

MODERNIZATION OF FIRE SERVICE AND CIVIL DEFENSE

- A NEED OF THE TIME

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh Fire Service & Civil Defense (FS&CD) Directorate is a government organization aimed at promoting public welfare and security. It is the first responder organization to help and rescue life and property of jeopardized people at any natural or man made calamity. Bangladesh is a natural calamity prone country due to its geographic location. Very often it undergoes such disasters with huge loss of lives & properties almost every year. Apart from these there are instances of fire¹, collapse of buildings, water transport capsized, cyclone, flood etc which sometimes appear very painful & embarrassing on the part of the country. There is also risk of earthquake which might cost unbearable situation for densely located old and new buildings² of Dhaka and other cities of the country. Department of Fire Service and Civil Defense is the only organized institution to extinguish fire, encounter accident, rescue injured locked people, give emergency first aid, ambulance services for patients, etc. It also imparts security and first aid training to people of different government & private organizations.

With the advancement of technology, conflict between states on different issues and ideologies have come forward. Modern warfare technique³ is able to spread swiftly inside the territory of the opponent country causing irreparable damage to it. The technology based air power has the radical capacity to shape battlefield now a day. It has unique ability to influence the outcome of a conflict at any level of warfare. The ready instance of it was Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and recent US led air attack in Iraq during Gulf war. To address such situation beforehand there is no alternative to proper civil defense structure, management and training. Bangladesh, as a small country, with its vulnerable geographic location may be subject to such attack any time. Civil Defense involves a variety of practical measures to protect civilians in war and natural disasters. The purpose of Civil Defense is to ensure protection of civilian lives & properties including maintenance of utility services. The major task of Civil Defense⁴ includes warning system, arrangements for evacuation, management

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1. Yearly fire data-2009 by FS&CD Directorate
 2. Protection of civic life of Dhaka city during earth quake –research paper by ARDOC Mymensingh, page -1 para-2.
 3. Protection of civic life of Dhaka city in the face of hostile air campaign- research paper by ARDOC Mymensingh, page-1 para-1
 4. Civil Defense Manual-1950, page 15, 17, 18, 58

of shelters, fire fighting & rescue, medical services including first aid, repair of indispensable public utilities and safeguarding objects essential for survival. So, the importance of Civil Defense in Bangladesh need not to be emphasized more.

The existing management and organizational aspect of fire service & civil defense in Bangladesh is not up to the mark. It has measured lacking in necessary modern equipments as well as shortage of manpower. Moreover the Civil Defense side is almost neglected & inactive as if it is thought that Bangladesh is not supposed to face any warfare situation in future. But this thought is not wise and safe as a sovereign nation. So considering the practical situation, the Fire Service & Civil Defense Directorate needs to be given due attention to examine its present capability in detail and take necessary measures enabling it to cope with the intensity of changing future disasters both natural and man made.

The study recommends a reasonable Fire Service & Civil Defense structure which will cater to the need of the time. It also aims to assess the existing capability of The FS&CD Directorate.

An Overview of the FS&CD Directorate of Bangladesh.

In 1982 The Directorate of FS&CD emerged as a new organization under Ministry of Home Affairs with the combination⁵ of Fire Service Department and Civil Defense Directorate of Ministry of Home Affairs and the Rescue Department of the Ministry of Communication. The aim of the organization is to protect human life and property during disasters both man made and natural.

Historical Background

As a new born nation Bangladesh inherited the Fire Service & Civil Defense organization from the then East Pakistan. From documents available it is learnt that the President of Pakistan promulgated an Ordinance in this respect known as “The East Pakistan Fire Services Ordinance,1959” with a view to maintenance of fire brigade, licensing of warehouse & for certain other matters. Under the provision of this ordinance a rule was framed titled “The East Pakistan Fire Services Rules, 1961”. The ordinance of 1959 was amended in 1970. After emergence of Bangladesh it owned “The East Pakistan Fire Services Ordinance” 1959 & “The East Pakistan Fire Services Rules 1961”. The Ordinance of 1959 was amended in 1974 and the Rule of 1961 was amended twice, once in the year 1999 and next in 2000. At the last, the government of Bangladesh framed a law with a view to fire prevention, extinguishing and rescue operation of fire in

5. Protection of civic life of Dhaka city during earthquake- a research paper by ARTDOC page no.12

2003 known as – ‘Ogni Protirodh O Nirbapon Ayn, 2003’ Besides, Bangladesh succeeded Pakistan’s structure of Civil Defense Organization and enacted ‘The Civil Defense Act, 1952’. Its role and function during peace & war time is still in place. Though its name bears the function of Civil Defense, in reality the Civil Defense parameter of this organization did not flourish accordingly.

Existing Structure & Management

The organogram of FS&CD Directorate of Ministry of Home Affairs shows that the organization is headed by a Director General. There are 3 directors, 11 Deputy Directors, 28 Assistant Directors, 69 Deputy Assistant Directors, 44 Senior Station Officers, 217 Station Officers with a total number of 6,343 officials in 90 different categories. Among those 46 first class officers, 141 second class officers, 5813 class three officer/staffs and 343 class four employees.

Six Divisional offices are headed by 6 Deputy Directors , 21 greater district headquarter offices headed by Assistant Directors, & 64 district offices are headed by Deputy Assistant Directors throughout the Country. The main Operational Units i.e. Fire Stations are headed by Senior Station Officer/Station Officers. Total Number of existing Fire Stations is 215 and construction of 154 new Fire Stations is going on under four projects. There are nine river fire stations. It has a training institute at Dhaka headed by a Principal.

There are four workshops which are located in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna. Maintenance & repair of vehicles and fire fighting equipments are done here.

Civil Defense Aspect of the Organization

Before creation of the Directorate of Fire Service & Civil Defense in 1982, Civil Defense Organization had separate identity, structure and management. Its aim was to protect the Civilian lives & properties during war and peace time. So this organization had a post of Director known as Director Civil Defense, under him there were several Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors with some staffs . In the District and Sub Division level Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Sub Divisional Officers (SDO) respectively were the Ex- Officio Controllers of Civil Defense. There were Deputy Controller and Civil Defense Officers at District level and Assistant Controller at Sub division level who belonged to Civil Defense department and were under the command of D.C and S.D.Os regarding functions of Civil Defense. D.C and S.D.Os were responsible for executing all Civil Defense schemes, organization & training of the Civil Defense Services in the District and Sub divisions respectively.

There was warden service⁶ the function of which was to assist and advise the public in observance of Civil Defense measures in emergency situation. Apart from these, there was a training academy and a training school in Dhaka. All officers and officials related to the function of Civil Defense would have been trained here. In the district & sub-division level students-teachers of educational institutes, officials of government, semi government and private organizations were given essential emergency training⁷.

Manpower

Manpower statement of the organization shows that 5939 staffs are presently working against 6343 sanctioned posts. 404 posts are lying vacant. Among those, out of 46 class-1 posts 21 posts are vacant, out of 141 class-2 posts 56 posts are vacant, out of 5813 class-3 posts 311 posts are vacant and out of 343 4th class posts 16 are lying vacant. . For smooth running of the functions of such an important organization shortage of manpower is a hurdle. The Directorate has proposed additional 441 manpower against 51 different posts to the Ministry of Home Affairs to gear up capability of the organization.

Vehicle – Pump and Equipments

The position of necessary equipments of the organization shows that large number of equipments like Turn table ladder (TTL), snorkel, emergency tender, home tender, breakdown van, lighting unit, chemical tender, fire float, rescue speed boat, heat protect suit, breathing apparatus, helmet, gumboot, rescue command vehicle, forklift are running short as per TO&E. Most of those equipments are very essential for fire fighting & rescue, building collapse and oil/chemical fire extinguishing cases.

Rules and Regulations

‘The East Pakistan Fire Services Ordinance, 1959’ & ‘The East Pakistan Fire Services Rules, 1961’ are still applicable in Bangladesh. After liberation the Rule of 1961 was amended twice, once in the year 1999 and the other in 2000. At last the government of Bangladesh framed an Act with a view to fire prevention, extinguishing and rescue operation of fire in the year 2003 known as – ‘Ogni Protirodh O Nirbapon Ayn 2003’ but no rule is yet framed under it. The directorate sent such a proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2008.

Besides, Bangladesh owned Pakistan’s structure of Civil Defense Organization and enacted ‘The Civil Defense Act, 1952’. Its role and function during peace & war time is still in place.

6. Civil Defense Manual-1950, p.27

7. Civil Defense Manual 1950, p.14

Limitations of Present FS&CD Organization

On examination of the present structure & management, manpower, equipments, etc. of the Directorate of FS&CD and basing on key informant interview, few case studies, an opinion survey from all walks of life, some limitations of the organization were identified. Furthermore informal discussion with staffs and related documents revealed some points of dissatisfaction among the staffs of the organization.

On analysis of the information about constraints of existing Fire Service & Civil Defense Organization which remains on the way to its becoming a dependable ideal resort for people in moments of disaster is identified as follows:

Establishment of Fire Stations in Each Upazilla: It is essential to establish at least one Fire Station in each Upazilla to cover all parts of the country under Fire Safety net work.

Shortage of Manpower: At present 404 posts are lying vacant out of the sanctioned posts as per TO&E. The Directorate has proposed additional 441 posts in 51 categories for smooth running of its function. Shortage of necessary manpower is a vital back log for such an organization for smooth running of its function.

Shortage of Modern Equipments : The organization is running short of a big number of very essential disaster fighting equipments, among those – Turn table ladder (used for fire fighting in high rise building), Snorkel (used for fire fighting & rescue), Emergency tender (used in case of building collapse), Foam tender (used for fire due to oil), Chemical tender (used in case of fire due to chemical) are mentionable. These equipments need to be available in all the 44 class-1 Fire stations. Moreover for modernization of the organization the Directorate produced another list of 69 kinds of essential equipments to the researcher which was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs for approval. An organization dealing with very important security aspect of the nation should be looked after with due care and priority.

Need for Advanced Training : Since Bangladesh is a disaster prone country and the nature & intensity of different disasters do not care any prediction, the members of FS & CD need to be given latest and modernized training at home and abroad so that they can cope with the forms of disaster.

Inactive Civil Defense Structure and Function : Before creation of The Directorate of Fire Service & Civil Defense in 1982, Civil Defense Organization

had separate identity, structure and management as per 'Civil Defense Act, 1952'. Its aim was to protect the Civilian lives & properties during war and peace time. But now there is no structure, management and function of Civil Defense. Only there is a part of civil defense in the Basic training curriculum at Fire service & Civil Defense Training Center, Mirpur, Dhaka. In case of any sudden warfare the nation might have to face very hard situation.

Circumstantial Hazard While Addressing Disaster:

In most of the fire incidents circumstantial hazards stand to be a major obstacle in fire fighting measures. The salient features of these obstacles as found in the case studies and opinion of the operational staffs are as follows :

- Fire service is not informed in time.
- Exact location is not given which causes delay of the fire units to reach the spot.
- Very narrow approach lane or road.
- Unauthorized shops/stalls, construction materials on lanes.
- Unplanned digging of lanes/roads.
- Unplanned electric, telephone & dish cables on roads.
- Want of water source near the spot.
- Chaotic situation created by mob or unwanted visitors.

It is necessary to remove these hazards in an integrated way with the help of concerned departments or agencies. People need to be sensitized.

Implement and Enforce Regulations on Fire Safety: From the case study of Bashundhara shopping mall fire incident it is known that the incumbent organization violated approved plan of RAJUK in constructing floor plan of the mall. The terms & conditions of high- rise building mentioned in the clearance certificate of Fire Service & Civil Defense directorate is violated by the organization. There was no fire exit or fire lift. Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) was not followed. But in fact no authority took any legal step against those illegal activities of Bashundhara authority. If necessary legal action was taken in time such problem would not have arisen.

Discriminatory Position of Certain Officer/Staffs of FS & CD : Since the pay scale of Station Officer and Fire Man were higher than those of Sub-inspector and Constable of Police before Liberation and at present the pay scale of Station Officer & Fire Man have been lower than those of the police member.

It is obvious that such discriminatory and humiliating step is bound to reflect negative impact on the efficiency of concerned officials.

Welfare of Officer/Staffs: Welfare of Personnel is closely linked with their efficiency in work. So, it is wise to ensure their security aspect duly. The 'Fire Service & Civil Defense Risk allowance Rules-2007' which was sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs need to be examined & taken care of.

Initiative from the Government for Modernization

Recently the Government has decided to modernize the Organization after the tragic Nimtoli fire incident. Establishment of 156 new Fire Stations under 4 projects are going on. Earlier the Directorate sent a proposal for approval of additional 441 Posts in 51 categories and 69 kinds of essential Fire fighting equipments and 7 Development Project proposals for modernization of the Organization to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Apart from these with the help and funding of Comprehensive Disaster Management Program (CDMP), community level training (Pilot Project) is given to 1000 volunteers identifying the vulnerable earthquake prone areas of Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong initially. In this way a total of 62,000 volunteers will be developed under Community Level Collapse Structure Search & Rescue (CLCSSR) training course.

But from the study it is realized that those initiatives were not enough to update the capability of the organization to address disasters of the time. Because apart from the areas of Govt. initiatives there are some areas without developing those the end of modernization will not be fruitful.

Priority Areas Need to be Modernized

Need to Shift the Purview of the Ministry:

The function of the directorate of FS & CD is very much related to disaster management. It has no functional similarity or belongingness to the Ministry of Home Affairs. So, there is no justification of its remaining under the purview of the MOHA. On the other hand we have no isolated disaster management ministry. There is a Disaster management bureau under the 'Ministry of Food and Disaster Management'. So, considering the importance of various and recurrent disasters in our country it is high time to establish a separate ministry named 'Ministry of Disaster Management' and to address disasters in an integrated & effective way- FS&CD directorate, Disaster Management Bureau and Space Research and Remote Sensing Organization (SPARRSO) should be brought under that ministry. The new ministry should be under control of the Prime Minister.

Establishment of Fire Station in Each Upazilla:

At least one Fire Station need to be established in each Upazilla to cover fire safety to all parts of the country.

Establishment of Fire Stations in Certain Industrial & Densely Populated Districts:

As per proposal of commerce Ministry, projects for establishing fire stations. In 17 places of 12 Industrial & densely populated districts need to be implemented in time. Besides these as per risk in Metropolitan areas number of fire stations need to be increased.

Manpower:

The vacant posts as per TO&E should be filled in urgently. The additional manpower as suggested by the Directorate need to be recruited soon.

Equipments:

The total number and kinds of disaster fighting equipments proposed by the Directorate for capacity building of the organization need to be procured on priority basis

Implementation of Development Projects:

The Development Projects Proposed by the Directorate need to be Examined and considered duly in time.

Advanced Training:

All personnel concerned with disaster fighting need to be given specialized training at home and abroad.

Activation of Civil Defense Structure & Function:

Civil Defense aspect has a broader range of disaster addressing capability both man made and natural. It renders a sustainable preparation in case of any sudden warfare situation or earthquake which is not possible by the present Fire service & civil defense structure and management. So, it needs to be revived in the light of 'The Civil Defense Act, 1952'.

- i) Special & updated curriculum need to be introduced in schools and colleges about emergency preparedness.

- ii) Civil Defense training program should be reinforced in Districts and Upazilla level with updated curriculum. People of all walks of life need to be brought under this training program.
- iii) Documentary films should be shown on it in interior parts of the country for sensitizing the common people.
- iv) Warden Service needs to be activated properly.
- v) District and Upazilla Civil Defense activities should be revived.

Circumstantial Hazard During Disaster Addressing:

To avoid this obstructive situation people of all walks need to be sensitized first. All local government organizations should take active roles for it. Department's concerned need to ensure that the lanes/roads do not go under unauthorized occupation & remain clear.

Implement and Enforce Regulations on Fire Safety:

Implementation of fire safety regulation, Bangladesh National building Code (BNBC) regulations and RAJUK approved plan need to be ensured strictly. Concerned authority should spare no scope to bypass those. If necessary, Law should be enacted to keep it beyond the jurisdiction of the courts like that of land acquisition by the Government.

Establishment of Media Center:

A media center needs to be established to develop consciousness among people about various aspects of disaster preparedness.

Discriminatory Position of Certain Personnel of FS&CD:

Pay scale and status of The Station officer/Staff officer and Fire man should be redressed after proper examination for the sake of their job satisfaction.

Welfare of Personnel Engaged in Operational Task:

The draft of the 'Fire Service & Civil Defense Risk Allowance Rules-2007' which contained proposal for compensations in case of death, full and half invalidity of the personnel during operational task need to be examined & considered. The matter of approved risk allowance by the Finance Ministry need to be reviewed by inclusion of all the Officers & staffs of the organization with enhanced rate as was proposed by the directorate, because they belong to the essential service category involving high risk.

Fire Service & Civil Defense Model of Singapore

Due to similarity in roles and functions, the Singapore Civil Defense Force (SCDF) and Singapore Fire Service (SFS) were formally integrated in 1989 and the organization was named 'Singapore Civil Defense Force' (SCDF). The SCDF is under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The main role of SCDF is to provide fire-fighting, rescue and emergency ambulance services, mitigating hazardous materials incidents, as well as formulate, implement and enforce regulations on fire safety and civil defense shelter matters. The SCDF also actively engages the local community through its wide-ranging public-educational programs and community-based activities to enhance the resilience and emergency preparedness of the civilian population. Bangladesh Fire Service & Civil Defense directorate is also under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The aspect of organizational structure of SCDF is like that of Bangladesh FS&CD. In Singapore the units are separate which are not in Bangladesh. However, the nature of jobs is same. The Organizational head of SCDF is called 'Commissioner', where as in Bangladesh the same is called 'Director General'. In Singapore there are two wings headed by two directors under the 'commissioner', they are – 'senior director (emergency services)' and 'senior director (corporate services)'. In Bangladesh there are three directors under the Director General, the third one is director (development, training & planning). The important lacking in the Bangladesh FS & CD is that it has no medical department/services. Recently the DG has proposed for a 20 bedded burn unit with hospital in his development projects proposal. The training unit needs to be totally isolated like that of Singapore. Because training is the most vital and basic need in the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the recurrent nature of disasters - both man made and natural, and considering the grave losses of lives and properties due to those in a disaster prone country like Bangladesh, it is the need of the time to take necessary action without further delay. From the above study on the subject, the following measures are recommended to modernize the Fire Service & Civil Defense Directorate:

- i) A new Ministry under the control of the Prime Minister named - 'Ministry of Disaster Management' should be established. The directorate of FS & CD, Disaster Management Bureau and SPARRSO need to be brought under this new Ministry.
- ii) Medical Services/Hospital unit need to be established under this organization.

- iii) Training side need to be isolated and made separate unit.
- iv) Civil Defense aspect need to be activated as per 'Civil Defense Act,1952'
- v) Introduce latest curriculum of disaster preparedness in schools and colleges.
- vi) People of all walks of life up to remote places of the country should be brought under disaster preparedness training program. Documentary films on it may better serve the purpose.
- vii) Warden Service needs to be revived in districts and upazillas.
- viii) Ensure establishing Fire stations in each upazilla and important Industrial areas of the country.
- ix) Post and recruit necessary manpower for the Directorate.
- x) Ensure supply of necessary modern fire fighting equipments as per requisition of the Directorate.
- xi) Impart advanced training to concerned officials at home and abroad.
- xii) To remove circumstantial hazard during addressing disasters, integrated efforts need to be taken with the help of concerned departments/organizations. Steps need to be taken to sensitize people by the Local Government Agencies and Administration.
- xiii) Formulate, implement and enforce regulations on fire safety and civil defense matters.
- xiv) Welfare aspect of the Personnel should be taken care of and the draft proposal of 'Fire Service & Civil Defense Risk Allowance Rules-2007' need to be examined.
- xv) Discrimination in the pay scale of station officer and fire man need to be examined and considered properly.

CONCLUSION

Disaster is a recurrent and inevitable phenomenon in the lives of the people of Bangladesh. With the advancement of technology and knowledge, the scope of protection has developed. What we need is well preparedness, knowledge and logistic support. Above all, commitment of the government and people's cooperation are guiding factors for it. There is no way but to enhance the capability of FS & CD reorganizing its structure and management to cope with the disasters of the time. Simultaneously, people of all walks of life need to be sensitized about all aspects of disaster.

The suggested measures should be given due importance. The memories of the tragic incidences of Nimtoli, Bashundhara and Taltola slum fire incidents, some tragic building collapses of very recent past are still fresh in the minds of Bangladeshi people. If any earthquake at Richter scale 6 occurs, the impact will surpass our imagination. Moreover we need to have technical knowledge about what necessary measures to be taken during air attack or warfare situation. So, modernization steps of the Fire Service & Civil Defense Directorate on the suggested areas need to be taken on priority basis.

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Syed Mustafizur Rahman hails from Khulna, Bangladesh in 1954 . He had his Honours Graduation in English from Dhaka University in 1977 and joined Bangladesh Civil Service (Administration Cadre) in 1983 as a member of BCS-1982 regular batch. He started Career as an Assistant Commissioner & Magistrate and successively held positions of Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Secretary, Board of Investment, Deputy Commissioner, Private Secretary to Minister, Member, Rajdhani Unnayan Kortripokho (RAJUK), Joint Secretary in the Ministries of Health & Family Welfare and Home Affairs. He traveled Singapore, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, Srilanka, Nepal and France on various occasions. His hobby is roaming about in Village area, reading and listening to music that tell of Life & core feeling. Mustafiz is married to Nazneen, a house wife and blessed with two sons and a daughter. Elder son Shanto is an Executive Officer of Jamuna Bank Ltd. Younger son Komol is a fourth year student of bachelor of fine arts honours at Charukala Institute of Dhaka University and daughter 'Shashi' is a student of class seven. He is proud Grand father of 'Zaad' (8 months) with daughter-in-law 'Pranti'.