

Earthquake: Lessons from Turkey

The recent earthquake in Turkey has caused serious damage to the country, many of the buildings collapsed killing thousands. One of the main reasons was poor quality of construction...We should include Earthquake and Fire by-laws in our present Building Construction Rules without further delay.

by M B Huda

WE are all shocked at the recent earthquake that has left Turkey in a deep crisis. The country is now facing a mammoth task of overcoming the immense sufferings of the people. There is a serious shortage of food and medicare facilities and the rehabilitation of the homeless is of primary concern now.

International news-media in a recent coverage informed that the recently constructed buildings came under serious criticism.

The construction industry came under attack by distressed Turks for constructing inferior quality buildings. The report said that these buildings were the first to go down while many of the old buildings were still standing. So far the only reason is that these collapsed buildings were constructed with poor quality building materials like sand, cement etc.

I must say that this devastating earthquake has given us an opportunity to make an assessment of construction rules followed in our country.

Does the present Building Construction Rules consider earthquake factor in our building designs? In case it is not, then do we have the right to know why such an important by-law was left out. Those who are involved in the construction industry must come forward and addressed the BCR accordingly. I cannot imagine how we will be able to meet a crisis during earthquake when we know that 80 per cent of our buildings have violated Building Construction Rules. Let our professionals think seriously and investigate the various aspects of design and construction methodology and create public awareness so that the country can develop the future building industry on the basis of a doctrine namely Bangladesh National Building Code.

Let our professional bodies like Institute of Architects, Institute of Engineers, Institute of Planners, Geologists and Environment specialists discuss and do the needful before it is too late. The following are some important aspects which may be considered for discussion by the experts: 1) Details of Master Plan of major cities especially those that fall under the critical earthquake factor; 2) Building Construction Rules may restrict the heights of the buildings depending on the severity of earthquake factor applicable for the area; 3) Implement the Dail Master Plan and include rules to cater for earthquake measures in the existing Building Construction Rules; 4) Identify unsafe buildings — (a) old structures, (b) poor quality construction — that may have been completed recently; 5)

Bangladesh as an earthquake prone country has been demarcated in three parts depending on the severity of earthquake factor, highest being the northern and eastern part while southern and western parts are relatively less prone to earthquake. Dhaka, the capital lies in the middle which includes a vulnerable portion of land stretching from south-east corner up to north-west corner.

Finally, I must point out that people generally think that the cost of a building increases when designed by the professionals and also when quality control measures are followed. In fact this is a wrong concept, because it is found that in absence of proper design and drawing an individual is mis-guided by our workforce and finally ends up with a building which is over-spent and has no proper design to ensure safety of the occupants. I am sure, if this trend cannot be discouraged and stopped the country will be heading to a point of no return, as far as our Built Environment is concerned. Hence let us try to build our country in conformity with nature and on the basis of Building Construction Rules as we are preparing to meet challenges in the next millennium.

The writer is former chief architect, ministry of public construction and national housing, govt. of Zimbabwe.

It is gratifying to be able to pick one's sports heroes just when they are getting started and follow their career through maturity and retirement. As a young boy, the writer started following the career of Muhammad Ali (born Cassius Marcellus Clay) from his Boxing Gold Medal victory at the Rome Olympics in 1960, through his first Heavyweight Championship (1964-67), banishment from boxing (1967-70) for refusing to fight in Vietnam, reinstatement in 1970, two more Heavyweight Championships in 1974 and 1978, and his physical deterioration, witnessed by the whole world as he lit the torch for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The writer has been following Tiger Woods since he won his third consecutive US Amateur Golf Championships in 1996. Last week, Woods, the golf phenom turned international superstar, won his second "Major" — the PGA tournament — by out-dueling

MEANING in German, "Many thanks, Miss Steffi Graf". Thanks for the memories of those Grand Slam titles, epic battles with Martina Navratilova, Monica Seles and Martina Hingis, and always, always such grace and beauty under pressure.

This has been a year of retirement for America's sport Greats. The greatest basketball player the world has seen, Michael Jordan, retired, as did ice hockey's Wayne Gretzky, known simply as "The Great One" even when he played. Now add to that list the international superstar Germany's Stephanie (Steffi) Graf, the greatest tennis player ever, according to Billie Jean King, who should know.

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Letter From America

Vielen Dank, Fraulein Steffi Graf!

Spain's 19-year old sensation, Sergio Garcia. And it has been a pleasure keeping up with Steffi Graf since her victory in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics Tennis Championship (it was a non-medal, exhibition sport). What a thrilling journey it has been since!

Playing tennis since the age of two, a la Tiger Woods, Steffi Graf won her first pro title in 1986 by defeating Chris Evert in the final at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Evert had won her last French Open that year. She three years, gradually languishing in the rankings, before bowing out in 1989. Martina Navratilova too would stick around for four more years after winning her last Grand Slam — Wimbledon — in 1990, before her deteriorating skills became painfully obvious to the world and her.

Steffi Graf, only 30, could easily have played another four years, and perhaps capture 3-4

In 1987, Graf reached the final of every tournament she entered, which no Open era player has done. She is the only player, male or female, to own the number one ranking for 186 consecutive weeks (over three and a half years), and 377 weeks (over seven years) in total. She earned 22 million dollars playing tennis — more than any other woman; millions more from endorsements in her native Germany. After an injury-plagued 1997 and 1998, this year she had climbed back to number 3, and with a victory at the US Open later this month, would have recaptured No.1 ranking!

When Steffi burst into the scene at the age of 13, the American trio, and the pillars of the game — Billie Jean King, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova — did not take the German under their wing and nurture her. The advocates of the game were offended by the teenager's comment that her

for rivalries: her main opponent was herself and the pursuit of perfection. That pursuit took her to a life time record of 902-115, or a 89 per cent winning rate!

An worthy adversary makes a sportsperson soar to new heights. Joe Frazier made Muhammad Ali the Greatest. Nicklaus to be the greatest golfer to date. Steffi Graf had three rivals to contend with — in that order. Graf's decade-long rivalry with Navratilova ended in a stalemate, 9-9. However, all of Graf's defeats were when she was lower in ranking, including a heart-breaker in the semi-final of the 1986 US Open which the writer remembers vividly: Navratilova never defeated her. Similarly, Graf lost to Chris Evert for the first six times, before turning the tables, and winning the next eight, for a career record of 8-6. Against

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

more Grand Slam titles, overtaking Margaret Court's tally of 24 (11 of which she won in her native Australia). But titles and greatness did not dominate Graf's thoughts; perfection did. When it became clear to her that she would not produce the required 7-match winning perfect record routinely at the Grand Slams any more, she quit. In June, in winning her 22nd Grand Slam — the French Open — she defeated the world's number one tennis player, Martina Hingis for her 107th title. In July, in the final of Wimbledon, an energy-depleted, "running on fumes" Graf lost to the new number one, Lindsey Davenport, and decided that it was time to call it a career (Graf is 8-6 life time against Davenport).

And what a career it has been! Graf is the only woman to win all four Grand Slam events at least four times: she won Wimbledon seven times, French Open six times, US Open five times and the Australian Open four times. In five different years, she won three or more Grand Slams. Graf is only the third woman, besides Maureen Connolly (1953) and Margaret Court (1970) to earn the Grand Slam, by winning all four of tennis's crown jewels, Australian, French, Wimbledon and US Open in the same year (1988). Graf completed the "Golden Slam" in 1988 by winning the Seoul Olympics tennis Gold Medal.

only responsibility was to play tennis. Evert regretted that their cold-shouldering hurt Graf personally, and may have hurt women's tennis. "We let Steffi slip through the cracks," Evert lamented. Graf and Hingis are lucky though; their homelands, Germany and Switzerland respectively, looked after them like royalty. The last American tennis royalty was Chris Evert. These days young American tennis players are on their own. That is why, while Graf and Evert enjoyed tennis longevity, American phenoms like Tracy Austin and Jennifer Capriati burned out before they were twenty.

What made Steffi Graf so great? A ferocious forehand, lightning foot-speed, a wicked backhand slice, a strong serve and toughness in the big points. Add to that marathon practice sessions, incessant training regimen and the incredible capacity to come back from debilitating injuries. No one could hit the ball hard enough or place it strategically enough to thwart Graf's footwork. Most of all it was her forehand. Graf would take her racket way back, cock, and deliver the slingshot so hard that opponents would be whipping air. I remember on one occasion Navratilova raced to the net, and Graf hit her forehand so hard at her that Navratilova mis-hit the volley! Steffi was the first player to dominate and dictate play from the base line. Graf did not care

Monica Seles, who displaced her at No. 1 in 1991, Graf went 10-5, with many victories coming — such as Wimbledon in 1992 — when Seles was No.1. Graf is 7-2 against precocious Martina Hingis, who had referred to Graf as over the hill. At last June's French Open, Graf administered the most emphatic parting shot the game has seen to the tennis's No. 1 player!

Even a Graf-ophile like the writer has to admit that by early 1993, Monica Seles had become so dominant that it was clear Graf was not going to beat her at any Grand Slam except Wimbledon. (Seles had beaten Graf handily in three Grand Slams in a row). Then in April of 1993, a German Steffi Graf fan stabbed Seles at the back at a tournament in Hamburg, for the sole purpose of making Graf No. 1 again. He succeeded! From only one Grand Slam victory in the years 1990, 1991 and 1992, in a Seles-free world, Steffi won the remaining three Grand Slams of 1993 (Seles had won the Australian Open). Graf would repeat that 3-Grand Slam winning performance in 1995 and 1996. Upon persistent persuasion from Martina Navratilova, Monica Seles returned in 1995, but she has not been the same player. It is anybody's guess how many Grand Slams Steffi Graf would have won with Monica Seles around. To make matters worse for Seles, her German assailant was

acquitted. An Eastern European colleague of the writer commented wryly: "You don't expect a German court to convict a German for stabbing a Yugoslav!"

The writer met Steffi Graf at the 1995 US Open Tennis championship. She was practicing at an outside court with her coach. I can recognize "Fraulein Forehand" from a mile because of her characteristic forehand. We snapped pictures of Steffi practicing and caught her on our home video. She graciously signed autographs for my sons. Apart from being gorgeous-looking, Steffi to me looked very thin and wiry.

Yes, on top of being a dominant tennis player, Steffi Graf is also a very pretty woman. While Steffi, Chris Evert and Evonne Goolagong were feminine, beautiful, and base-liners, Margaret Court, Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova were masculine and men-serve-and-volley players. Sometimes there were tensions in the women's locker rooms; protective mothers would watch over their teenage daughters like hawks. Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova are openly lesbian.

What made Steffi retire? The stated reasons are lack of desire, injury and achieving all she wanted. There were three other unstated reasons: Martina Hingis, Venus Williams and Serena Williams. Players know when the next generation has arrived. By making her grand entrance to the world of tennis, Graf herself had drawn the curtain over the careers of Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert. Now it is her turn to move over.

Who is the greatest, Martina or Steffi? Graf says it's Martina: "For me she is the uncontested No. 1; she has left a mark on the sport like no one else." Martina responded by first saying something sensible: "There is a definite group of great players, and she (Graf) is there, and I am in it. Chris is there, and Billie Jean King and Margaret Court." Then Navratilova said something stupid: "When people call me the greatest player ever, I get embarrassed, and when I hear them call Steffi the greatest, I say, 'Hey, wait a minute, what am I, chopped liver?'" No Martina, you are not chopped liver. You are simply a dumb and jealous woman!

The last word should be left to the Grand Old Lady of tennis, Billie Jean King. She has no reservation whatsoever: "Steffi is definitely the greatest tennis player of all time." Who are we to argue with Billie Jean? Auf Wiedersehen. ("Good Bye"), Steffi!

Afghan Ghost Haunts Russia in Dagestan

Russian troops have begun search operations in the mountain towns of Dagestan for armed insurgents who have declared an Islamic republic on the border with Chechnya. Meanwhile, policymakers in Moscow have the distinct feeling they have been here before — and not so very long ago.

by Dilip Hiro



from the 1980s on, the brutal 20-month Chechen-Russian war has left the region awash with weapons and ammunition. In addition, there is no dearth of Dagestani volunteers to join the holy war against Russian rule.

At the same time, Russia — at the core of the Soviet Scientific Atheism for three-quarters of a century — lacks the political or religious expertise in Islam and Muslim affairs to either understand or influence matters.

If anything, the Russian Federation's Christian credentials are a barrier to building a smooth working relationship with those of its constituent republics where Muslims are a majority.

Dagestan is one such, as are the Republics of Ingushetiya and North Osetiya-Alania — all of them contiguous with Chechnya.

Among these constituent republics of the Russian Federation, Dagestan stands out. With an area of 50,300 sq km — two-and-a-half times the size of Chechnya — it is the largest. Its population of more than two million also makes it the most populous.

Whereas Chechnya, Ingushetiya and North Osetiya-Alania are all landlocked, Dagestan has a 400 km-coastline along the Caspian Sea, a great strategic asset.

But though rich in oil and natural gas, Dagestan is the poorest of the 22 republics of the Russian Federation. This has alienated many Dagestanis from Moscow as Islamic radicals highlighted this poverty and blamed it on Russia. Little wonder then that ousted Premier Stepashin, after visiting Dagestan, told his cabinet: "I think we could really lose Dagestan."

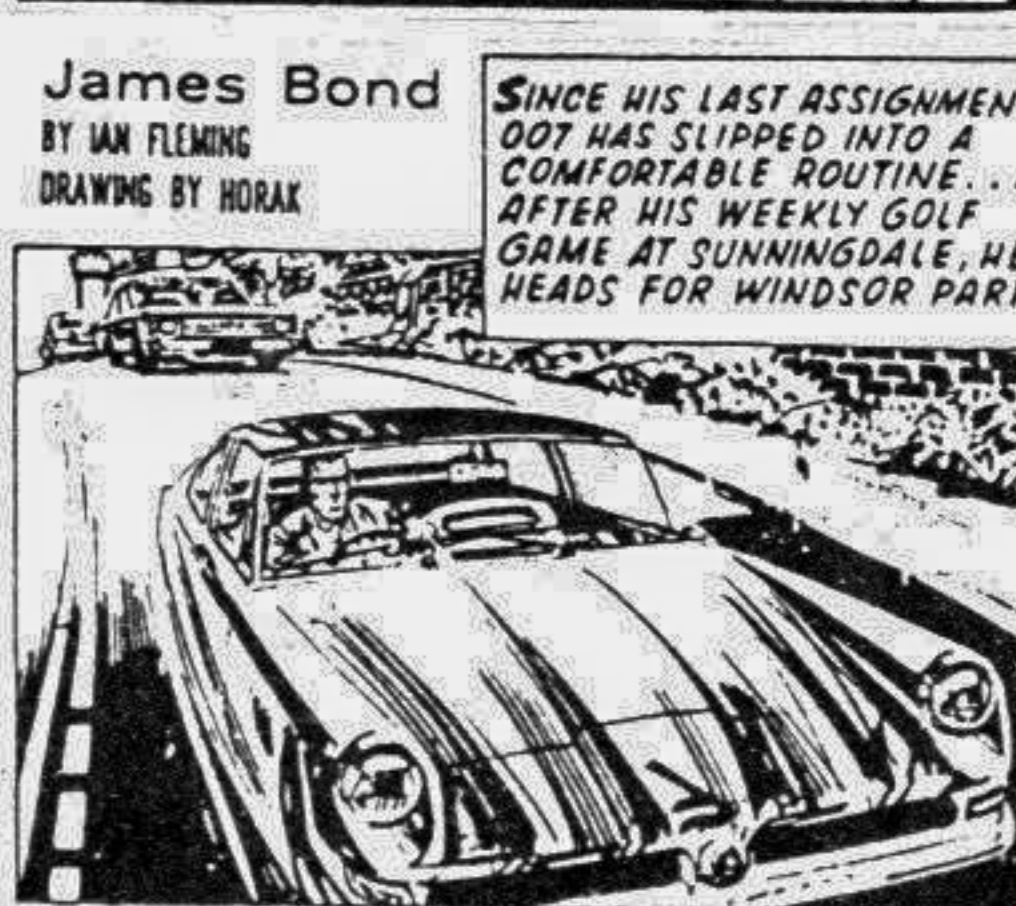
Were this to happen it would be a bigger blow to Moscow than just the loss of territory. With Russia losing half its Caspian coastline, Moscow would lose its claim to the oil and gas riches the lie under the Caspian seabed. It could also mean that Moscow would have to abide by the decisions of Dagestan on the movement of the crude oil that currently flows through a pipeline from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to the Russian port of Novorossiisk.

— Gemint News

The writer is an author and commentator on Central Asian and Middle Eastern affairs.

by Jim Davis

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