

### Bus fares

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increased the prices of petroleum products by Tk 5 to Tk 8 to reduce subsidies on imported petroleum products.

The new price of CNG -- Tk 30 per cubic metre up from Tk 25 -- also came into effect from midnight last.

The Awami League-led alliance government increased the CNG price to Tk 25 per cubic metre from Tk 16.75 once before on May 13.

Shamim Ahmed, a resident of Dhaka's Shearpara area and a regular bus passenger, termed the transport fare hike irrational and unacceptable. "Low-income city dwellers will feel the pinch," Shamim, who works in an advertising firm, told The Daily Star.

Nurul Islam of Green Road said the government should not increase transport fares more than once a year. "The new transport fares came when transport workers and passengers are still fighting over the earlier hiked fares," he said adding that this move will only intensify the tension.

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the decision to hike prices of imported petroleum products and CNG, and the increase in bus fares will have a dampening effect on the economy.

"But, it was needed to reduce the huge subsidy on imported oil," he said. The decision may hamper the economy to an extent but exports should not be troubled, he added.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, senior research fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said price hike of petroleum products and other fuel was needed to reduce pressure on the macro-economy. The decision to hike prices of petroleum products and to increase bus fares will have a bad impact on consumer spending. The government should see how pressure on ordinary consumers can be reduced, he said.

If the prices of imported petroleum fuel and CNG were not increased, the government would have to manage the macro-economy by either printing bank notes, borrowing money from the banks, or by receiving foreign aid, he added.

Government earnings, apart from the contribution of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), are not good even though the inflow of remittance is maintaining a moderate growth, Moazzem said.

At the same time, the government is receiving the targeted foreign aid. It has a target of receiving \$3.3 billion aid this fiscal year.

Government expenditure continues to increase mainly due to high subsidy on importing petroleum products. "So in this situation the government chose to increase prices of petroleum products for better macro-economic management," he said.

### Dahagram

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One bus will be made operational between September 26 and 30, and within a month a second bus will be running on the route, said Lt Col Aslam Hossain, commanding officer of Lalmonirhat 31 BGB battalion.

The move came in less than two weeks after India allowed Bangladesh 24 hours' access to the enclave through an agreement signed during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to Bangladesh.

BGB Rangpur Sector Commander Col Neyamul Islam Fatemy led a seven-member team at the meeting at Panbari BGB camp of Patgram upazila in Lalmonirhat.

Brig Gen Gajindor Singh Rathor, Jalpaiguri BSF sector commander, led the Indian side in the meeting.

The meeting also decided that inhabitants of the enclave from now on are allowed to take 60 domestic animals instead of 20 in a week to the mainland through the Tin Bigha Corridor.

## BNP may call hartal

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It called an emergency media briefing for noon today at its central office in the capital to make a formal announcement about the protest programmes.

The decision was taken in an emergency meeting of BNP's senior leaders at Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office with her in the chair. The two-hour meeting started at 10:15pm.

Meeting sources said the opposition leaders discussed in detail the incident of clashes between police and Jamaat-e-Islami men yesterday that prompted the authorities to arrest Jamaat leaders including its Acting Secretary General ATM

Azharul Islam. "We have discussed the latest political situation and the preparations for our September 27 rally. We will inform you in detail about the meeting's decisions tomorrow," BNP Acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told reporters after the meeting.

Party leaders Khandaker Mosharruf Hossain, Nazrul Islam Khan, Mirza Abbas, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, and Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka were present at the meeting among others.

The sources said the leaders mainly discussed the impact of price hike of fuel and decided to protest it strongly. They think it will help the party to get more public support ahead of its scheduled rally from where Khaleda Zia is expected to announce a raft of anti-government programmes.

The government raised prices of diesel, kerosene, petrol and octane by Tk 5 a

litre, and of furnace oil by Tk8, which took effect from Sunday midnight.

MANMOHAN WRITES TO KHALEDA  
An email sent to the media from BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office yesterday claimed that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sent a letter to Khaleda following their recent meeting in Dhaka.

In the letter Manmohan said he believes such exchanges "always contribute to better understanding and are in the spirit of democratic polity", the email read.

The email claimed that Manmohan said in the letter that he has greatly benefited from Khaleda Zia's perspective on relations between Bangladesh and India and the issues of concern to both.

The Indian prime minister also expressed appreciation to Khaleda Zia for her contribution to strengthening and improving India-Bangladesh relations.

The government raised prices of diesel, kerosene, petrol and octane by Tk 5 a

## Jamaat men

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Islam, its acting secretary general; Tasneem Alam, publicity secretary, and Mohammad Ijjat Ullah, central working committee member, following the violence. The trio were picked up from the party's Moghbazar office in the evening, said Masudur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of police.

Jamaat clashed with police also in Chittagong, leaving at least five people including an assistant commissioner of police wounded and seven vehicles shattered.

At least 26 members of the party were arrested from a procession in Kushtia. In Barisal, five persons were hurt in police action to disperse the activists who gathered for a rally.

In Dhaka, it all began when police around 4:00pm barred the party men from staging a prescheduled rally at Bijaynagar. Jamaat was to hold the gathering as part of its country-wide demonstrations to demand release of its top brass who are behind bars on war crimes charges.

At first, witnesses said, Jamaat men got into a heated argument with police. Law enforcers had to step back initially as the party activists outnumbered them by several times. Reinforced, they came back with riot cars.

Running battles between the two sides continued for over an hour at Kakrail, Bijaynagar and Shantinagar. Pelted with brick chips by the activists, police lobbed at least one thousand teargas canisters, fired several rounds of rubber bullet and charged batons to control the situation.

At least 38 policemen were reported hurt in the fight. Five severely injured cops were admitted to police hospital at Rajarbagh and another to Apollo Hospitals.

Five police vehicles -- a prison van, a jeep, a pickup truck and two motorbikes -- were among those set ablaze.

While Syed Nurul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of police (Ramna division), put the number of torched vehicles at 28, a Fire Service and Civil Defence source told The Daily Star today at 1:30am it was not more than eight.

Jamaat men also burnt tyres and other objects on roads. Activists of its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, also joined the battle, said the party sources.

Fright-gripped pedestrians were running for safer places while many took shelter in the nearby buildings and shops.

Students and guardians of Willes Little Flower School and College at Kakrail stayed inside the institute compound after the classes ended.

The college principal, Lt Col Mohammad Moinul Islam Chowdhury, said none of the children and

## Abbas warns

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leadership will pass through very difficult times after the Palestinian approach to the United Nations through the Security Council to seek full membership for the Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with east Jerusalem as its capital," he told reporters.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe warned of the risk of an "explosion of violence" in the Middle East if the Palestinian conflict is not resolved, saying the Palestinians status quo was "neither acceptable nor tenable."

"The relaunch of the peace process is needed," Juppe told the Council on Foreign Relations think-tank in New York.

He said he planned to meet with Abbas later yesterday. "I will ask him what is his strategy? Going to the Council of Security and what after that?"

"We have to avoid such a confrontation. We have to find a balanced solution," Juppe told the Council on Foreign Relations, adding that he thought the international community had "three or four days" to find such a solution.

There are multiple diplomatic efforts to try to reach a deal between the Palestinians, Israelis and Americans that would avoid a UN confrontation.

Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad and Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak held an unannounced meeting Sunday in a last-ditch bid to reach agreement on new talks, diplomats said, while adding that no breakthrough was made.

Abbas was to meet Ban and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was also to hold talks with Lavrov, following up on her meeting with European Union foreign affairs representative Catherine Ashton on Sunday.

The United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations make up the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East, whose envoy Tony Blair is seeking to mediate an accord.

Blair is seeking a statement that would advance recognition of a Palestinian state while drawing the Palestinians back into direct talks, which could placate the United States.

"I think there is a way of avoiding a confrontation," the former British prime minister said Sunday.

Israel says the UN bid is a Palestinian attempt to circumvent direct negotiations, which ground to a halt in September 2010 after Israel ended a moratorium on settlement construction in the occupied territories.

The Palestinians say the UN move does not exclude new talks and will bolster their ability to negotiate as an equal partner.

Abbas said he would not be deterred from going to the Security Council and blamed Israel for the peace talks deadlock.

"We decided to go to the UN because all the negotiations, direct and indirect, failed because of Israel's stubbornness," he said.

## Reshuffle

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Abdul Karim had been serving on contract since 2009 after his retirement.

Karim's contract was supposed to expire on September 25 but the government in a rare instance had to extend his contract for only four days as he is at the moment accompanying Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her official visit to the USA.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office told The Daily Star last night that as a result of these two leaving service, reshuffles will also take place in the secretary level. With this possible reshuffle in mind, a number of senior bureaucrats are already busy lobbying for better positions.

Sources said Sheikh Md Wahid uz Zaman, secretary, water resources ministry, Iqbal Mahmood, secretary, public administration ministry and Muhammad Musharrif Hossain Bhuiyan, secretary at the Economic Relations Division are lobbying for the cabinet secretary post.

Highly placed sources said the appointment of Wahid uz Zaman as the cabinet secretary is almost certain.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister's Office Secretary Molla Waheeduzzaman, Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder and Jute and Textile Secretary Md Ashrafal Moqbul are in the race for PM's principal secretary post, sources said.

Sources said that Molla might replace Karim but PMO sources said Molla will remain in his current position and they are still looking for a new principal secretary.

Sources also say that there would be changes in other crucial positions of the civil service, including the prime minister's private secretary and a few secretaries at the Secretariat. PM's Private Secretary Nazrul Islam Khan might be sent either to a ministry or made the PMO secretary if Molla is appointed the principal secretary.

Joint Secretary of Local Government Division Abdul Malek or Road Division Secretary Farid Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury might be appointed as the PM's private secretary.

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Survey of Bangladesh.

Citing the USGS map, he said the intensity of the quake was very strong in Sikkim. But the further it travelled from the epicentre, the weaker it got.

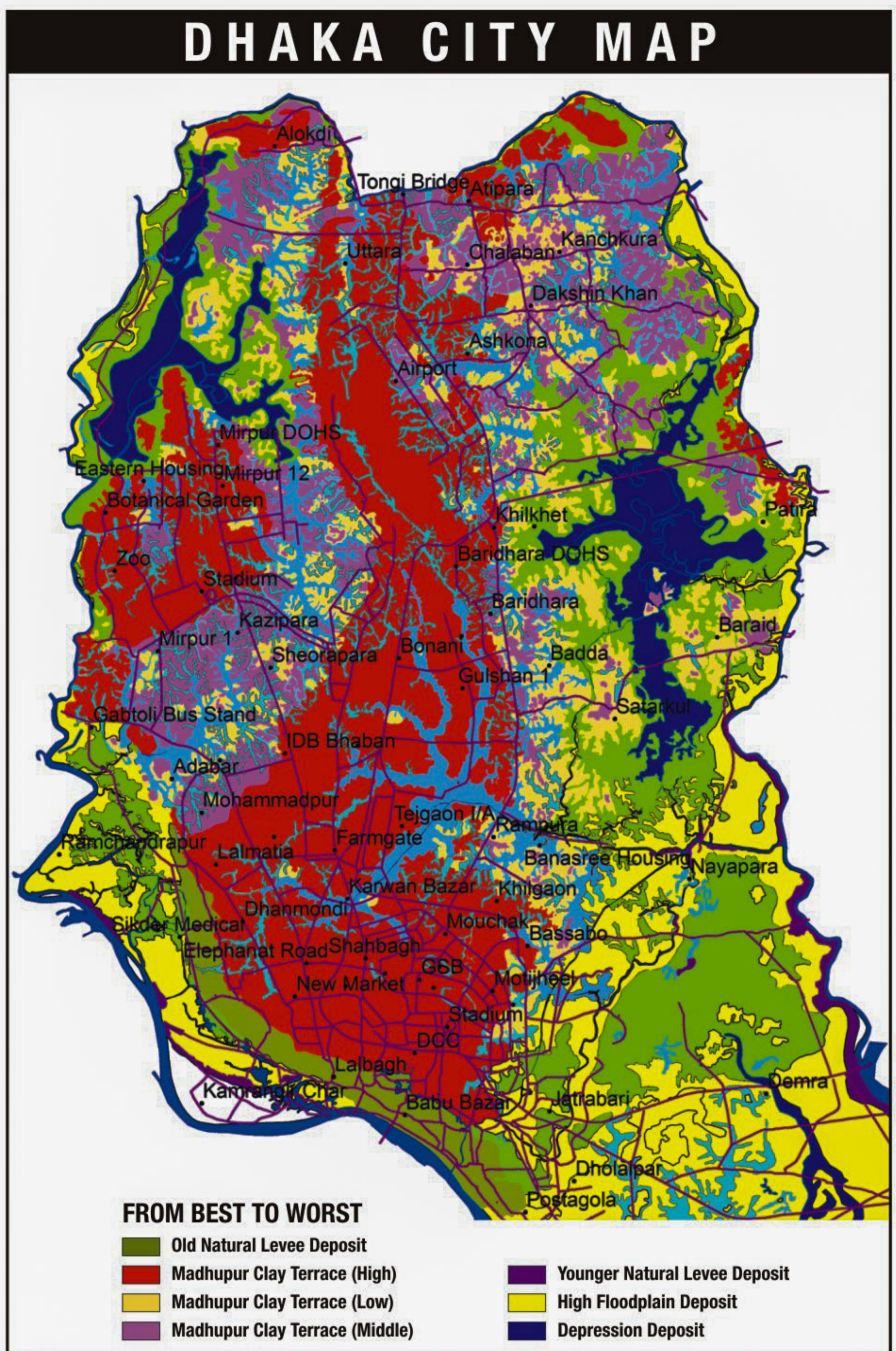
So, by the time the quake hit northern Bangladesh, it had already come down to iv on Mercalli scale, which measures the intensity of the jolt felt at different places.

"In Dhaka, the strength of the earthquake was not more than ii or iii [on Mercalli scale]," he said.

At the epicentre, the energy transmitted was 16 centimetre (cm) per second but when the quake struck northern Bangladesh it came down to 4 cm per second. The higher the energy transmitted per second is, the stronger the quake strikes.

"It was less than 1 centimetre per second in Dhaka." Had it struck the city at 6.0 to 7.0 magnitude, almost all the buildings constructed on organic soil filling up wetlands would have collapsed, he added.

Only those buildings built



## Troubles brewing in silence

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they get before going off. The Main Boundary fault in the Himalayas just broke its silence, releasing some of its energy that sent a chill through parts of India, Bangladesh and Nepal on Sunday.

Experts, however, worry more over the silence of the other quake-makers in the region, of which three are in Bangladesh -- the Modhupur fault (60km) in Tangail, the Dauki (230km) in Sylhet-Mymensingh and the Eastern Boundary fault (900km), Sitakunda in Chittagong, to the Nicobar Islands. Then there are the 1,600km Western Region fault along India-Bangladesh-Myanmar border and the broken Indian-Burmese mass below the

surface (geologically known as plate) to worry about.

Except for causing tremors occasionally, these faults have been silent for about 400 years.

"All these areas are major sources of earthquake. Enough energy should have been accumulated by now. It's not possible to predict when but it is safe to say that disasters are due in the region," Prof Humayun Akhter, head of Earth Observatory at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star last night.

Another leading earthquake expert, Maksud Kamal, professor of geology at Dhaka University, shared Humayun's concern, terming the long silence of these faults ominous. "It is natural for earthquake to occur at intervals of around 20 years.

And wherever in the region it hits, Bangladesh will be within a radius of 300km to face non-characteristic earthquake of 6-7 magnitude on the Richter scale."

The three faults within Bangladesh have been assessed as capable of producing tremors of up to 8.5 magnitude. Different surveys have found the Modhupur fault the riskiest, which can cause 7-7.5 magnitude earthquakes.

Though the Sikkim quake has spared Bangladesh this time only with jolts for nearly two minutes, the future looks grim for the densely-populated country with unplanned urbanisation on under-developed lands.

A 7.5 magnitude quake in Modhupur can wreak havoc in Dhaka, only 50km away. "It

can destroy 30 percent of the buildings in Dhaka, kill about two lakh people and trap another three lakh in no time," said Prof Humayun, spurring the government on disaster preparedness.

Modhupur apart, both the Dauki and Eastern Boundary faults can cause quakes of 8.5 magnitude.

As part of its disaster management plans, the government has decided to train about 62,000 people on rescue operation.

Humayun, however, thinks the government and the media should focus more on an extensive awareness campaign, telling people about the do's and don'ts during earthquakes. "First, people should learn how to protect themselves. Rescue comes later," he added.

## Distance saved fragile Dhaka BNP asks govt

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potential hardships in people's lives which will also take a toll on the country's economy," said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, acting secretary general of BNP, in a statement.

He said people of middle and lower income groups will be adversely affected due to this step taken by the government.

"The government increased fuel prices only three months ago and it does not make any sense to raise it again," Alamgir said.

The BNP leader said transport cost and prices of essential commodities will also rise, resulting in a deeper crisis.

National Awami Party (NAP) President Prof Mozaffar Ahmed said the poor will suffer due to the price hike of kerosene which will have a negative impact on the agriculture and transport sector.

The government, on Sunday, increased fuel prices by Tk 5 to Tk 8 per litre to reduce subsidies on imports of petroleum products.

Urban geology experts stressed the importance of soil tests before constructing multi-storey buildings, saying most owners skip it to save money.

A recent survey done by Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP), a government project, says some 78,000 of 3,26,000 buildings in Dhaka, 1,42,000 of 1,80,000 in Chittagong and 24,000 of 52,000 buildings in Sylhet are risky.

Although Bangladesh is by and large seismically active, Dhaka has yet to experience any moderate to large earthquake, experts say.

A study on earthquake in Dhaka city jointly conducted by Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, USA and the Department of Geology, Dhaka University in 2004 demonstrated that the western part of the capital from Mirpur-Kalyanpur to Pagla along the Buriganga river and the eastern part from Uttar Khan-Badda to Demra along the Balu river falls in the high risk zone.