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Down to Earth

Earthquake hazards for city

By ASM Nurunnabi

Apart from the people in general, it is felt by geologists and other experts in this field that the level of earthquake hazard for the Dhaka city is not quite negligible. Earthquake is a natural calamity. It originates deep inside the earth by a number of geological processes, the technical details of which may not be of interest to a layman. A more intriguing question is whether an earthquake can be predicted. Though a variety of prediction methods have been used for centuries, since the 60s, scientific efforts on prediction have grown in an explosive manner particularly in Japan, Russia, China and the USA. The aim, according to geologists, is to establish as much reliability in earthquake forecasting as in the case of weather forecasting. Since the prediction of earthquake intensity at a particular site is an important aspect of earthquake forecasting, this factor is largely emphasised in choosing the sites of important structures such as dams, hospitals, nuclear reactors and human settlements.

Bangladesh has been divided into several earthquake vulnerable zones on the basis of certain specific geological parameters. It is known from the past record that Dhaka was rocked in 1664. The 1737 earthquake claimed thousands of lives in the vicinity of Calcutta. Since then this region has experienced several earthquakes between the years from 1762 to 1950. Among these, the Shillong earthquake of 1897 with a magnitude of 8.7 in the Richter scale, the Srimangal earthquake of 1918 and the Assam earthquake of 1950 with the same magnitude are more notable events.

According to our quake experts, an earthquake of the intensity of 6 in the Richter scale

can create havoc in the capital city of Dhaka. In their opinion, Dhaka city is one of the most vulnerable urban quake zones of the country. Recent tremors in Sylhet, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar in the past few months are somewhat indicative of the quake-proneness of many of our territorial spheres. The Chittagong quake was reported to have taken a toll of public and private property and quite a number of lives with some buried alive.

With the rapid growth of population in the city, a building spree is in operation in order to meet the fast growing demand for new housing. In this hectic pace for new construction, the ordinary rules for safe construction are often neglected. Sites unsuitable for new constructions are acquired by many at low prices without regard for proper filling, where necessary, thereby, creating potential hazards in case of tremors. We have thus at present in the city two kinds of buildings: one is the considerable number of new houses in new areas built on weak and unstable foundations and the other is the large number of old buildings, some of them dilapidated, in the old part of the city. Both these kinds of buildings seem to be vulnerable to damage in case of tremors of more than low intensity beyond short spells. The new phenomenon of high-rise buildings in the city may pose a serious danger in case of earthquakes unless they are built on sound construction lines with modern structural designs, which can absorb earthquake shocks.

There is another aspect. The vulnerability of metropolitan Dhaka even to moderate intensity of tremors is said to have grown considerably due to subsidence of land caused by free-

style lifting of ground water. The greater cause of concern in case of earthquake as already noted is the many old and dilapidated buildings in the old part of the city. A large number of them were built during the British period. Such buildings seem to be unlikely to escape large-scale damage in case of strong tremors.

It has been felt that from housing to roads and town planning, nothing in our construction and community layout activities made us ever think of keeping the quake factor in consideration. Now we are being suddenly told to expect the quakes to hit us with increasing frequency as well as intensity since we are technically placed on a very quake-prone zone. There may be grievances in some scientific quarters that we have failed to take a timely note of our physical, geomorphological factors.

Since we are, by and large, quite helpless in the face of inexorable physical forces, experts say that earthquakes will continue to be unpredictable into much of the next century. So it is incumbent on us to mount adequate preparedness strategies in time to minimise the impact of quakes as much as possible.

As experts have opined, town planning, city development, construction of roads and buildings must now incorporate the quake factor. And people should be motivated not to feel scared but to face any possible disaster with knowledge and management aptitude, logic and co-operation.

According to expert opinion, a seismic observatory network should immediately be set up in order to precisely determine the state of seismicity in our country for sustainable policy making and socio-economic development.

Forged certificates recovered: Two arrested

Police unearthed a forged certificate-making factory from Kalyanpur area in Mirpur thana in the city on Thursday and arrested two people, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip off, a special squad of CID police, led by ASP Khalequzzaman, raided a house in Pakistan area and found several forged marksheets and certificates of different universities and education boards, and seals were recovered from the spot.

According to information provided by Hannan, police raided two more places — one in Ansar camp area in Mirpur and another at Kalyanpur. A large number of forged marksheets and certificates of different universities and education boards, and seals were recovered from there.

They also arrested team leader Moslem Uddin Mollah from Kalyanpur. Mollah was earlier arrested in 1987 and 1992 on the same charge.

Police said the accused have long been engaged in selling forged certificates.

Dacoity in city house

By Staff Correspondent

Armed dacoits looted a gun, gold ornaments, cash and other valuables from a house in the city's Azampur area yesterday after noon.

Equipped with firearms and sharp weapons a gang of four youths stormed into the house at New Paltan at around 1.15 pm and decamped with the booties worth about Tk 1.68 lakh, police said.

One Mosaddek Rahman and his family lived in the first floor flat where the incident took place, but during the dacoity, only his mother and a maid was in the flat.

As the maid opened the door after hearing knocks, the dacoits forcibly entered the flat and looted the valuables.

After about half-an-hour, they decamped with a double barrel gun with two round cartridges, electronic goods, gold ornaments and Tk ten thousand.

However, none was arrested till filing of this report last night.

BCL founding day tomorrow

Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of ruling Awami League, has drawn up an elaborate programme to observe its 50th founding anniversary tomorrow, reports UNB.

The day's programme includes placing of wreath at the Bangabandhu's portrait at zero hour, hoisting of national flag at the party central office at 7 am and discussion at Ramna Batamul at 10 am, said a press release.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to be present as chief guest at the discussion meeting.

Black box

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ATP in the domestic service. The decision will be taken after getting reply from the Australian company, considering the financial involvement, a senior Biman official said yesterday.

About D-check of its another F-28, grounded since December 21, the official said the process of taking decision is almost in final stage. He did not disclose where they are planning to send the F-28 for D-check. But sources alleged that the delay was due to lobbying by some quarters on behalf of foreign companies.

Meanwhile, Biman and Sadharan Bima Corporation, the local insurer of the damaged F-28, are waiting for the report of Lloyds, undertaker of the aircraft, to make the insurance claim. Surveyors from Lloyds left Dhaka on Wednesday after preliminary assessment of the damage.

Biman sources said the F-28, now lying like a lame duck on a wet land in Sylhet will be removed from there after completing insurance formalities. Law enforcing agency personnel are now taking care of plane.

The airline is unable to maintain its 60 domestic flights each week as three aircraft of its four-plane domestic fleet are now grounded due to accidents and for D-check. It has cut down its domestic flights. Earlier, in June last year, an ATP aircraft of Biman met with an accident in Chittagong.

JCD to resist

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JCD general secretary Habib-un-Nabi Sohel and other central leaders Nasir Uddin Pintu, Manzur Elahi, Monwar Hossain Rana, Monir Hossain, Nasrullah Khan Zunayed, Nasir Uddin Asim and Selhmuzzaman Selim, among others, present at the press conference.

When contacted, DU Vice-Chancellor Prof AK Azad Chowdhury told UNB that there was no fixed schedule for the Prime Minister's visit on the campus on Monday.



A Chinese Muslim girl praying beside her mother at the Niujie Mosque in Beijing yesterday in the holy month of Ramadan. China has about 20 million Muslims.

— AP/UNB photo

Madhyapara Hardrock Project

Flaws in PP, red-tapism may delay handover

Flaws in project proforma and bureaucratic tangle are likely to make the handover of the Madhyapara Hardrock Mining Project uncertain from the foreign contractor, due in 2001, reports UNB.

The uncertainty loomed as the original PP kept no provision for necessary local manpower that has to be trained, a lapse later followed by usual bureaucratic red tapism delaying the process of recruitment for the project.

As per the contract, the North Korean company, NAM-NAM, which is developing the Madhyapara hardrock mine, was to train 20 local people in Korea and 320 people locally by 2001 when the project will be handed over to Petrobangla.

But the condition to train up manpower, scheduled to begin in June, 1996, could not be fulfilled as the Petrobangla failed to supply personnel to the contractor for their training.

As per the PP, training for the 20 people in Korea will begin next May and for another 320 local people will commence from October this year.

When contacted, a source in the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources said there was only 23 officers in the approved PP and total number of local employees for the project was only 74.

The supply of personnel for training in North Korea became impossible in time as the project having a limited number of manpower cannot spare 20 people at a time.

However, the concerned authorities submitted a revised PP in January last year suggesting a raise in the local manpower, but ECNEC instead formed a

five-member secretary level committee to have a fresh look into the viability of the project.

The committee, headed by the finance secretary, is yet to submit its report, making fresh recruitment uncertain and causing a potential setback in the timely handover of the project to the Petrobangla.

"This delay might force Petrobangla to go for a new agreement with the foreign contractor to run the project and that would cause a serious financial setback for the project," said an Energy Ministry official.

The Madhyapara hardrock was discovered in 1974 and the government finally signed agreement with the North Korean company on turn-key basis in 1994 to mine out 16.5 lakh tons of hardrock annually.

Sonia, Priyanka urged to contest polls

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: The Congress Party said today it had asked Sonia Gandhi, widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, and her daughter to contest coming parliamentary elections, reports AFP.

ND Tiwari, a Congress leader, said Sonia Gandhi, who has agreed to campaign for the party, and 25-year-old daughter Priyanka had been urged to contest in the populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

The United News of India (UNI) quoted Tiwari as saying Sonia Gandhi, 51, should be the Congress nominee in Amethi constituency and Priyanka Gandhi in adjoining Rae Bareilly.

Neither of the Gandhis has any political experience. Amethi and Rae Bareilly have previously elected members of the Nehru-Gandhi family, which ruled India for some 40 years after Independence in 1947.

Tiwari said he expected Sonia Gandhi to take "an early decision" on the request.

Sonia Gandhi, despite offering to campaign for Congress, has not presented herself as a candidate. The Gandhi family, often compared to the Kennedys in the United States, enjoys considerable influence in the largely-rural Amethi constituency.

Congress hardliners believe the Gandhi name will revitalise the party following its steady decline in recent years. Her decision to plunge into elections has been hailed by Congress, but ridiculed by the Hindu nationalists — the main challenge to Congress.

Today, the Hindu nationalists lashed out at Sonia Gandhi, arguing she would fail to resurrect Congress in the February-March elections.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said Sonia Gandhi's long-awaited decision to campaign for the party "has only led to sycophancy in the Congress."

"This feeling that Sonia's entry into politics will strengthen the Congress is not true," BJP spokeswoman Sushma Swaraj told reporters.

Militants kill 13 soldiers in Manipur

NEW DELHI, Jan 2: Militants ambushed an army convoy in a remote northeastern state today and gunned down at least 13 army soldiers and injured six others, a local news report said, according to AP.

The driver of the military jeep lost control when militants set off an explosion on the road at Shanting village in Manipur state, United News of India news agency reported.

It was not clear which of the dozen underground groups attacked the soldiers. The groups representing various tribespersons are fighting each other and Indian security forces over greater control of the hill tracts. Details of the attack were sketchy.

The assailants fled when the soldiers fired back, UNI said.

Khaleda takes iftar with orphans in city

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday took her iftar at an orphanage at the Shah Saheb Bari of Narinda Mashurikhola in the old part of the city, reports UNB.

Before taking iftar with the orphans, she talked with them and enquired about their well-being.

The inmates of the orphanage, including Abdul Gaffar Malik of Narsingdi, Tareq of Noakhali, Saiful Islam and Mashur Rahman of Manikganj, and Abdul Mannan of Faridpur thanked Begum Zia for taking iftar with them.

Begum Zia offered feteha at the mazar of late Peer Saheb Hazrat Shah Ahsan Ullah and also her Magreb prayers there. Before iftar, she joined a milad mahfil.

Earlier, the BNP Chairperson was warmly greeted by the local people who stood on both sides of the streets in queue at Hatkhola crossing, Narinda Lane and Shah Saheb Lane.

Alhaj Hazrat Maulana Shah Muhammad Ahsanuzzaman and city BNP convenor Sadeq Hossain Khoka received the Leader of the Opposition at the orphanage gate.

At the request of local people, Begum Zia addressed them briefly and expressed the hope that despite the countrywide unrest and indiscipline, peace would prevail during the holy month of Ramadan by the grace of Almighty Allah.

The BNP chairperson sought divine blessings from the Almighty to guide her and her party in continuing their journey on the path of truth and justice upholding the Islamic values and also follow the ideals of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman.

After the Magreb prayers, Begum Zia attended a special munajat.

She was accompanied by Selima Rahman, Ehsanul Kabir, Emran Saleh Prince, Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, Kazi Abul Bashar and local party leaders and workers.

ULFA leader

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dian government," the BBC monitored here, quoted the Assam Chief Secretary as saying.

According to the UNB, Barua was arrested from Elephant Road area under Dhamondhi thana in the city. However, Dhamondhi police last night said they had no information in this regard.

3-nation summit

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Dhaka. He also said any date will have to be considered by the Indian premier after accommodating the visits of presidents of Russia, France, and Sri Lanka and prime ministers of Greece and Italy to India this month.

Asked if the fact that Gujral was now interim prime minister would prevent him from making a foreign trip, the spokesman said, "It should not."

A spokesman of the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka said yesterday that they were still not sure about the participation of their prime minister but were aware of Bangladesh's initiative in this matter.

"Right now, nothing has been confirmed," the spokesman added.

Yussuf Abdullah Haroon, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said that holding the Business Summit would involve participation of a large number of business leaders of the three countries.

However, he assured that if the date was fixed sometime this month, every effort would be made to ensure participation of a large number of leading members of the chambers of the three nations.

The national committee for the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan Business Summit headed by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad held a meeting in Dhaka on December 28. On that day, the aftermath of postponement of the Summit was reviewed but there was no concrete decision on the arrangements.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka Declaration which is expected to be adopted by the three countries at the proposed Summit had already received final approval at the meeting of senior officials of the three countries on November 20 in Dhaka, three days ahead of its postponement.

Oil, gas blocks

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letter, coupled with diplomatic pressure, led the government to invite Chevron-Texaco for talks and the Petronas-Mobil joint venture was told that it would be allowed to discuss Block 11 only.

Following this move, Petronas-Mobil stepped off the negotiations on the pretext of "rethinking" the proposal.

At this point, the negotiation was suspended.

Afterwards, Tullow proposed to sit with Chevron-Texaco on the first week of January.

Human rights body

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without political or other bias or interference. While recommending the members of the commission, the three member committee will "ensure the pluralistic representation of the civil society involved in the promotion and protection of human rights", the draft said. "At least one member should be a woman."

Besides, there will be an Executive Director who will be the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission and exercise powers and discharge functions delegated to him by the Commission.

The chairperson and the members of the commission will hold office for a term of five years. They would be eligible for reappointment for another five-year term. However, none of them would usually hold office after attaining the age of seventy years.

A chairperson or a member of the Commission, after ceasing to hold office of the Commission, will be ineligible for further employment under the government of Bangladesh.

The Commission will be financed through a Trust Fund established by the government. There will be scope for others to donate. All funds coming from the government will be appropriated by the Parliament.

The government will appoint an accounting officer for the funds while the Commission will prepare an annual statement of accounts. The accounts of the Commission will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

The functions of the NHRC will include, among other things, "inquiring — suo motu or on petitions made to the Commission by a victim or any one on his/her behalf — into violation of human rights, or negligence in the prevention of such violation, by a public servant, intervening in any proceedings involving any allegation of human rights violation pending before a court — with approval of such court, and visiting any jail, or any other government institution where persons are detained, to see the living conditions of the inmates."

According to the draft bill, "The powers of the Commission include, among other things, all the powers of a civil court trying a suit under the Code of Civil procedure, 1908, while inquiring into complaints." The draft also says, "Every proceedings before the Commission shall be deemed to be a judicial proceedings within the meaning of certain sections of the Penal Code."

"The Commission, or any other officer — not below the rank of a Gazetted Officer — authorised by the Commission, may enter any building or place

where the Commission has reason to believe that any document relating to the subject matter of its inquiry may be found in the place. Subject to the provisions of a certain section of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, the Commission or the said officer authorised by the Commission would enjoy the right to "seize any such document or take extracts or copies therefrom."

"The Commission may utilise the services of any officer or investigating agency of the government. Subject to the direction and control of the Commission, any officer or agency whose service are used would enjoy the power to summon and enforce the attendance of any person and examine him," the draft says.

However, "No statement made by a person in the course of giving evidence before the Commission shall subject him to, or be used against him in, any civil or criminal proceeding except a prosecution for giving false evidence by such statement," the draft says.

The Commission will submit an annual report to the government. It may submit special reports on any matter on the basis of its urgency and importance.

The government will place the reports in parliament within 90 days from the date of its submission. The government will also place in the House a memorandum of action taken or proposed to be taken on the recommendation of the Commission in case of non-acceptance of a recommendation, the government will submit the reasons before parliament.

Ershad's remarks motivated: Gen Noor Uddin

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Lt Gen (Retd) Mohammad Noor Uddin Khan yesterday protested some remarks by former president and chairman of Jatiya Party HM Ershad on Thursday, reports BSS.

The minister, who was the Chief of Army Staff during the military uprising in 1990, in a statement said that the untrue remarks of former president HM Ershad was motivated and bent on belittling his commendable role during the mass upsurge of 1990, which is well-known to the people.

He said "from my deep feelings and ideals of military life, I firmly believe that no civil or military person loyal to the state and Constitution or his profession can support martial law."

Bedaruddin hospitalised

Bedaruddin Ahmed, a prominent musician and singer and principal of the Bulbul Academy and Fine Arts (BAFA), was admitted to Suhrawardy Hospital on Thursday night following a heart attack, family sources said, reports BSS.

Direct bus service

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not seek permission of Indian state governments for movement of foreign vehicles within their territory, while forwarding the proposal for having an umbrella agreement.

Earlier, the proposed agreement for inter-state bus service envisaged passage of passenger vehicles on only one route. This route was initially planned to be Dhaka-Aricha-Daulatdia-Jessore-Benapole on the Bangladesh side and Petropole-Calcutta-Delhi and Ajmeer on the Indian side.

According to the projection paper prepared by the Ministry of Communications, nearly one lakh people were expected to avail of the Dhaka-Calcutta direct bus service within a year of its operations.

Available figures show that an estimated 2,67,000 people travelled to India from Bangladesh by land and air in 1996, while nearly 2,09,000 people came to Bangladesh from India.

BTTB

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Abdur Rakib Saber, director (coordination) of Grameen Phone admitted that they did not pay any money to the BTTB as revenue but said everything had been accounted for and will be paid after the signing of final agreement.

"When the final inter-connection agreement is made involving a mutually agreeable revenue-sharing arrangement, the call charges to each other will be computed from March 26, 1997," he said quoting from the temporary agreement.

Rakib further said the temporary agreement also allowed them to settle the financial arrangement between the two organisations mutually. So, the allegation that they had been doing business illegally was not true, he argued.

The Grameen and AKTEL have so far given mobile connection to about 22 thousand people and have been getting Tk 500 fixed rent per month excluding outgoing call charges.

Rakib, however, said they do not have any plan to impose incoming call charge on the subscribers even after revenue-sharing agreement with the government is finalised.

Meanwhile, due to hard competition among the operating companies the price of mobile telephone has now come down to one-fourth of that in the last few years.

Now any one living in the city and surrounding areas can have a mobile set at around Tk 20 thousand against its 1993 price of more than Tk 80 thousand.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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