

The dos and don'ts of handling emergency situations



MR KHAN

OVER the past two decades of working in the risk consulting business, two things have become apparent to me: (i) after every major incident, we suddenly become very worried and conscious about lack of safety, and (ii) we forget all about our worries in about a week. In the meantime, lives and livelihoods of several families are permanently altered

people's heroic efforts. However, let's not forget that roads were totally blocked all the way up to FR Tower by thousands of onlookers, which prevented fire trucks and emergency services from reaching the site quicker. Thus the question that should also be asked is: how many lives were lost due to roads being blocked? Dhaka is severely congested. But carefully devised roles played out by the police, fire department, and emergency medical services can save critical time and lives. The government is working on developing an emergency response plan. But implementation, investment, and training will take time. In the meantime, the following strategy may be put in place as a response to any emergency.

Role of the police
Once confirmed information is received by the police, they may inform the local electric supply authority to cut off electrical power, and begin the process of clearing people from the area. This is to ensure clear passage of the various other emergency services, and for the safety of the general public (boilers, chemicals, and transformers may explode, glass may shatter). The police are well-versed in clearing roads, thanks to the movement of high-profile VIPs around the city. The entire route from the fire station to the site of the emergency is to be cleared for smooth passage. A yellow-tape barrier will keep the public at bay. Onlookers and those willing to help should be restricted from breaking through the barrier until and unless their voluntary services are requested. It is important to note that public emotions run high during such emergencies. The police needs to remain calm, be sympathetic but firm, and hold down the fort during this period.

Role of fire services
It is important that fire services are in constant communication with the police who can feed them information which will allow the fire services to

decide whether to send ladders or long-range crane fire trucks, safety nets, inflatable cushions, and water or other suppression agents to the site. Fire service authorities need to ask a few basic questions to the police: (i) what is the emergency (fire, building collapse, accident, etc.); (ii) what is the occupancy (office, residence, factory, warehouse, etc.) type?; (iii) what is the height of the building?; and (iv) what is the estimated number of lives at risk? Fire trucks can be dispatched from various locations based on this

help estimate the total number of ambulances and personnel required to be dispatched.

Role of civilian onlookers
The advice from emergency experts is to "stay away". Give space to the authorities to do their job. If you wish to volunteer, let the police know you are standby to assist. If the fire service authorities require volunteers, the police will then draw a specific number of volunteers to assist the fire brigade. Till then, wait and remain calm. Once

Inaccurate information wastes time as it diverts resources.

Need for change
One thing that must change is the way the authorities communicate with the public during ongoing emergencies. And currently, there is an absence of communication. During the course of an emergency, a designated official from the nearby police station should take charge and draw the public and media to a nearby location to give updates at every 30-minute interval. S/he will update them on the actions being taken by the authorities. By not taking control of the communication process, the authorities allow the public and the media to draw their own conclusions. Don't prevent the media from doing their job, but work with them.

The above formula can be replicated for any emergency situation.

The government needs to lead by example. Government establishments should be the role model for non-public entities. How many government schools, colonies, offices, and hospitals are equipped with fire hydrants, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, alternate emergency exits and fire escapes, fire plans, emergency response plans, or fire-rated doors? The answer is, very few, if not none. This leads to claims of double standards and generates mistrust among the general public. The government should lead the way by setting an example of minimum standards, not just for building construction, but also for public safety. People also need to start demanding safer workplaces and facilities from their employers.

How many fires or Rana Plazas will it take till we wake up to the alarming reality of the near non-existence of safety standards that we are living with?

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The efforts of medical and fire services helped save many lives in the devastating Banani fire last month. But perhaps more lives could have been saved had some things been done differently.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

information. It is imperative that the first responders are also the right responders (take the FR Tower incident as an example). This is achievable if the right information is communicated to the fire services in the first instance.

Role of emergency medical services
Throughout the world, fire services are typically dispatched together with emergency medical providers to the same location. With the right information, medical services can also

again, taking the FR Tower incident as an example, the first few ambulances arrived approximately at 1:45pm; however, many could not reach the site as the entire road was blocked by onlookers.

Role of media
An emergency situation is already (negatively) sensational. There is no need to further sensationalise it. All that it does is create unnecessary panic and desperation. Don't speculate. Report what is known to be accurate.

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because of the incident—all in haste. How we behave during and after an incident is correlated with the number of lives saved or lost. When a serious incident occurs, whether a road accident or a building fire, hundreds of people flock to the spot. Soon the roads get blocked. People begin to talk about it on social media. Mainstream media quickly picks up the news. By the end of it, there is absolute panic with little reliable information on the incident. There has been much discussion about the lives saved in the fire at Banani's FR Tower because of the actions of daring heroes who risked their own lives to save others (we saw this during Rana Plaza too). Yes, several lives were saved, thanks to some

Children are at risk due to climate change, but they are also sources of solutions



SALEEMUL HUQ

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
A recent report from Unicef mentions that 19 million (or one in three) children in Bangladesh are at risk from the effects of climate change. This is indeed an alarming potential risk for the country. However, all such reports about future adverse impacts of future climate change have an unwritten codicil which says "if we do not prepare ourselves". We are no longer living in a world, at least in Bangladesh, where we are not aware of the impending problem and not taking steps to prepare ourselves to tackle the problem.

While this is true in all situations and for all countries and stakeholders, it is especially important when discussing children. This is because the problems they will face were created by adults who are leaving the burden to their children and grandchildren. That is the argument of movement by the teenager from Sweden, Greta Thunberg.

However, while they are right to protest against the unfairness of their



Thousands of young people gather in Parliament Square in central London to protest against the government's lack of action on climate change in February 2019.

PHOTO: WIKTOR SZYMANOWICZ/AFP

situation, many of them are also eager to rise to the challenge of finding solutions to the problems that their parents left them with. In this paradigm shift of thinking about solutions instead of problems alone, many positive factors emerge which we can build on.

The first one is that children are major national assets for the future of any country, but in poor countries like

Bangladesh with large proportions of young people, they are a major human resource and asset upon which a future resilient to climate change can be built.

This will not happen automatically and nor will it happen with the current system of education and skills development in Bangladesh. Thus, we need a crash programme to enhance the quality (not just quantity) of education and capacity building at all levels to

make our future citizens into the world's most climate-resilient adults who can help both Bangladesh as well as other countries to tackle climate change.

The second paradigm shift is to change the objective of education from job-seeking to problem-solving for students at all levels. This can start with students in universities across the country. Since the government wisely allowed private universities to be established in Bangladesh, we now have well over a hundred universities of different kinds across the country with millions of students.

While it is true that the quality of education being currently delivered is far from good in many of these universities, they remain a good foundation through which better quality education can be delivered to encourage future graduates to become problem-solvers and not just job-seekers.

A third element in this paradigm shift in education at all levels from primary schools up to universities is to include tackling climate change (which includes teaching about the problems, but even more about solutions to those problems) at appropriate levels for each age group. University students can be trained to become the vanguards for such a rapid nationwide effort to ensure

that children of all ages learn about climate change.

Finally, if we can manage to shift the current paradigm of our education system to enable children and students at all levels to learn about climate change as a potential problem and, more importantly,

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enable them to become problem solvers, then Bangladesh can indeed lead the world towards becoming resilient to climate change over the next decade.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

The then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (L), negotiations chairman George Mitchell, and British PM Tony Blair pictured in 1998 at the signing of the agreement.

April 10, 1998
NEGOTIATORS IN NORTHERN IRELAND REACH HISTORIC PEACE DEAL

The Good Friday Agreement ended 30 years of violent conflict about Northern Ireland's constitutional status ("The Troubles").

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 "Get lost!"
- 5 Layered mineral
- 9 Shade
- 11 Bourne's portrayer
- 12 Indian coin
- 13 Bulb gas
- 14 Clumsy galoot
- 15 Sheet fabric
- 17 Scent
- 19 Blend
- 20 Country division
- 21 Acquire
- 22 Audacity
- 24 Funny fellow
- 26 Some babies
- 29 Take in
- 30 Arrange in every possible way

DOWN

- 1 Scuffle
- 2 Some autos
- 3 Tijuana Brass trumpeter
- 4 Bunion spot
- 5 Painter Chagall
- 6 "Count me in!"
- 7 "Settle down!"
- 8 Building wing
- 10 Good name
- 11 Be bold
- 16 Came into view
- 18 Viper feature
- 21 Start of an idea
- 23 Green-and-yellow birds
- 24 Cotton pest
- 25 Pump full of bubbles
- 27 Wolfish
- 28 Posture
- 29 Ship poles
- 30 Buddies
- 31 Borders
- 33 Competed
- 37 Funny fellow

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BEETLE BAILEY

WHEW! CAN YOU GET ONE OF YOUR G.I.s TO DO MY GROCERY SHOPPING?

NO! I CAN'T USE A U.S. SOLDIER TO DO PERSONAL JOBS!

I THINK YOU HIT IT IN HERE, SIR

WELL, KEEP LOOKING

BABY BLUES

HI MOM, HOW WAS YOUR SELF-DEFENSE CLASS?

(IT WAS GOOD!)

HOW WAS YOUR EVENING WITH DAD? ANY ISSUES?

UH, WELL...

LET'S JUST SAY THAT WE HAVE A BUNCH OF NEW "OUR LITTLE SECRETS."

THE FIRST ONE TO SPILL THE BEANS GETS AN ICE CREAM SANDWICH.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

SPHOOLS BROW
ITALIA AIDA
TAKEAGANDER
MARS AN
CITY RENT
ALASEA ARE
VELVET STOW
SLIP SCOT
DISCO
TAKEAPOWDER
OHIO INLOVE
PANS TESTED

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott