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Safety issues in focus, at last

Govt agencies, development project authorities move to ensure protective measures at sites

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Different government agencies and project authorities finally seem to be paying attention to safety regulations after five people were crushed to death by a girder of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Line 3 on Monday.

After the tragic incident due to gross negligence in ensuring safety, Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) has issued directives to beef up safety at all its project sites.

Besides, Dhaka North City Corporation has called a meeting of all agencies implementing development projects in its areas.

In another development, the Road Transport and Highways Division, following media reports on Wednesday that the work of BRT project was still going on without maintaining proper safety measures, asked the authorities concerned yesterday to report on the matter.

It said the work will not resume until a safety plan submitted by the contractors is approved and in place.

The division also asked the chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department and the managing director of Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Ltd, two of the four implementing agencies of the BRT project, to explain what caused the shocking incident.

These welcome developments came but only after deaths of five people including two children in the capital's Uttara.

A preliminary report of the government probe committee exposed negligence on the part of the Chinese contractor, China Gezhouba Group Co Ltd, its safety team and the crane operator.



Experts said the project authorities also cannot avoid responsibility. In the absence of proper monitoring by implementing agencies, safety in a particular project mainly depends on how much emphasis the financier puts on safety issues, which in no way can be a proper process, experts and officials said.

In a country like Bangladesh, different government agencies take some piecemeal steps following a major incident, but those often fail to improve the situation due to a lack of sustainability. The solution lies in ensuring that the projects have in-built safety mechanisms, they said.

"The fact that the authorities concerned are taking steps to ensure safety after a major incident means their projects lacked safety measures in the first place," Prof Hadiuzzaman of Buet said.

"It can be said that safety issues were neglected in development projects," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

On Tuesday, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam visited the site and asked officials to suspend the construction work, citing inadequate protective measures.

When a reporter on the spot asked why he was visiting the site only after the incident and what he had done to ensure safety at the project sites, the mayor claimed he had conveyed his concern to the project implementation authorities on several occasions but they did not pay heed.

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A parking lot has been built grabbing the land of the Turag in Kamarpara area of Tongi. Vehicles like buses and trucks are parked at the spot beside the Tongi-Ashulia road. Demarcation pillars of the river are hidden from view due to the occupation. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Some raising prices unfairly for extra buck

Says PM

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said prices of all items went up after the government hiked fuel prices, but some unscrupulous people were increasing the prices to make extra profits.

She said the pandemic, Russia-Ukraine war, sanctions and counter-sanctions caused great problems for all.

The PM made the SEE PAGE 6 COL 2

It was all primed for the disaster

Helper was operating the crane, Rab says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The crane that toppled and dropped a girder segment on a car killing five did not have a fitness certificate and the man operating it had no training to do the job, Rab said yesterday.

Rakib Hossain, who was in control, was actually the operator's helper, while the supposed operator Al Amin, who was giving instructions standing nearby, had no valid licence to operate the machine, said Khandakar Al Moin, Legal and Media wing director of Rab.

Both of them fled the scene after the tragedy. Law enforcers arrested Rakib, Al Amin and eight others from Dhaka and several other districts in the last two days.

Quoting the arrestees, Moin told a press conference at the Rab media centre that the crane, which might have been in operation since 1996 or 1997, had a rated capacity to lift 45 to 50 tonnes. But the girder segment it was lifting weighed 60 to 70 tonnes.

There should have been two cranes at the site, but there was only the one with a fitness certificate that expired a year ago, he added.

When the crane toppled over on Monday, a box girder segment fell on a car on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in the capital's Uttara, crushing five people, including two children, to death.

The crane was being used by China Gezhouba Group Company Limited, the contractor for Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Line 3 project.

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ELECTORAL LAW AMENDMENT

EC ignores most reforms proposed by parties

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Ignoring many of the major recommendations put forward by political parties during the recently held talks, the Election Commission has proposed amendments to electoral law.

During the talks with the EC between July 17 and July 31, many political parties recommended staggered national elections as well as the introduction of a proportional representation system.

Several political parties demanded adding a voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) to the Electronic Voting Machines, a method of providing feedback to voters.

The parties suggested deploying "capable" EC officials as returning officers instead of the deputy commissioners, installing CCTV cameras in and outside of all polling centres, and reintroducing "No Vote".

Some had demanded holding polls again in a constituency if a person is wins unopposed.

Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana yesterday told this newspaper that they sent their amendment proposals to the law ministry a few days ago.

Asked why they did not incorporate political parties' major recommendations for reforms, she said they would soon inform all political parties which recommendations were accepted and

which ones were not.

She said having a staggered national election and proportional representation system required political decisions.

"If we get the political decision, we will bring changes to the RPO [recommend amendments to the Representation of the People Order] again."

The commission has not made any final decision on EVM use and VVPAT, said Rashida.

"We will make recommendations for changes if we reach a decision that require changes to the RPO."

She said the EC could appoint its officials as returning officers without the need for any changes to the RPO.

Representation of the People Order, 1972 is the law that regulates the election of members to the Jatiya Sangsad.

An election commissioner wishing not to be named said they were mulling whether to install CCTVs in all polling stations or the ones considered vulnerable.

EC'S PROPOSALS

Rashida said they had proposed that the EC be able to cancel an election before gazette notification of the results, provided complaints made against the polls were proved to be true by probes.

She said now the EC cannot say anything after the announcement of the unofficial results.

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FOREX MARKET VOLATILITY

BB asks MDs of 6 banks to explain role

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank on Wednesday asked the managing directors of six banks to explain why they took advantage of the volatility in the foreign exchange market to make profits breaking banking norms.

The six banks are: Dutch Bangla Bank, The City Bank, Prime Bank, Southeast Bank, Brac Bank, and Standard Chartered Bangladesh.

On August 14, the BB directed these banks to attach their treasury heads to the human resource departments amid allegations of their involvement in gaining excessive profits ignoring rules.

The central bank on Wednesday also asked the six lenders not to transfer their profits from foreign exchange businesses between January and May to their income accounts. The profits must be kept in a separate account, according to the BB letter.

In case any of the banks have already transferred the profits to their income accounts, the action should be reverted.

None of the managing directors of the six banks responded when this correspondent contacted them for comments.

Serajul Islam, spokesperson of the BB, said that the banks had been asked to reply to the BB letters in seven work days.

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Exhausted in the hot and humid weather yesterday, a rickshaw-puller tries to cool himself off by drinking and splashing some water on his face from a roadside tap near Ittefaq intersection in the capital's Hatkhola area.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Hasina govt must be kept stable

Momen says at Janmashtami festival

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Foreign Minister AKM Abdul Momen has said he requested the Indian



government to do whatever necessary for continuation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"I went to India and said Sheikh Hasina's continuation must be ensured. She is our role model. If her continuation is ensured, our country will stride towards development and become a truly non-communal country," he said at the opening ceremony of Janmashtami festival at JM Sen Hall in Chattogram city yesterday.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the audio clip of his speech.

Referring to his visit to SEE PAGE 2 COL 5