

## MASS DISASTER IN BANGLADESH FORENSIC VIEW

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### Abstract

Achievements in all spheres of humans endeavour to create a better world and the progress they made over generations all can be wiped out in a twinkle of an eye. All can take in a violent disaster natural or unnatural. Bangladesh, one of the least developed country of the world, burdened with large population had been affecting by some form of natural disaster like flood, cyclone, tidal surges etc every year. These disasters were due to its geographical location and geophysical climate. On the other hand, unnatural disaster like plane crashes, fires, shipwrecks, railway and other transport accidents, bomb blast etc. are some times avoidable under some precautionary measures.

The process of identification of the victim of disaster is one of the challenging problem for a forensic pathologist.

Forensic investigator can contribute their role expertise and recommendations in collaboration with other agencies.

### Introduction :

Washed by the world major rivers-Brahmaputra, Meghna and Padma and their 230 tributaries-Bangladesh endures inundation's almost as an annual event. The geographical location and geophysical climate of Bangladesh trend to encourage natural disasters like, flood cyclone etc.

There is often a direct relation between the type and magnitude of disaster and its effect on health. The frequently observed health effects due to natural disaster are: death, severe injury, infection, malnutrition, temporary migration of people from one place to another.

The worst natural disaster that hit Bangladesh in recent years was the flood in 1988. Which devastated three fourth of the country and displaced more than a quarter of it's 110 million population. About 2000 people were either drowned or died as a result of flood related diseases. More than 50% of the district hospitals were damaged. A Cyclone and tidal wave racing in from the Bay of Bengal in May, 1985 devastated the southern coast wiping out an entire coastal island with more than 11000 people.

The greatest cyclone in Bangladesh occurred in November 1970, killing not less than 30,00,000 people and again in April 1991, killing about 1,50,000 people and causing injury to around 1,40,000 people.

Man made disasters of ethnic political strife also affect the country though rarely. The great man made disaster we experienced during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. Within a period of less than 9 months the Pakistani army killed about 3 millions of people. Those army were also involved in various other crimes like rape and arson.

Forensic specialists of the country played an important and challenging role to identify the dead bodies during disaster and also help other investigator agencies by determining the actual cause of death Clearly a major purpose of identification is to assist in limiting the grief of the relatives of the casualties.

**Table-I : Disaster events in Bangladesh from 1960 to 1989**

| Type          | Frequency | Killed   | Injury  | Affected     |
|---------------|-----------|----------|---------|--------------|
| 1. Cyclone    | 32        | 3,97,258 | 61715   | 2,64,58,753  |
| 2. Drought    | 3         | 0        | 0       | 5000.00      |
| 3. Earthquake | 1         | 2        | 100     | 0            |
| 4. Fire       | 1         | 32       | 0       | 2000         |
| 5. Flood      | 22        | 45953    | 100,000 | 190,867,5452 |
| 6. Land slide | 1         | 200      | 0       | 0            |
| 7. Storm      | 19        | 43600    | 2795110 | 2,40,000     |

(Source : Brief regional overview, WHO, New Delhi, Aril 7, 1991)

**Table-II : Disaster events in Bangladesh during 1990 to 1996**

| Type            | Affected | Injured | Reported to DMCH |
|-----------------|----------|---------|------------------|
| 1. Tornado      | 10325    | 225     | 39               |
| 2. Flood        | 7338     | 271     | 31               |
| 3. Fire         | 535      | 315     | 73               |
| 4. Launch wreck | 3125     | 875     | 195              |
| 5. Railway      | 31       | 401     | 83               |
| accident        | 2210     | 410     | 81               |
| 6. Bomb blast   | 700      | 125     | 61               |

(Source DMCH record, B.B.S. report)

Some methods which are commonly used for identification in Bangladesh are :

**Visual identification :** This is the most common form of identification in Bangladesh. But it has got it's disadvantages as well. The atmosphere leads to error. Moreover, facial injuries or distortion of any type may give rise to difficulty in identification.

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**Ancillary method :** Ancillary or indicative methods of identification include recognition of the clothing, jewellery and personal documents etc.

**Extent of the loss in relation to money :**

Asian Institute of Technology, in Bangkok made a report on 80 events took place in Bangladesh during 1964 to 1986. This report indicates a total loss of 25 billion Us dollars that means one billion dollar per year.

**Measures taken :**

A national disaster council formed in 1988, advise the Govt. and adopts speedy remedial measures. A health sector disaster co-ordination committee has been formed within the Ministry of health to co-ordinate and supervise health sector activities during and after disaster. A number of workshops have been conducted both at the Thana and National level to develop awareness among general people and train them about preparedness and helping each other during and after disasters. Recently WHO has supported activities emphasizing managerial and health educational aspects, intersectoral co-ordination at all training of health workers and community leaders, provision of adequate medical supplies at the time of need and demarcation of disaster prone areas.

Success of disaster preparedness and response in a least developed country like Bangladesh largely depends on external assistance. So far as the health aspect of the problem is concerned the assistance from international and bilateral agencies have been of immense help. Benefit may also be derived from centre for research on the epidemiology of disaster a collaborating centre of WHO.

Ultimately it is the courage and determination of the people which prepare them to face the reality of the turmoil of disaster each year. They consider the disaster as a part of their life.

**Conclusion :**

Since we cannot prevent disasters, takes place all over the world in varying magnitudes in terms of its ferocity and human toll, whether pertaining to natural calamities or result of man made disasters. Such episodes poses on of the greatest challenges before the mankind for its timely and effective management. The developing countries still by the term of this century unfortunately has paid very little attention towards this important aspect resulting into heavy toll of precious human lives and national wastage, simply because proper prospective thoughts and newer trends in such Mass Disaster Management has not been full understood and kept pace with the developed countries.

**References :**

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