

New Delhi stages mass quake drill

AFP, New Delhi

Over 40,000 people in India's capital took part in the city's biggest ever earthquake drill yesterday as the tremor-prone city of 16 million seeks to improve its disaster preparedness.

"We want to find out how capable we are to deal with natural and man-made disasters. 'Be prepared' is the slogan for today," said RK Dheer, an official at the National Disaster Management Authority.

Students and volunteers took part in the massive drill in schools, colleges, hospitals, metro stations and crowded markets.

Dheer said the city's traffic department and transport officials were also involved in diverting traffic and suspending metro services.

"All of this is being done to know how we react during a crisis," he told AFP.



Delhi Metro passengers move away from the train platform with their hands on their heads at a metro station during a mock drill conducted by the Delhi Police and Delhi metro authorities in New Delhi yesterday. Over 40,000 people in India's capital took part in a mass earthquake drill as the tremor-prone city of 16 million seeks to improve its preparedness for a disaster.

PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka agrees to probe war crimes

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's army yesterday said it agreed for the first time to probe war crime charges against its troops and investigate allegations of prisoner executions made in a British TV documentary.

Army chief Jagath Jayasuriya appointed a court of inquiry to investigate charges that troops were responsible for killing civilians and prisoners in the final stages of their war against Tamil rebels in 2009, an army statement said.

The dramatic U-turn from the security establishment came two days after the US warned that the Indian Ocean island would face censure at next month's UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva.

Lieutenant General Jayasuriya asked a five-member panel of officers to investigate allegations against the force, including that it executed prisoners as claimed in a documentary by Briton's Channel Four television channel.

The probe is a major shift for Sri Lanka's armed forces, which had insisted that it did not kill a single civilian while crushing the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels in a no-holds-barred offensive that ended in May 2009.

The army said the inquiry was ordered after the government's own Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), a panel which probed why a 2002 truce collapsed, said civilians had perished as a result of military action.

It said an inquiry into observations of the LLRC and the "Channel 4 video footage irrespective of its authenticity or otherwise, is now in full progress."

Presidential polls in Egypt at end of May

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's first presidential elections since a popular uprising ousted veteran leader Hosni Mubarak a year ago will be held at the end of May, the state-owned Al-Ahram daily reported yesterday.

The report comes amid mounting pressure against the military rulers who took power after Mubarak's overthrow to cede power to civilian rule.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Local Development Mohammed Attiya told Al-Ahram that presidential elections will be held at the end of May but that the date would be set by the elections committee.

Presidential hopefuls will have three weeks starting March 10 to register their candidacy, after which there will be campaigning for 45 days, Attiya said.

PLOT AGAINST ISRAELI DIPLOMATS Thailand charges Iranian suspects

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand charged two Iranians yesterday over an alleged bomb plot against Israeli diplomats, officials said, piling pressure on Tehran amid accusations of a terror campaign against the Jewish state.

Tensions between the Middle East arch-foes have risen sharply following three bomb incidents in world capitals in less than 24 hours, but Iran angrily rejected accusations that it was to blame.

On Monday, bombers targeted Israeli embassy staff in India and Georgia.

Meanwhile, Malaysian authorities yesterday arrested an Iranian suspected in relation to the Thailand blasts, Malaysia's police chief said.

A statement released by Malaysian police chief late yesterday said authorities arrested the suspect in the capital Kuala Lumpur at 3:30pm.

In Bangkok, two Iranians were detained over three blasts which rattled the city Tuesday. They were charged with causing an illegal explosion and other offences, Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul said.

"We cannot say yet if it's a terrorist act," he told reporters, but it's similar to the assassination attempt against a diplomat in India.

"These Iranian men are an assassination team and their targets were Israeli diplomats including the ambassador," a senior Thai intelligence official told AFP.

Ghulam Azam urged ME not to recognise Bangladesh

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former Jamaat ameer at the tribunal yesterday. Ghulam Azam, 89, is facing charges on 62 specific crimes against humanity committed during 1971.

Tipoo said after Ghulam Azam escaped from Bangladesh on November 22, 1971, he formed "East Pakistan Restoration Committee" in Lahore. He used the committee to launch an anti-Bangladesh movement in the name of an Islamic movement and tried to influence the Middle East into not recognising Bangladesh, he added.

The three-member tribunal led by its Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq yesterday began hearing the formal charges against Ghulam Azam. The formal charges contain 191 pages and yesterday 44 of them were read out before the tribunal.

The tribunal will continue the hearing today (Thursday). The court also

set February 23 for delivering a verdict on Ghulam Azam's bail petition.

Ghulam Azam was produced before the tribunal yesterday but he left after lunch break. The hearing continued in his absence.

According to the formal charges read out by the prosecution, Ghulam Azam, as a leader of the East Pakistan Restoration Committee, met a Saudi prince after the Liberation War.

"The Hindus have taken over East Pakistan... They have knocked down mosques and turned them into temples. They have burned the Quran. They have killed many Muslims," the prosecution quoted Ghulam Azam as telling the prince.

The prosecution said Ghulam Azam's Bangladesh citizenship was revoked in 1973, but he returned to the country on August 11, 1978, during the regime of Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman. He got

into the country on a Pakistani passport, according to the formal charges.

Earlier in the day, after the hearing on a bail petition of Ghulam Azam, the tribunal said it would deliver a verdict on February 23. This is Ghulam Azam's second bail prayer. His first was rejected on January 11 when he appeared before the court, which sent him to jail.

Yesterday, the former Jamaat ameer also filed several other petitions, which the court heard and disposed of before it went into lunch break at 1:00pm.

The petitions included illegible pages and missing documents among the volumes of documents the prosecution gave to the defence.

Abdur Razzaq, chief counsel for Ghulam Azam, also said the defence had not received copies of the case diaries, which the prosecution claimed had been submitted to the court.

The court then ordered the defence to collect the case diaries from the court. It also ordered that legible copies be given to the defence team within two days.

The prosecution was further directed to provide the defence with missing documents, which were mentioned in the index but were not provided to the defence.

The tribunal, however, rejected a fourth petition, which asked for a copy of the original complaint that the defence claimed had triggered the investigation and led to the case.

In his submission, Abdur Razzaq argued that the complaint was at the heart of the case and the defence had a right to obtain a copy of it.

Countering the petition, prosecutor Rana Dasgupta referred to several provisions, which made it clear that the complaint was part of the case diary.

The petition was then rejected.

Another petition, seeking adjournment of hearing on formal charges, was scheduled to begin yesterday. The hearing is pending with the court and is expected to begin after the hearing on formal charges finishes today.

BAIL PETITION
Defence lawyer Imran Siddiq, in a lengthy bail petition for Ghulam Azam, said his client had motor difficulties and was suffering from old-age complications.

He claimed that hospital food made the 89-year-old more ill and that he had lost weight. He said Ghulam Azam should be given bail as he would not flee the country and would face trial.

Chief prosecutor Tipoo, however, said the ground for the bail prayer is pretty much the same as Ghulam Azam's first bail prayer, which had been rejected by

the court. He said Ghulam Azam had been effectively the "mastermind and springboard in steering the paraphernalia of Jamaat" and other organisations like the peace committees and Razzaks, Al Badr and Al Shams.

These organisations collaborated with the Pakistani occupation army in 1971 and actively engaged in thwarting the liberation forces, he said.

The former Jamaat chief made an attempt to address the court as arguments over his bail petition went on. When Razzaq brought that to the court's attention, the tribunal chairman said, "But he addresses the court through you."

The court then fixed February 23 for delivering the verdict on the bail petition.

Ghulam Azam is one of the front men who actively helped the Pakistani occupation forces' attempt to foil the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

The prosecution on January 5 brought 62 specific charges against the former Jamaat chief. On January 9, the tribunal accepted the charges and ordered Ghulam Azam's chief counsel Abdur Razzaq to produce him before the court on January 11.

On January 11, Ghulam Azam appeared before the tribunal, which rejected his bail petition and ordered the authorities to send him to Dhaka Central Jail. They also fixed February 15 for hearings on charges framing.

The arrestee was moved to a prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University hospital for treatment the same day.

Ghulam Azam is among six Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and two BNP leaders now facing war crimes charges at the tribunal.

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE Santorum surges ahead in polls

AFP, Washington

Rick Santorum's drive to capture the Republican presidential nomination gained momentum Tuesday as he surged to the front of the field in national polls and extended his lead over Mitt Romney in his rival's native Michigan.

But Romney's supporters were just rolling out the big guns -- massive spending on television and radio ads -- that drove previous poorly funded challengers from the field in key states like Florida and Iowa.

Michigan, where Romney was born and raised, is looming as a crucial, must-win state for the candidate, who has struggled to convince Republicans he is the man to go up against President Barack Obama in November elections.

But national polls showed Santorum surging ahead of longtime frontrunner Romney and the ground shifting rapidly against the former Massachusetts governor since he lost three state nominating contests to the former Pennsylvania senator last week.

A national CBS/New York Times poll released Tuesday had Santorum at 30 percent among likely Republican primary voters, to 27 percent for Romney, Paul at 12 percent, and Gingrich at 10 percent.

In Michigan, Santorum is now out front at 39 percent to 24 percent for Romney, 12 for libertarian Paul and 11 percent for Gingrich in a survey released Monday by Public Policy Polling.

PDB pledges

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the sweltering summer, they said.

"Like the previous year, we will enforce a load-management plan. We have also decided to stop use of electric heaters, cut illegal power connections, and discourage use of extensive lightings in shops and refuelling stations during May-June period," a senior official of Power Development Board (PDB) told BSS.

PDB has already requested Petrobangla to take steps to ensure adequate gas supply to its gas-fired power plants for uninterrupted electricity generation, he said adding "availability of gas is a matter of concern for us".

"If the gas is diverted to our plants from other major gas consumers like the fertiliser factories, PDB will be able to generate an additional 800-1,000 megawatt (MW) power everyday," the official said adding that distribution lines in the capital had already been repaired for

smooth power supply.

The country is currently facing a power shortage of at least 1,000 MW, which is forcing the PDB to ration power at different areas.

Officials familiar with the power development projects said PDB has set a target of generating 5,945 MW power from all the gas-run plants.

The generation of the targeted power is possible if the PDB gets 920 to 990 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf) during the 2011-2012 fiscal, they said.

PDB currently receives 588 mmcf to 747 mmcf gas from Petrobangla against its demand for 920 mmcf.

It can seldom go with full load at Ghorashal and Raozan power plants due to shortage of gas, PDB officials said.

If it is able to run these two power plants in full swing, it can feed Chittagong city and divert additional power to capital and other parts of the country, sources said.

St Jude's students in action

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consecutive rounds to be among the top three spellers.

The first phase was a knockout round, giving 19 out of 25 the opportunity to move to the second round.

The competition got tougher as students had to spell words like "benefactor", "monotonous" and "immigrate" to qualify for the next round which had nine competitors out of 19.

"Pronunciation" was one of those words that knocked students out of the race in this round.

After a tight battle, Hiya Islam, Farhan Siddique and Samin Akhand came out as three top spellers from the school.

"I feel happy to be one of the three. I will surely buy

the Spellato dictionary to prepare for the upcoming competition with students from other schools," said Samin, a student of the seventh grade.

Hiya, who spelt "outlandish" correctly to win the battle, said, "I will definitely try my best to win the competition. I feel great to win this in my school today (yesterday)."

Later in Summerfield International School, Umair Yameer Ahmed and Akif Khan of grade seven and Tasvir Hassan Majumder of grade eight qualified as the best three spellers from the school through the contest.

This is not the end for those who could not win their school rounds as students from grade six to ten

can still participate and qualify in the Spelling Bee contest by playing the game online, logging into www.champs21.com. Only their best scores will be registered, and they can play as many times as they want in order to do better.

S M Abdul Alim, an English teacher of St Jude's International School, appreciated the initiative and said, "This is a great event, inspiring children around the country to improve their knowledge and spelling skills. It is going to be a good family show on TV and the misuse of the internet by children will surely be reduced now as the online game encourages them to learn more."

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Asian Development Bank
BANGLADESH RESIDENT MISSION

INVITATION FOR BIDS

FOR
AIR HANDLING, BMS, FIRE DETECTION & SUPPRESSION AND CCTV FOR BRM OFFICE EXPANSION AT SHER-E-BANGLA NAGAR, DHAKA - PACKAGE B

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the construction of air handling, BMS, fire detection & suppression and CCTV for its Bangladesh Resident Mission (BRM) office expansion at Plot No. E-31, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207. The expansion of the existing two storied building will be at the second and third level with a built-up area of 1,292 sqm (second floor 1,260 sqm and third floor 32 sqm.) and a finishing area of 817 sqm and connected external services work in the ground.
- National competitive bidding will be conducted in accordance with ADB's Single-Stage: One-Envelope bidding procedure and is open to all bidders from eligible source countries.
- Bidders must meet the following main criteria to be considered (i) a bidder's net worth, calculated as the difference between total assets and total liabilities, should be positive; (ii) minimum average annual construction turnover of Taka40 million, calculated as total certified payments received for contracts in progress or completed within the last three years; (iii) demonstrated experience under construction contracts in the role of contractor, subcontractor, or management contractor for at least the last five years prior to the bid submission deadline; (iv) demonstrated participation as contractor, management contractor, or subcontractor, in at least one contract within the last three years, each with a value of at least Taka17 million that have been successfully or are substantially completed and that are similar to the proposed works; (v) demonstrated having the key equipment listed in the bidding documents; and (vi) demonstrate access to, or availability of, financial resources such as liquid assets, unencumbered real assets, lines of credit, and other financial means of minimum Taka8 million, other than any contractual advance payments.
- The bidding document, in the English language, is available for inspection and may be obtained by interested bidders from the address below upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Taka2,500.00 (or U.S.\$ 30) Sundays-Thursdays from 16 February (between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM) and until 18 March 2012 at 4:00 PM.
- Bids must be delivered to the address below at or before 3:00 PM on 19 March 2012.** All bids must be accompanied by a bid security in the amount as specified in the bidding document. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at the address below at 3:15 PM on 19 March 2012.
- ADB will not be responsible for any costs or expenses incurred by bidders in connection with the preparation and delivery of bids. ADB reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the bidders.

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