

Strong quake hits Sumatra island

AFP, Jakarta
An earthquake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale shook parts of Indonesia's Sumatra island yesterday, but there were no immediate reports of casualties or property damage, a meteorologist said.

The offshore quake hit at 8:54 am (0154 GMT), with the epicentre 240km west of the town of Sibolga in North Sumatra, at a depth of 33 kilometres, said Syahnan, chief meteorologist in Aceh province in northern Sumatra.

Residents of Aceh's provincial capital, Banda Aceh, ran out of their homes and offices in panic, fearful of more tremors on the scale of the December 26 earthquake and tsunami that left at least 128,000 dead in the province.

On March 28, an 8.7-magnitude earthquake killed more than 900 people on the island of Nias off Sumatra. It was centred on the same Indian Ocean geological fault line as Thursday's quake.

Indonesia sits on the so-called Pacific Rim of Fire, where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity.

Increments remain unaffected

New pay structure eliminates previous discrepancy

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Good news for government employees: they will have all their increments added to their new pay scale this time without any discounts as in the past.

Previously, senior staff would find little increase in their salary because of new pay scale as they were entitled to retain not more than three increments in the new pay scale.

It means that somebody who had eight increments would get only three added to the new pay scale. This often reduced their take-home salary under the new pay scale.

But the new pay scale, now being gazetted, eliminated this discrepancy.

For example, say, a fourth class employee after getting three time scales has a basic salary of Tk 1,750. If he gets another eight increments amounting to Tk 1,010,

his salary now comes to Tk 2,760.

Under the new pay scale, his basic salary now comes to Tk 2,850. But under the new pay fixation formula, he will retain his eight increments or Tk 1,010, which will make his basic salary Tk 3,910.

But had the previous pay fixation formula been applied, he would have got only two increments equivalent to Tk 260 to increase his basic salary to Tk 3,370. So, he gains Tk 540 more this time in basic salary.

Typically the pay fixation leaves many government employees unhappy following a new pay scale. Like all previous times, employees unaware of the new increment formula are also expressing their unhappiness. However, the finance division hopes that the new system will meet their expectations.

"This is for the first time the government followed a new for-

mula in pay fixation," said a senior official. "The sixth Pay Commission reviewed the pay structures of India and Pakistan and recommended retention of increments."

The finance division sources said government employees will not be able to draw their salary for May under the new scale as the gazette is yet to be readied. They will be able to draw their five months' arrears in the first week of June.

Pensioners will also get five months' arrears in June. Pensioners drawing up to Tk 1,000 a month will get 40 percent more under the new system. Pensioners drawing more than Tk 1,000 will get 25 percent more, but their minimum total pension will not be less than Tk 1,400.

Private sector teachers and education staff drawing salaries under the government's Monthly Payment Order (MPO) will also draw their five months' arrears.



Awami League brings out a mourning rally in the capital yesterday in protest against the killing of its leader Advocate Khorshed Alam Bachchu.



Asma Kibria leads a peaceful demonstration under the banner of "Blue for Peace" at Mirpur in the capital yesterday demanding arrest and trial of the killers of her slain husband, former minister Shah AMS Kibria.

BACHCHU KILLING AL brings out mourning procession

DU CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of opposition Awami League (AL) leaders and activists yesterday marched on city streets to protest the killing of city unit leader Khorshed Alam Bachchu.

The AL leaders and activists wearing black badges and carrying banners demanded immediate resignation of the BNP-Jamaat-Islami alliance government blaming it for killing their leader in a planned way.

Organised by the Dhaka city unit AL, the mourning procession marched from the Bangabandhu Avenue to the Central Shaheed Minar amidst tight security measures with police taking position on rooftops of different buildings on both sides of the roads and adjacent areas.

Earlier, addressing a rally in front of the AL central office on the

PM opens Rupsha bridge tomorrow

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurates tomorrow the Khanjahan Ali Bridge on the river Rupsha, meeting the long-felt need of the people of the south-western region.

The country's second largest seaport, Mongla is likely to have a surge in its operations with the opening of the bridge, which will also improve communications in the region.

The 1.36km-long bridge was constructed at a cost of Tk 726.15 crore funded by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Japan and the Bangladesh government.

About half of a 16.54km-long bypass road on the western side of the bridge has been constructed. The entire road is expected to be

complete by May next year, said sources in Rupsha Bridge Project (RBP).

However, construction of two 8.68km-long link roads on both sides of the bridge have already been completed for traffic on Khulna-Satkhira and Khulna-Jessore routes.

The then prime minister, Khaleda Zia, in 1994 laid the foundation stone of the bridge. Sheikh Hasina, while in office, inaugurated the construction on May 17, 2001, seven years later.

The bridge's first estimated cost was Tk 582 crore. But with time the construction cost rose to Tk 726.15 crore, of which the government has provided Tk 148 crore.

The RBP sources said the bridge will contribute to cope with incremental freight traffic and further transit cargo movement to

the landlocked Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan through the Mongla port.

The improved communications network is also expected to boost the economic development of the country.

The bridge has provided a permanent road link with the Khulna-Mongla highway.

Besides, it will provide a shorter and convenient road link between the country's northwest and south-west regions.

Shimizu-ITD Joint Venture is the contractor of the RBP, while the Roads and Highways Department under the Ministry of Communications is its executing agency.

The bridge has four lanes in addition to space for bicycle riders.

AL sticks to Saturday's hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) will stick to its countrywide hartal on Saturday, the second in four days, despite demands from HSC examinees and their guardians to withdraw the general strike.

Making matters worse for the five lakh examinees, the education board authorities have yet to make any fresh announcement about Saturday's examination.

"We are observing the situation [the opposition's decision about the hartal] and hope the examination will be held as per schedule," Akhtaruzzaman Talukder, a senior official of the Dhaka Education Board's control room, told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

He said, however, that the board officials will sit at a meeting this morning for a final decision. If there is any decision to postpone Saturday's examination, the authorities will make an announcement over radio and television channels

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Sircar, Moudud misinterpreted constitutions

Allege SCBA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) yesterday said Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and Law Minister Moudud Ahmed misinterpreted the constitution of the country and the SCBA, and the rules of procedure of parliament.

"In their reaction to the cancellation of their membership of the Association, the speaker and the law minister again gave untrue and misleading statements before journalists," reads an SCBA press release.

SCBA President Advocate Mahbub Alam and Secretary Enayetur Rahim regretted the speaker and law minister's "lack of knowledge" about the country's constitution, rules of procedure of parliament and the SCBA constitution.

On Wednesday, the speaker termed the ongoing lawyers' movement for withdrawal of a controversial judge "unconstitutional", while the law minister said it was "politically motivated".

The statement maintained that the demand for withdrawal of Additional High Court Judge Faisal Mahmud Fizee is not an unconstitutional and political demand.

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5 die, 32 hurt as bus hits truck at Narsingdi

UNB, Narsingdi

Five people died and 32 others were injured in a bus-truck collision on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Shilmandi in Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

Police said the accident took place at about 10:30am when a Dhaka-bound bus from Bhairab collided head on with a Narsingdi-bound truck.

Three people died on the spot and the remaining two in Narsingdi

Sadar Hospital.

Of the injured, five were admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, 12 to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital and the remaining 15 to Prime General Hospital.

Traffic on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway was suspended for an hour following the accident.

On Wednesday, two people died in road accidents on the Dhaka-Chitragong highway at Gazaria upazila in Munshiganj district.

Witnesses said an unidentified man aged about 28 was crushed under the wheels of a Comilla bound microbus near Bhober Char area in the evening.

The driver, however, managed to flee along with the bus. On information, police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

In another incident, Daud, 26, was killed as a bus ran over him at Moddho Baulia area in the morning.

Time ripe for Kashmir pact, says Pak FM

Tight security for fourth bus run following violence

AFP, Kuala Lumpur/ Srinagar

The time is ripe for a deal between Pakistan and India on Kashmir and the two countries should seize the opportunity to end the long-running dispute, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said yesterday.

"At the moment conditions are particularly propitious," he told reporters during a stopover in Kuala Lumpur on his way home from visits

to Australia and New Zealand.

"Both leaders have to show courage and take difficult decisions and the fact there are peace constituencies in both countries should be a help to them," Kasuri said.

The two countries, which have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, last month declared a drive for peace "irreversible".

Since 1989, more than 40,000 people have been killed in insurgency-related violence in Kashmir,

which is held in part but claimed in full by both India and Pakistan.

Kasuri said a major confidence-building measure in the search for a solution to the Kashmir issue would be an agreement on the disputed Siachen glacier in talks beginning on May 25.

"It is doable, I think if we have agreement on this it will act as a major confidence-building measure. It will also help in the process of

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Tarique meets FBI, Pentagon officials in US

NSI chief was also present

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of the ruling BNP, now on a visit to the US, had exclusive meetings with top defence and intelligence officials in Washington on Tuesday, according to a report carried by a Bangla tabloid.

He had lengthy meetings with top officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Pentagon, the tabloid said in a report circulated by New York-based Bangla news agency "News World."

National Security Intelligence (NSI) chief Brigadier General Rezzakul Haider and some other officials accompanied Tarique at the meetings, the News World reported

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CMCH top PDB engineer sued for power cut

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chief executive engineer and the staff of Power Development Board (PDB), Chittagong were sued yesterday for snapping electricity to Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH).

Assistant Public Prosecutor Golam Hossain filed the case with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Chittagong.

The complainant blamed the accused for two reported deaths that occurred during an over three-hour power outage on Wednesday.

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Shipping goes majestic

Private firm buys Tk 100cr vessel, more huge ships are adding to Bangladesh lines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A local businessman has recently bought the biggest ocean-going cargo ship in the private sector at a cost of \$15 million equivalent to around Tk 100 crore.

Mohammad Shajahan, owner of Royal Cement factory, procured the ship with a carrying capacity of 45,202 tonnes while the global shipping sector witnesses a boom now.

The 623-foot long and 93-foot

wide vessel—MV FT Jahan—has all facilities for the crew including a swimming pool. It is now anchored at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port.

"The vessel is so large that it will not be able to enter the Karnaphuli port channel," said its captain Monjur Rahman Chowdhury. The port channel has a depth of nine metres while the draft of the ship is 12 metres, he mentioned.

Shipping sources said recent

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MV FT Jahan, the biggest oceangoing cargo ship bought by a private entrepreneur recently.

BACHCHU KILLING Little progress in investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators said yesterday they could not make much headway into the killing of Dhaka city Awami League (AL) leader advocate Khorshed Alam Bachchu.

"There is no development in the investigation," deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (DB) of police told The Daily Star yesterday.

Investigators quizzing the two arrestees—Ismail Hossain alias Sujan and Mohammad Sohel, both remanded Wednesday for seven days, —are yet to get any clue from them, said investigation officer (IO) Fazul Kabir last evening.

He said they raided several places in search of the youths.

Khorshed's wife Jahan Akhtar, however, is still in the dark about the murder. "I do not have any idea about any reason behind the killing," she

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CTG ARMS HAUL CID quizzes 14

BDNEWS, Ctg

CID police have interrogated 14 accused in Chittagong arms haul case. The accused are now on bail. The interrogation was conducted at the directive of the court to get information about absconding accused Abul Hossain.

CID sources said it is now clear from the police investigation that absconding accused Abul Hossain was involved in the arms smuggling.

But his name had not been mentioned in the charge sheet as his address was not available. As a result, the court directed CID police to submit a statement about Abul Hossain after interrogating the

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Prayer Timing		
May 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-45
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation