolerance and inclusion.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is ahead of both India and Pakistan in nutrition & basic medical care, personal safety, health and wellness, and tolerance and inclusion.

Bangladesh is also ahead of Pakistan in access to basic knowledge, access to information and communications.

But the country lags behind India in water and sanitation, shelter, access to basic knowledge, access to information and communications, environmental quality, personal freedom and choice, personal rights, and access to advanced education.

Pakistan is ahead of Bangladesh in

water and sanitation, shelter, environmental quality, personal freedom and choice, personal rights and access to advanced education.

While it is easy to look at the amount of wealth countries generate as a measure of how well they are doing, economic markers like gross domestic product (GDP) do not tell the whole story, missing out on things people actually need to enjoy a comfortable life, like healthcare, housing education, and political freedoms, according to Social Progress Imperative.

"The Social Progress Index proves that GDP is not the destiny," said Michael Green, executive director of the Social Progress Imperative.

He said more countries should perform like Costa Rica, which squeezes a lot of social progress out of its modest GDP.

Costa Rica ranked 28th globally and second in Latin America and the Caribbean, just a few spots below Chile at 25th.

The United States came in at 19th place.

Williamson, Ferguson trump Tigers

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and square in a game where they put up a below-par 141 for eight on a wicket free for batting. The Black Caps, after a top-order wobble, raced to 143 for four with two overs to spare. New Zealand captain Kane Williamson hit a fantastic unbeaten 73 off 55 balls that contained five fours and two sixes. He got perfect support from the other end in the match-winning unbroken fifth-wicket stand of 79 runs with Colin de Grandhomme, who hit an unbeaten 21-ball 41.

Bangladesh perhaps put a little bit of pressure when they reduced the home team to 64 for four defending that modest total. But with Williamson playing a captain's knock, the Tigers' bowling failed to make any further inroads and the only moment they sniffed a chance was when Shakib Al Hasan was bowling in the 14th over and Williamson pulled to the mid-wicket boundary. A catch was there for the taking but inexplicably Soumya Sarker, one of the better fielders, was

standing well inside the rope. And by the time he backtracked, the ball sailed just over his head for a boundary.

At that time Williamson was on 43 and the Black Caps were 84 for four and needed just over seven runs per over. Had Soumya, who had yet another forgettable day with the bat, been in the proper position and taken the catch it could have opened a window of opportunity for Bangladesh.

But apart from that, the Tigers were always behind the eight ball. They reached a fighting total because of a fluent half-century from Mahmudullah Riyad.

The right-hander, who scored 0, 1 and 3 in the ODI leg of the tour, returned to his sublime self with a superb 52 as Bangladesh recovered from a shaky start to post a fighting total.

He treated the fans to some delightful strokes after Bangladesh were reduced to 30 for four in 5.1 overs. His 47-ball knock contained three fours and as many sixes including a magnificent one straight over the bowler's head and

into the sightscreen.

Mahmudullah apart, Mosaddek Hossain scored a 17-ball 20 that contained two sixes. He also shared 36 runs for the sixth wicket with Mahmudullah after Shakib was dismissed for 14.

Bangladesh's innings never took off after captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza won the toss and decided to bat.

Imrul Kayes was first to go, playing a nothing shot for a duck in the second over with the score on four.

Sabbir Rahman showed his attacking intent from the first ball but got out to a full toss after scoring 16. Tamim's first signs of aggression turned into a tame catch at mid-wicket and Soumya Sarker was out to a peach of a delivery from Lockie Ferguson as Bangladesh lost three wickets for two runs including two of successive deliveries off Ferguson. Mahmudullah survived the hattrick delivery and took the score to some respectability.

Bangladesh will play their second T20I on January 6 at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui.

Bangladesh's trade prospects bright

Says state minister for foreign affairs

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign friends are now "growingly" engaging with Bangladesh with a special focus on building economic relations which will be broader and deeper in the current year, says State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam.

"This is a fantastic position for Bangladesh," Shahriar told UNB yesterday, adding that Bangladesh is now gradually becoming a "trade-dependent country" instead of an "aid-dependent one".

He said once Bangladesh used to maintain relations with foreign countries to keep its exports unhurt and now many countries are coming here willingly and want to get engaged in trade with Bangladesh.

"They're putting emphasis on economic relationship with Bangladesh but I don't want to specify any country as the numbers are many," he added.

Responding to a question Shahriar said Bangladesh will focus on exploring new export markets instead of looking for trade privileges. "It's a new area of work for our missions abroad."

Despite challenges, he said, Bangladesh's export remained unhurt and credit goes to joint efforts.

Describing 2016 as one of the most successful years in maintaining Bangladesh's relations with the external world, the state minister acknowledged that the July 1 terrorist attack emerged as a big challenge.

"However, within a span of six months in the same calendar year we could overcome the challenge and restore confidence among all," he said.

Shahriar said the countries which issued travel alerts have softened their alerts and the number of incoming visits has increased significantly.

Successful completion of GFMD summit in Dhaka with the participation of over 700 foreign participants gives clear evidence on how security situation has been improved in the country, he said.

The state minister, however, said there is nothing to be complacent as globally security issue is a challenge and will remain a challenge.

He said the government will take more initiatives, if needed, to further

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Charges pressed against eight 'militants'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The Detective Branch (DB) of police in Jessore yesterday submitted a charge sheet against eight suspected militants, including six members of a family, in a case filed under the anti-terrorism act.

Seven of the militant suspects had surrendered to police, promising them to return to normal life.

The accused are Tanjib Ahmed, Maksudha Khatun, Masuma Akter, Tanjila Tamanna, Raihan Ahmed, Ataur Rahman, Shakir Ahmed and Nazmul Hasan. They are from different areas of Jessore and Dhaka.

Among them, Tanjib Ahmed is a regional commander of banned militant outfit Hizb-ut Tahrir, Bangladesh, according to police.

Sub-inspector of the DB police in Jessore Shariful Islam, who is also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to a court in the district.

Police said they arrested Tanjib Ahmed along with 14 gun magazines in Kosba area of Jessore town, days after Hizb-ut Tahrir held an online press conference on September 4 last year.

Later, police filed the case with the Kotwali Police Station in Jessore.

Imaul Haque, officer-in-charge of Jessore DB police, said all the other accused surrender to them in different times.