

Miracle rescue from Iran quake

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the quake. She was located first by sniffer dogs yesterday afternoon -- more than 8 1/2 days after the quake buried her under a building.

Rescue workers then spent three hours excavating her from the rubble.

"She is now being treated in a Red Crescent centre and is in good condition," Malek said.

There have been no survivors found in the devastated city since Thursday when three people were rescued despite long odds. Experts say it is extremely unlikely to survive even beyond three days without food or water in such conditions.

The tremor killed at least 30,000 people in Bam, an ancient Silk Road city that once had 103,000 inhabitants. Government officials have said the final toll may reach 50,000. Ninety percent of its buildings were also ruined.

Cold snap claims

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-- bundled up in warm clothes amid a daylong countrywide hartial enforced by the main opposition Awami League.

Hundreds of people, especially children and the elderly, were taken to cold-related complications over the days.

"The veil of dense fog not only covered Bangladesh, but also giant northern stretches of neighbouring India and Nepal," said Asadur Rahman, deputy forecasting officer of the meteorological department.

"The situation is likely to improve from Monday when day temperatures will begin to rise."

"But the mild cold wave sweeping Jessor and Kushtia regions may last a couple of more days," a weatherman said.

Yesterday's lowest temperature in Dhaka was 12.3 degrees Celsius, down from 12.8 degrees on Friday.

Bangladesh saw its coldest winter in 1968 when mercury slid to 2.8 degrees Celsius in Srimangal.

Launch and ferry operators said the blankets of fog doggedly hanged until midday blurring vision in a a

UNDP team

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appointed staffs in the three hill districts towards that end.

But the UN agency could not properly restart the works as Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma, chairman of CHT Regional Council and chief of Parbatya Chatagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), accused it of trying to exclude the regional and district councils from the development process. The regional council also sent a letter to UNDP Assistant Secretary General Hafiz Pasha alleging violations of the UN's development strategy for the indigenous people in the CHT by the UNDP country office.

The regional council alleged the UNDP tried to implement its projects in the CHT denying the 'hills reality'. The council also objected to the inclusion of Bangali settlers by the UNDP as beneficiaries of its projects.

The allegations, for all practical purposes, brought the UNDP development works in the CHT to a standstill. In response, the UNDP headquarters in New York decided to send the high-profile delegation to review the situation.

The team is scheduled to start visiting the three hill districts from January 8.

The UNDP informed the CHT Regional Council of the review team's visit by a letter addressed to Shantu Larma and received on December 3 last, council sources said.

Harsher law

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solutions are also engaged in the crimes.

Some people take allotments of lands in the name of welfare organisations and turn them into their own property craftily and some others throw up slums, rickshaw and automobile garages.

The committee said crooks grab land in direct or indirect collaboration with government officials, employees and their relatives, and expatriates, the poor, hapless women and innocent people are their prime targets.

The committee put government land, vested property, abandoned and nawab estates and shoals under the land ministry and wakf (endowed lands) under the religious affairs ministry high on the list of grabbed lands.

Lands under the department of forest, roads and highways and railway division and unused lands of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation, water-bodies and river banks under the land and fisheries and livestock ministries, unutilised or abandoned lands of government housing estates, city corporations and other local government bodies and ports are encroachers' favourite targets.

It said vast stretches of unutilised lands under agriculture, textiles, jute, liberation war affairs, food, science and information technologies, disaster management and relief and housing and public works ministries were encroached across the country.

In an attempt to restore a semblance of normality to the south-eastern city, state media said at least three of Bam's 23 schools were reopened briefly yesterday -- the start of the week in Iran.

"We opened the school this morning but we decided to close again," Abbas Burunabadi, a consultant to the governor of Bam, told Reuters at a boys school in Rudab just outside the city that appeared undamaged. He said they would try again Monday.

"Less than 30 percent of the pupils attended classes today and I haven't seen many of the teachers," Burunabadi said, as several children played on the street in front of the one-story brick building. "Most lived in Bam and a number were killed."

One group of six boys between eight to 12 were kicking a stone around on the street in an impromptu football match while

children in another slightly larger group played with sticks or leaned against the walls of the school beneath a yellow banner that said classes had been postponed until Monday.

"I went along this morning but it was cancelled," said Aboljassen Nezamabaei, 7, on his bicycle outside school.

Mohammad Taqizadeh, head of education in the Kerman province, told the official IRNA news agency classes would start Monday in tents if there are enough pupils.

"There were 27,000 pupils in Bam before the earthquake, but we have no figures on the number now," he added. "More than 90 percent of the schools were damaged."

Burunabadi, in Rudab, said there were also other worries.

"From a psychological point some pupils are afraid to go back inside a building," he added.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is being seen off by her council of ministers at the Zia International Airport before she flew off to Islamabad to attend the 12th Saarc Summit.

Cabinet meet

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concerned and the Chittagong Circuit House, venue of the cabinet meeting, was also given a face-lift last month, sources said.

But the plan for holding the cabinet meeting on the date was dropped as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will not be able to lay the foundation stone of the third Karnaphuli bridge due to incomplete preparations for launching the project work, sources added.

Talking to The Daily Star, Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Shafiqul Islam said that no date has been set for the meeting in the port city. "So far, I know it may be held in February, just one week after Eid-ul-Azha, but that too is not yet confirmed," the DC said.

But the prime minister is expected to arrive in Chittagong on January 13 to attend the ground-breaking ceremony of Asian Women University," the DC disclosed.

The existing two bridges on the river Karnaphuli have become almost worn out posing threat to communication between the port city and the southern part of Chittagong.

Sources said different development issues in line with the demands and aspirations of the residents of Chittagong are likely to feature in the cabinet meeting that is to be held in the port city.

Int'l phone tariff

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charges as we need to pay overseas operators in foreign currency. Otherwise, the country will lose a huge amount of foreign exchange," BRTC Chairman Md Nurul Islam said.

He mentioned that the BRTC is not allowing its service telephones to enjoy the new facility.

There are 36,602 government telephones and 6,386 BRTC service telephones.

In reply to a question, Nurul Islam said some subscribers are facing congestion due to lack of required knowledge about using the new code.

He categorically denied the BRTC's reported involvement in the VoIP (voice-over internet protocol) to terminate calls at the reduced rate. "We are using a special compressed technology to apply the reduced rate, instead of using the conventional International Trunk Exchange (ITX)," he said.

About VoIP licence, he said the BRTC does not need such licence because it is authorised to send voice since the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) came into being.

The BRTC chairman said a section of the VSAT (very small aperture terminal) abuses the technology for transmission of voice instead of data, causing a huge loss to the state.

About the criticisms by telephone subscribers outside Dhaka for not getting the facility of reduced call charges, he said the facility will be extended to all in the hartial.

Nurul Islam, who took over as chairman late last month, said all efforts are being made to introduce the BRTC's mobile phone service in time. "The purchase committee is evaluating the bids now," he added.

The BRTC plans to introduce 2.5 lakh GSM (Global System of Mobile Communications) mobile phones by June this year.

2 journalists

FROM PAGE 12

Earlier on Friday, a journalists' convention at Barisal criticised the home minister for branding them as enemies of the press.

Meanwhile, Janakantha's Pirojpur correspondent Shafiqul Huq Mithu, who was seriously injured by alleged BNP cadres on December 29, was sent to Dhaka last Thursday after attackers threatened him following the withdrawal of his police protection. Mithu is currently undergoing treatment at Dhaka Pongli Hospital.

The public handed Russell, one of the attackers, over to police, but the other attackers are still at large. A case was filed.

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sunless day yesterday, disrupting their services. Some local and inter-city trains to northern districts were stranded for 10 hours, while long-haul buses moved ahead slowly with headlamps.

UNB adds: Eight people -- Hossain Mondol, 65, of Hossainpur, Peer Ali, 90, of Dakhinpara, Madar Fakir, 90, of Purbopara, Shahin, 6, of Sadhpura village in Sadar Upazila, Mamota Begum, 60, of Karkola village in Chatmohar, Karimon Bibi, 77, of Sripur, Muzaffar Bepari, 70, of Govindapur and Alim, 2, of Shandikia village in Sujanagar -- froze to death in Pabna yesterday.

Our Satkhira correspondent adds: Five newborns died from cold-related diseases at Satkhira General Hospital and Satkhira Shishu Hospital yesterday.

Narayanganj correspondent adds: The cold snap claimed the lives of Kenu Mia, 40, and Aloka Kani, 60, and sent scores of people to hospitals.

Official BSS news agency adds: Three people -- Mesher Ali, 45, of Govindapur, village and Sabera Begum, 40, of Rakshiptara village in Bangnara and an unknown child -- died in Rajshahi in past two days.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Biting cold and chilly winds continued to sweep the southern region, disrupting launch and ferry movement, the key mode of communication to the region.

Oust govt plan Jan 10

AL tells post-hartial rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the Awami League (AL) at a post-hartial rally yesterday said a programme for a massive movement would be announced at a grand rally on January 10 to oust the BNP-led alliance government by March.

As the government has driven the country to the verge of destruction, the AL will have to come to the rescue of the people and return their democratic rights by unseating the 'failed' government with the participation of the masses, they observed.

The rally was addressed by party leaders in front of the AL central office at Bangabandhu Avenue at around 4:00pm after holding a six-hour sit-in on the street.

AL presidium member Tofail Ahmed said a seed for ousting the government has been planted by observing a 'spontaneous' hartial across the country.

He said the government has done nothing to develop the country, rather it has brought the 'Sonar Bangla' (the golden Bengal) of Bangabandhu to the verge of destruction.

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Deposit rates

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