

The Daily Star

DHAKA, MONDAY, JANUARY 29, 2001

3rd Millennium

Quake claims 15000, thousands still under debris

NEW DELHI, Jan 26: Rescue operations were in full swing today as India's worst earthquake in 50 years was feared to have claimed more than 15,000 people and injured over 30,000, report agencies.

Official sources said the toll in the quake in the western state of Gujarat could rise as people remained buried under debris. An estimated 10,000 of the dead were reported from the worst-hit Kutch district, epicentre of the quake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale, the Zee news television channel said.

Reuters quoting PTI earlier said, the death toll has risen to 7,000, including 6,000 in the town of Bhuj.

According to AP the death toll is believed to be over 7,500, although the bodies have not yet been pulled from debris.

Bedraggled survivors of a devastating earthquake trembled through aftershocks today as they waited in flattened cities for blankets, food, water and the vital equipment needed to lift concrete slabs trapping thousands of their loved ones.

Officials said more than 10,000 people were buried under the mountains of jagged concrete where buildings once stood in Bhuj, a town 20

kilometers from the epicentre of the earthquake.

At least 5,000 of them are most likely dead, said a high-ranking official of Gujarat state. Combined with the confirmed statewide death toll of 2,341, that would bring the loss of life to about 7,500, with at least 14,193 injured. Ten people were also crushed in their collapsed homes in Pakistan.

Nearly 400 children, who had assembled for a school function in Bhuj were feared trapped under rubble after the earthquake.

PP Afjha, Inspector General of Bhuj Police, said the children had come to school to celebrate India's Republic Day on Friday when the earthquake triggered the collapse of the school building.

"All the school children along with their teachers are buried under the rubble of the school building," said Afjha.

The police officer said a similar disaster had occurred in another school in Bachao, located 100 kilometers from the epicentre in Bhuj.

Fifteen children were trapped in their school in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's commercial capital. Six

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Rescue workers try to free children from a school building (top) and Rapid Action Force personnel clear the debris under which residents are feared to be trapped (right) while people sit out in the open yesterday in Ahmedabad in fear of an aftershock of the killer quake that ravaged Gujarat the day before.

— AFP photo

Announcement

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Lawyers' compromise formula likely to fall flat Govt seems firm not to appoint more SC judges now

Star Report

Prospect of a resolution of the crisis arising out of appointment of two judges in the Supreme Court through the initiative of five senior lawyers has virtually become uncertain.

The senior lawyers worked out a compromise formula to solve the crisis by elevating two more High Court judges to the Supreme Court (SC). But the government's 'firm stand' in this regard is now becoming clear.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already made it clear that fresh appointment of judges in the SC at the moment would result in another round of disagreement.

An influential policymaker of the ruling Awami League told

this correspondent yesterday the government believed that an artificial crisis was created over the issue by BNP leaders for political purposes. "That is why the government is least concerned about it," he said. "Besides, we have not done anything in violation of the Constitution."

Meanwhile, the team of five senior lawyers yesterday met at Barrister Iftiqar Ahmed's chamber to prepare a written statement to be placed before the Prime Minister when they meet her soon.

The meeting took note of the Prime Minister's remarks about appointment of new judges in the SC at a press conference in

the city on Friday.

One of the five lawyers on condition of anonymity told this correspondent, "Some people are making undesirable remarks. We can give befitting replies to those but we will not do so because they simply cannot

justify their remarks."

Advocate MA Malek, another member of the team, said, "We will put forward a well thought-out, constitutional and legal written statement before the Prime Minister. We'll propose appointment of two more judges

in the Supreme Court."

At Friday's press conference, Sheikh Hasina said that when the five senior lawyers meet her, she would be willing to know from them whether the appointment

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Meghnaghat power plant PDB recommendations on Marubeni go to energy ministry today

By Sharier Khan

The Power Development Board (PDB) sends today its recommendations to the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources for a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and Land Lease Agreement (LLA) with Japanese company Marubeni for the second phase of 450 MW Meghnaghat Power Plant.

PDB has recommended Marubeni for the plant despite the fact that the Japanese company's proposals deviated from its original understanding with the government.

Contrary to the original understanding, Marubeni will not provide PDB with any free electricity during the initial operation period (IOP), the first 30 months after the plant goes into operations. Instead, Marubeni is offering a complex formula under which the board will get some free electricity at the end of the 22-year contract and the old plant as a gift commensurate with the total value of free electricity.

PDB has agreed to the project in fear that "if Marubeni goes away, it will not easily get a new investor for the second phase," said a source.

The Japanese company, which has lobbied hard to get this project, is now taking advantage of PDB's fear, added the source.

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Bumper boro forecast Field reports project record rice output

By Reaz Ahmad

With boro cultivation in full swing, field reports suggest that the country is poised for yet another bumper cereal production.

If early forecasts come true, farmers would reap a bumper boro in the 2000-2001 fiscal following crop losses in the last aman season, said official sources.

Bumper boro in the election year would be a boon for the government. Boro will be harvested in May, just a couple of months ahead of the end of its tenure.

Field reports of Novartis, a

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PM opens Dhaka Int'l Leather Fair in city

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged private entrepreneurs to take the lead in enhancing investment and export by taking advantage of incentives offered by the government, reports UNB.

"The government can only play a catalyst's role in creating congenial atmosphere for investment and development of production. We've been working hard for this by ensuring political stability and institutionalising democracy," she said while inaugurating a 3-day Dhaka International Leather Fair at Sonargaon Hotel.

Hasina said lucrative incentive

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Major reshuffle of diplomatic deck in process

By M Anwarul Haq

In a major reshuffle of the diplomatic deck, Dhaka will soon appoint new ambassadors to Washington, London and Moscow. There will also be appointment of new envoys to Berlin, Ottawa, Singapore and other important capitals.

Tariq Karim will take over from KM Shehabuddin in Washington; Gyash Uddin from Mahmood Ali

in London; and Sarjil Hasan from Ataur Rahman Kaiser in Moscow. Both Shehabuddin and Mahmood Ali are due to retire shortly.

Karim went on voluntary retirement from the foreign service two years back while serving as the High Commissioner to South Africa. His latest assignment will be on contract.

Gyash Uddin, at present the

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Frustrated students of different schools chant slogans in city yesterday demanding action against people responsible for delay in printing and distribution of textbooks under the NCTB.

— Star photo