



Safety precautions are frequently ignored in the construction sector since owners, contractors, and workers lack knowledge and training or are careless.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Making workplace safe for construction workers

Fahad Bin Siddique is research officer at Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST).

FAHAD BIN SIDDIQUE

Over the past few years, Bangladesh has experienced a surge in the construction industry as our rapid population growth has necessitated adequate housing for everyone. And that's not all—the government is also implementing dozens of massive projects to improve the country's infrastructure.

In response to these demands, Bangladesh has seen a considerable contribution to its GDP coming from the construction sector, which reflects the industry's significance. According to the data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), construction added Tk 3.7 lakh crore to the GDP in 2022. This is an increase over the sum for the year 2021—Tk 3.2 lakh crore.

The Labour Force Survey 2017-18 of BBS reveals that the construction industry provides employment for more than 3.4 million individuals or approximately 5.6 percent of the nation's total workforce. But in this bustling panorama of the construction sector, there lies a shadow that often goes unnoticed: the frightening rate of accidents and fatalities suffered by construction workers.

According to a report published by non-governmental organisation Safety and Rights Society (SRS), over 700 fatalities of construction workers, as reported in newspapers, happened across the country between 2017 and 2021. This equates to an annual death toll of 143, on average. Because many fatalities and accidents occur on construction sites in our country every year, the vast majority of them never make it into official records or newspaper headlines.

Based on the report by SRS, in 2021, construction accidents ranked second in terms of workplace

fatalities. The transportation sector witnessed the highest deaths among all workplaces, while the manufacturing sector ranked third. While discussions about reducing fatalities have consistently focused on the manufacturing and transportation sectors, the high number of deaths in the construction industry does not receive the attention it deserves.

When it comes to the cause of death in the construction industry, according to the SRS report, between 2017 and 2021, the most common

According to a report published by non-governmental organisation Safety and Rights Society (SRS), over 700 fatalities of construction workers, as reported in newspapers, happened across the country between 2017 and 2021. This equates to an annual death toll of 143, on average.

cause of death was a fall from height (245 people), followed by electrocution (223 people), inhaling poisonous gas or suffocation (91 people), wall/mud/roof/stair/earth collapse (78 people), crushed by object (64 people), explosion (two people) and others (nine people). The data suggests that the considerable disregard for safety concerns by construction workers and owners of construction sites is the direct cause of the fatalities.

Safety precautions in construction sites are frequently ignored in Bangladesh since owners, contractors, and workers are often unwilling to ensure them

because of carelessness and a lack of understanding, training, and knowledge. If we look at the causes of deaths mentioned above, we can see that the casualties caused by falling from a height, being electrocuted, and breathing in poisonous gas or suffocation could be easily reduced if those in charge of the construction site take some precautions or pay a little more attention to safety.

Some experts may bring up the issue of implementing the Bangladesh National Building Code, 2020 (BNBC), but doing so is not an easy task at the moment. Furthermore, without an efficient regulatory authority throughout the country, BNBC implementation will not be successful. Nevertheless, we cannot wait for such an authority to be established, because the death toll is increasing year after year. Along with pressing the government to establish a regulatory authority for BNBC, we must strive to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge and training among workers and construction site owners about the importance of using safety equipment and taking precautions.

Such awareness must be raised through the combined efforts of the public and private sectors, and worker rights organisations and relevant NGOs must take the initiative to do so. A great example of this can be seen in Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), which has a long history of providing legal aid and assistance to workers. More recently, as part of the "Empowering Workers for Justice" initiative, BLAST has supported construction workers through a variety of initiatives, including raising awareness of construction workers' rights and responsibilities regarding safety and legal protection at workplaces. Such initiatives should be continued as well as broadened by strengthening affiliation with government and other organisations. I believe, with all of our efforts, we may be able to make significant headway to prevent fatalities and injuries from such avoidable causes.

When youngsters shun politics, the nation should be worried



THE STREET VIEW

Mohammad Al-Masum Molla is chief reporter at The Daily Star.

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

That an election is nothing without the voters goes without saying. And more often than not, young first-time voters can become the deciding factor in the polls since they are most likely to cause a swing towards whichever platform catches their fancy. The vibrancy of an election particularly hinges on these youths, who add to the overall heady atmosphere leading up to voting day. This has been a common phenomenon in Bangladeshi electoral politics, which is why the national elections often take on the mood of a large festival irrespective of religion or race.

But gone are those days. No longer is an election festive in Bangladesh. Nor do the first-time voters show much enthusiasm. More importantly, the political parties, especially the ruling one, care little about the

then the future of the nation is bleak, indeed.

Even more worrying is the fact that youths have turned away from politics out of frustration. We may keep blaming poor politics, corrupt politicians, and a rotten society, but to resolve our problems, we need solid political leadership to steer the nation in the right direction. A bureaucrat, a businessperson, a social worker, or a journalist can only extend their support, but leadership must come from the political figures. Right now, in absence of that lead, the young generation is becoming increasingly disinterested in politics.

Why am I expressing such deep concern? Because another election is due in a month. BNP, the opposition, has announced to boycott the polls, and so, it seems that polling is going

problems, which could be resolved if they only had the chance to talk about it at the right forum.

A fourth of the country's population is in the 15-29 age group. In numbers, the country's current youth population is around 45.9 million, according to the census report published by the Bangladesh

We have to keep in mind that youths have been missing out on being part of the democratic process, the voting environment, and rights. They need to connect with a mainstream political process that accommodates diverging and opposing views. There must be a healthy debate of conflicting ideas to enlighten the youth. Otherwise, there won't be any progress.



What's worrying is that an entire generation has grown up without being accustomed to the actual exercise of elections.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

voters. This frustrating trend was clear in the 2014 election—when 153 lawmakers were elected uncontested thanks to the main opposition camp boycotting the polls—and voters were deprived of the value of their vote.

The voting atmosphere, especially since the beginning of what is said to be "modern democracy" in Bangladesh in 1991, has gradually waned and is possibly at its historical low now. The media reported heavily that many voters could not even cast their votes in the 2018 election. This upcoming election, 25 million fresh voters, almost one-fourth of total voters, may cast their votes for the first time.

What's worrying is that an entire generation has grown up without being accustomed to the actual exercise of elections. It may not sound very alarming, but the impact is severe. If they grow up knowing that public representatives can be elected without voting and that there is no system of accountability, if they grow up in a winner-take-all culture,

to be lopsided again. And if there is no strong political opposition in the battle of the ballots, voter turnout will be less or voters will be deprived of their right.

Recently, I got the opportunity to listen to a bunch of youths at a university programme organised by DW Akademie. They discussed everything from traffic congestion to water scarcity, from psychological issues to medicare facilities—along with voting rights and the electoral atmosphere. What impressed me was that they want to speak up, they want to come up with ideas and solutions, but are not getting the space, or we are not providing it.

One of the participants said, "Everything around us is affecting or influencing our young generation, but we are in pain. We can't talk." Another said their generation has never seen a proper election. After the talks, the youths summed up the proceedings saying that the voting process and election system could be improved. They have a myriad of

Bureau of Statistics. While the elderly will certainly provide guidance, the youth must be the foot soldiers, and the relationship should not be just unidirectional (top to bottom) but reciprocal. Whatever approach we have must blend the experience and wisdom of the elderly with the technical savviness and creativity of the youth. This combination is imperative for the advancement of any society. The wider the gap, the poorer the nation will be.

Therefore, we have to keep in mind that youths have been missing out on being part of the democratic process, the voting environment, and rights. They need to connect with a mainstream political process that accommodates diverging and opposing views. There must be a healthy debate of conflicting ideas to enlighten the youth. Otherwise, there won't be any progress. We will only hurdle back from the light of reason, away from the benefits of a democratic process that preaches equality.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your letters to letters@thedailystar.net

New curriculum needs scrutiny

Complaints about the new school curriculum are rife among parents, teachers and students across Bangladesh. Most of the criticisms are about the new assessment system and trimming of science education. While the plan was to free students from educational pressure and unhealthy competition, they are increasingly becoming frustrated by the assessment system, with no structured method to solve assignments. It can be said that students are not yet ready for this method. Teachers are also not fully trained in carrying out assessments.

Science education has been reduced in the new curriculum. There are no separate books or exams for chemistry, biology, physics in Classes 9 and 10. There will be one book and one exam combining these three subjects.

Most of the secondary and higher secondary educational institutions are still underdeveloped in



terms of infrastructure. Salaries and allowances of teachers are insufficient, and that is why teachers are busy providing private coaching. Although some training is ensured, it is not adequate. If the state does not ensure suitable training for teachers and educational institutions for students, will it be possible to

improve the education system?

Therefore, the government, with the consultation of all the academicians, intellectuals, teachers, and regular people of the country should prepare a curriculum that is modern and scientific.

Maruf Hassan Bhuiyan
Feni

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

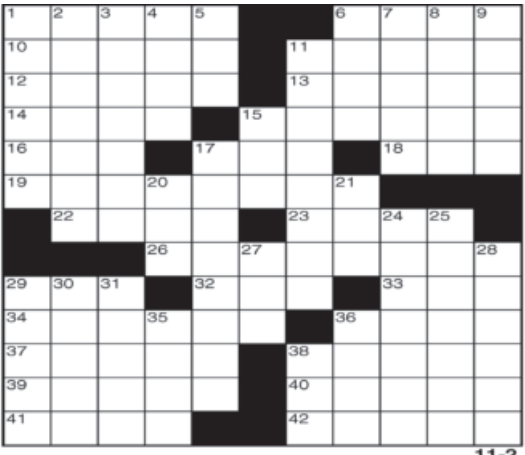
- 1 Put a stop to
- 6 Delighted
- 10 Sports-caster Mel
- 11 Much writing
- 12 Stowed cargo
- 13 Custom
- 14 News article
- 15 Coped
- 16 Sewing aid
- 17 Charged particle
- 18 Kinsey topic
- 19 Wi-Fi locations
- 22 Close
- 23 Play parts
- 26 Cheap criticisms
- 29 Gifted
- 32 Silent
- 33 Maze runner

DOWN

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- 36 Golf goal
- 37 Opera songs
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- 27 Harbor boat
- 28 Takes the wheel
- 29 Banded rock
- 30 Danger
- 31 Use your head
- 35 Cloth tatters
- 36 Ring of light
- 38 Pop



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	W	A	K	E		C	O	S	T	S
S	E	L	E	S		A	L	P	H	A
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