

Earthquake preparedness in Bangladesh

Recent Indo-Pak horror should be wake-up call

THE devastation that has been wrought by the massive earthquake in the Indo-Pak border area should comes as a grim but timely reminder to the authorities that Bangladesh, too, is vulnerable to earthquakes. The country lies on a major geological fault line and has suffered seven significant earthquakes in the 20th century alone.

The country does have a natural disaster preparedness plan, and in the event of floods or cyclones, the authorities have performed adequately. But planning for earthquakes is almost entirely absent from the thinking on disaster preparedness, and the lesson from the recent catastrophe is that this must change. Earthquake preparedness must be made a top priority.

There are several steps that the government should put in place, both short term and long term, in order to minimise the threat to life and property that results from earthquakes.

In the first instance, earthquake first responders, such as the fire department and civil defence are presently under the home ministry, where they have a peripheral existence, and they must be brought under the disaster management ministry, and coordinated with the other disaster management bodies.

Second, investment must be made in human resources and equipment, so that first responders are sufficiently trained, financed, and equipped to be able to handle a huge crisis.

Finally, it should be understood that a piecemeal and ad hoc approach won't suffice. There must be in place a comprehensive plan and policy to tackle the problem.

However, in the long run we should be concerned more with prevention than with response. Nothing can prevent earthquakes of course, but much can be done to minimise the resulting damage.

We are talking about enforcing building codes when it comes to construction. For the most part, buildings are constructed with no engineering input whatsoever, and building permission is granted with no thought to the making the building earthquake-safe.

The building safety code needs to be rewritten as a legislative act, with stiff provisions to make it enforceable. It is time to take this issue seriously. If existing strictures need to be remodeled or demolished to ensure public safety, we should be prepared to do so.

The expense of ensuring compliance with regulations and making buildings safer pales in comparison with the expense, both in terms of life and economic cost, if we continue down the same path as we have been.

Why the port strike?

Palliatives can't do anymore

AN indefinite strike called by the owners and crew of lighter vessels keeping the Chittagong Port in a paralytic state, a trouble-shooting meeting between the Fisheries and Livestock Minister and the striking vessel owners -- held on Friday evening -- failed to resolve the crisis. The owners are ready to withdraw the strike only if the 24 lighter vessels are unloaded, a problem that has persisted for eight months now. Obviously, this is not the kind of a problem that should have been nagging for such a long time.

The delay in unloading the lighter vessels shows that the failure to do a routine job has created a situation where the port itself is not functioning. This kind of strike, apart from obstructing internal trade and commerce, sends negative signals to foreign businessmen and shipping companies who might switch their preferences to other ports. Already, the port has earned a bad name because of slow handling of cargo and overall lack of operational efficiency.

A trouble usually brews over a period of time and then erupts into a full blown crisis in the shape of work stoppage. So why isn't there a mechanism involving the stakeholders that could prevent the port from coming to a complete standstill?

The port authorities have failed to keep things under control and strident trade unionism spearheaded by an unhealthy number of trade unions has only served to confound the confusion resulting from inept handling of port matters. The present problem unless resolved quickly it can have a debilitating blow to our export and import trade.

The stalemate at the country's premier port is a matter of great concern in that the country is facing the post-MFA situation where the major factor of competitiveness and salesmanship consists in how quickly and effectively we can transship our merchandise to the port of destination. Hence, the crying need is to enhance our efficiency at every step of the way so as to compete with other nations successfully. The government can ill afford to forget that the port is too important an infrastructure to be managed as poorly as it is today.

M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

VERY recently a new political party has been launched to be added to the list of scores of political parties in the country. Former lawmaker and BNP leader Syed Najibul Bashar Maizbhan-dari, who resigned from the BNP on September 26 last, floated the new political party Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF) on October 3 through a press conference in the capital, declaring himself as its chairman. According to newspaper reports, the symbol of the BTF will be 'a garland of yellow flowers.' It is difficult to say how many political parties the country has at the moment. According to the Election Commission (EC) source, in the parliamentary election of 2001, fifty-three political parties participated with symbols. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) " invited 114 odd political parties most of them names only to a three-day dialogue to talk about the new voters' list " in July last.

Definition of political party

According to Article 152 of the constitution of Bangladesh, political party includes a group or combination of persons who operate within or outside parliament under a distinctive name and who hold themselves out for the purpose of propagating a political opinion or engaging in any other political activity. The Political Parties Act, 1962 (of the then Pakistan) defined political party as a body of individuals or an association of persons setting up an organisational structure or collecting funds or owning property with the object of propagating political opinions or indulging in any other political activity. It appears from the above that the characteristics of a political party include, *inter alia*, (a) forming a group of persons who hold a com-

mon view about the problems of society, (b) propagating a political opinion that is different from the opinion(s) of other political parties or engaging in any other political activity, (c) having an organisational structure for promoting and furthering its political ideals, and (d) owning funds or properties.

Why political parties are formed

A democratic system cannot function in a country without political

parties is the *sine qua non* for functioning of multi-party democracy.

Legal provision for registration of political parties

The Representation of the People Order, 1972 (President's Order No. 155 of 1972) made on December 26, 1972 did not contain any provision regarding registration of political parties. Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 2001 promulgated during the period of non-party caretaker government

parties. Different political parties may have different political and ideological opinions. One political party may believe in secularism as one of the fundamental principles of the state policy; another party may believe in religion-based politics; still another party may like to follow a middle path. One political party may be a supporter of a socialistic economy; another may like a capitalistic economy; and there may be another which likes a mixed economy. However, the ultimate objective of a political party is to secure and maintain for its leaders the control of the government to materialise its political, economic, and other programmes. Furthermore, through such control, material and other benefits are given to the members of the party. Critics of political party systems, who are disgusted with human frailty, are of the view that parties are nothing but corrupt and selfish machines, productive of nothing but disunity, ignore reality, and perform a disservice to free government. Corruption and patronage is not peculiar to party government. In spite of all such criticisms, the existence of political

further amending Representation of the People Order, 1972 made provision for the registration of political parties with the EC. But it has not made the registration mandatory for a political party. It is optional. The salient features of the provision are:

- A political party intending to register itself with the EC shall submit an application signed by its president or secretary or persons holding equivalent status in the party to the secretary to the EC.
- The application shall contain particulars, namely (a) the name of the political party and its abbreviation or short name, if any; (b) the address of its head office, name of point of contact, telephone number and fax number; (c) the names of its office-bearers; (d) the total number of its members on the date of application; (e) the names of its affiliated or associated bodies, if any, and the address of the head of each of them; (f) the number of members in parliament, if any, elected on its nomination; (g) the number of members in the past two parliaments, if any, elected on its nomi-

nation; (h) the total votes cast in favour of all its candidates in each of the past two parliamentary elections; (i) the names and numbers of its local units at different levels, if any.

- The application shall be accompanied by a copy of the constitution of the party, which shall contain a specific provision to the effect that the party shall bear true faith and allegiance to the constitution of Bangladesh and it shall uphold the sovereignty, unity and integ-

city of Bangladesh.

- After considering the application and giving the applicant a reasonable opportunity of being heard, the EC may either register the applicant as a political party or reject the application.
- The registration of a political shall stand cancelled on its dissolution or amalgamation with any other political party.
- A registered political party shall be entitled to (a) one of the prescribed symbols for all the candidates set up by it in any general election to parliament; (b) one set of electoral rolls at half of cost; (c) broadcasting and telecasting facilities in the state-owned media during the general election to parliament; (d) be consulted by the EC in respect of any matter relating to the general election to parliament.

Political parties registered

Information available from the EC reveals that so far only six political parties have registered themselves with the EC: Jatiya Party (Ershad), Jatiya Party (Monju), Jatiya Party (Nazur), Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), Bangla-

desh Islami Front (Jalil), and Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon (BKA). This shows that the two major political parties, namely the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL), and some other political parties having representation in the current parliament such as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League have not registered themselves with the EC. Applications of thirty-five political parties are under scrutiny in the EC. Available informa-

tion suggests that no major political party is in the list of the thirty-five applicants.

Why political parties are not interested in registration

First, the major political parties do not want to disclose certain information relating to their parties through registration with the EC. On the other hand, it is an embarrassment for the small and "names only" parties, as they have no information to furnish on certain sensitive points.

Second, the country in succession since 1991 do not consider it necessary to register with the EC. In other words, they consider themselves above the requirement of registration.

Third, opportunism is pervasive in the political arena. The "names only" political parties may find it advantageous to be amalgamated with another like-minded party at an opportune moment. So, they are not interested to get registered with the EC.

Fourth, the law provides that a registered political party shall be entitled to be consulted by the EC in

respect of any matter relating to the general election to parliament. But in practice, this and other privileges mentioned in the law are being allowed to all the political parties, registered with the EC or not. Unless the political parties that are not registered with the EC are denied the privileges mentioned in the law, they will not feel the necessity of registration.

Fifth, since early nineties, the ruling party/parties and the main opposition have been busy in confrontational politics. They have hardly paid any attention towards institutionalising democracy in the country. They have not yet realised that registration of political parties can help grow the nascent democracy in the country to a considerable extent.

Last but not the least, the law has not made the registration of the political parties mandatory. So, they are not giving any importance to it.

To conclude, unless and until the registration of political parties with the EC is made mandatory, the list of political parties may continue to swell which, according to many, may not be conducive to the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy in the country. The Daily Star in its editorial of July 28 wrote: "The proliferation of parties, however, does shine a spotlight, on one glaring problem in the Bangladeshi body politic. It remains a rich irony that while even the smallest of shops or business is required to be licensed and registered, that there exists no law requiring the registration of political parties and no statute regulating them. It can be argued that the very political parties that rule the country (now and in the past) have no real legal standing whatsoever to do so."

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former Secretary to the Government.

How to be a successful politician in Bangladesh

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

IF you are dedicated, committed, and even half a patriot there is no sense in your trying to be a front-ranking politician in this country. If your lifestyle is that of frugal living, do not try your luck in politics in Bangladesh.

To be in the game of politics in this country, you should continually talk about democracy, and then consciously and diligently work against all norms of democracy every step of the way. You must be ready to own a Mitsubishi Pajero or Nissan Patrol at any cost. You must have a wardrobe consisting of an number of outfits befitting each social occasion from attending funerals up to attending official and ceremonial meetings with foreign dignitaries, high-profile seminars and workshops, and so on and so forth.

There is more. Make promises, which you know you can never fulfill. You must have up your sleeve all kinds of ready speeches befitting any occasion and on any subject, no matter what. Even if you make or say something that is irrelevant, the way

to come out of the jam is to look happy and smiling, after all none of your colleagues or any one amongst the crowd will ever question your wisdom!

Whether in opposition or a member of the ruling party, you must have your own group of musclemen. As you move around you must be

life of luxury and affluence. Make use of office and home telephones any way you like. After all, you do not have to pay the bill.

If you are one of the lawmakers of the party in power or contemplating to contest the forthcoming elections you should be visiting your constituency every now and then in order "to

No matter what, your prime concern should be to make money and money only. The way to do it is lobbying with concerned agencies and ministries for various infrastructure development projects like road construction, building bridges and culverts etc. After all, that is where big money lies and has the maximum scope of manipulations.

accompanied by a valet-cum handyman at all times, capable of keeping people who you dislike -- or who you owe money or favours to -- away from you. He is your confidante, ready to do anything and everything for you whenever called upon at any hour of day and night. You must be ready to switch sides depending on which side has the most potential of being in the seat of power.

Who knows it is the right path for being a part of the political hierarchy in Bangladesh. After all, while your regular monthly remuneration may be a meager sum, you can still live a

be in touch with the people." During the Ramadan and the Eid season make sure you are there with a bundle of lungis and saris and distribute amongst the poor, particularly those who are your prospective supporters.

Well, you should also have a good relationship with the police and intelligence agencies so that your otherwise questionable deeds cannot be questioned. You must be an individual of supreme self-confidence. Whether or not you have it in you, you must be an intellectual, a legal expert, and a man of extraordinary courage.

The essence of politics is being in the seat of power at any cost, no matter what. If not, at least be ready to be a constant menace to the society with a high degree of nuisance value. You will be then in a seat of power of another kind where resources of all kinds will be bestowed upon you from all corners.

concern should be to make money and money only. The way to do it is lobbying with concerned agencies and ministries for various infrastructure development projects like road construction, building bridges and culverts etc. After all, that is where big money lies and has the maximum scope of manipulations.

I just remembered -- to succeed in politics Bangladesh-style you should also have some unspecified dubious relationship with members of the diplomatic corps of some consequence.

A prospective front-line politician in the country must also be ready to build a mosque in his or her constituency, preferably with the motive of keeping the illiterate section of the vote bank well disposed towards you. Every effort must also be made to set up a school or a college commemorating the name of your father or mother.

No matter what, your prime

You should be prepared to build arches and raise festoons often blocking the smooth passage of traffic, and drag innocent school children out in the scorching rays of the sun or in rains to welcome the visiting dignitary. Let a few people be atop a truck with all kinds of drums and horns beating and blowing them hard heralding the arrival of the VIP.

You must also be a fear factor, rightly or wrongly, amongst your target group, and have an image that says it all: you, and you alone, have the solution to all their problems.

It is also a part of the ongoing

culture of successful politicians in Bangladesh that he or she must also be ready to sign and counter-sign any and all kinds of certificates and documents, and for that matter must always carry with him a set of rubber stamps of different sizes and designs representing the corresponding importance of each of the certificates signed and counter-signed.

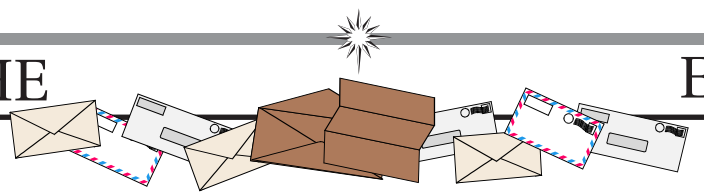
You must also concentrate on consolidating your power base by inducting yourself into the board of directors of any of the prospective banks in the private sector, better still if you can build some industry or business enterprise which is exclusively by you and for you.

But a new dimension has been added to all this: completely sideline and ignore the people -- let them go to hell. The attitude one has to build and tune himself or herself to is, as the couplets of a popular Bengali folk song puts it most befittingly: "Lauer Aga Khailam, doga Khailam, dugdugi Bajailam."

Long live Abhaga Desh! I wonder how Nawab Sirajuddowla was able to predict so far into our future! Frankly, politics in Bangladesh is the oldest profession.

The author is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



..... Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.....

Mistakes in HSC English textbook

There is many a question about the appropriateness of the methodology used in writing the textbook prescribed by the National Curriculum & Textbook Board (NCTB) for classes 11 & 12. It's not been possible to carry out the objectives of the book due to the lack of an empirical approach to the problem of language teaching and learning. The book contains some mistakes, perhaps due to carelessness.

A. In Unit 4, Lesson, Section B of the textbook there is a topic on Origami. But in the text it is misspelt as Oregami. Reference: The Little Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English (Seventh Edition, Sixth Impression) and Oxford Talking Dictionary (available on multimedia CD).

B. In Unit 14, Lesson 1, Section C of the textbook there is a sentence ... education was one of the most important social phenomenon... But according to grammarians we have to use a plural noun after one of the...

For this reason here the noun should have been spelt as phenomena (phenomena, originally derived from Greek, is the plural form of phenomenon). Reference: Michael Swan's Practical English Usage, Section 501(4), Second Edition, 3rd Impression, and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English by A S Hornby (4th edition, 10th impression).

C. In Unit 5, Lesson 4, Section B there is a grammatical instruction as 'We use '-ing' with a verb when it is used after think, like, love, prefer. But in contrary to this instruction, the second paragraph of Unit 4, Lesson 1, Section C starts as 'The Japanese love to take part in sports in their free time.'

Actually the instruction is partially correct. Grammarians say that after like, love, prefer and some other verbs we can use verbs either taking infinitive or gerund (-ing form) without any change of meaning. Reference: A.J. Thomson and A.V. Martinet's A Practical English Grammar, section 266 (4th edition, 10th impression),

and John Eastwood's Oxford Practice Grammar, section 63(A), second edition.

There is no clear obligation of using infinitive or gerund after think. But as per the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English we certainly can use infinitive after think such as Who would have thought to see you here?

I urge the authorities concerned to take the initiative to correct these inadvertent mistakes and incongruities in the next impression/edition. **Md. Munibur Rahman**
Lecturer in English
Jessore Govt. Mohila College, Jessore.

Dipali's suicide

Dipali, a tiny poor girl of Kishoreganj, committed suicide as she could not bear the pangs of hunger. It is really a matter of great regret that though the country is near self-sufficient in food production it cannot afford to provide food for all its people. Not only this, the government has increased the number of VGF cards in the north-

ern districts. But what purpose will it serve if girls like Dipali have to commit suicide? And the increase in food production will ever remain pointless if thousands of people have to starve in the northern region. Who are getting the VGF cards? And why are the poor families deprived of the rice supply that they need so desperately? After Dipali committed suicide, some businessmen and NGOs approached the family with help, but the government is silent and has claimed that the family has received VGF cards. There are thousands of families who are left without any food supply to sustain life.

They are not getting VGF cards as they have no link to the ward commissioner or ward member or they are suspected of not having voted for the ruling party. Who will save these vulnerable families? The NGOs are not capable of handling the food shortage in such vast areas. So the government has to play the crucial role here. **Taslim Hasan**

Dept. of Finance
University of Dhaka
Weekly holiday

Declaring two days weekly holiday is a good decision taken by the government for a country like Bangladesh, which is spending an enormous amount of foreign exchange for buying petrol and other related things in order to keep the country running. Moreover, the Dhaka city will get some respite from the poisonous gas and other related substances that it is swallowing everyday, especially from vehicles and urban based industries. As for the economy, I believe the labourers will be greatly benefited as they will make some extra money by working on Saturdays as overtime. **Humayun Hyder**
Zigatola, Dhaka

Drive against unscrupulous business

The recent drive against adulterated food businesses has earned appreciation of all. We know there has always been adulteration of food-- but

nobody could believe it has gone to the extent where it's simply poisoning us with a whole list of carcinogens. This was only possible due to lack of regulation and enforcement.

We have to be cautious about critical products, which have a direct impact on health like pharmaceuticals and other healthcare products, cosmetics etc. Particularly when it comes to medicines-- the dosage accuracy and stability of the end product are very critical for their pharmacological action. There must be strong surveillance on such products and occasional investigation into manufacturing floors of the pharmaceutical and healthcare products should be done by recognised bodies comprising international and in-house experts. We don't know what we are taking to cure our diseases. We just complain that these medicines don't work. Besides cheap and adulterated imported products from India, there are many small local companies who use substandard raw materials in

their formulations. Such products not only cause ineffective therapy, they can result in lethal toxicities.

Do we know what our daily care products like soaps, detergents, toothpastes, lotions etc really contain? These are the high volume products with good margins and the potential for adulteration is also high due to the wide range of chemicals used in these. We doubt whether BSTI has the strength in terms of expertise or technical facilities to keep these essential products off the hands of unscrupulous businesses. Why not take help from WHO or FDA or any such organisation that can independently look into the situation in our country. This will surely help create public awareness and check adulteration. **Shawkat Haider**
Toyama, Japan

Bangla Academy's dictionary

It appears very surprising to the

students that the popular Bengali to English dictionary published by Bangla Academy is out of market. Students would like to know the exact reason behind the non-availability of this dictionary.

A bookseller at Nilkhet said that more than 30 lakh copies of the dictionary have been given to UNICEF or other organisations. If it is so then, what about our students? Why the authorities do not reprint it for the sake of the general students? At the moment, students are missing a standard lexicon which cannot be replaced by other dictionaries.

We know the Bangla Academy is producing useless books most of the times, except the dictionaries. So, to uphold the image of our Language Movement and pay respect to our Language Martyrs, it is the authorities' responsibility and noble duty to make everybody feel proud through publishing more thought provoking and core books and dictionaries on a regular basis. **Haris, JU**