

Bangladesh's shaky position

Earthquake preparedness is vital

SUNDAY'S 4.6 magnitude earthquake comes as yet another warning of the country's vulnerability to such disasters. While Bangladesh has developed a more or less efficient natural disaster preparedness plan in terms of floods and cyclones following the devastations of the last four decades, earthquakes are another story.

The country lies on a major geological faultline and has suffered several significant, and some less significant, tremors since the 20th century. However, earthquakes cannot be forecast and thus the key lies in developing a preparedness plan to minimise the effects and mitigate the aftermath of such a disaster.

First of all, the entire concept of urban planning must be reconsidered in the light of the possibility of such catastrophes. Currently, most high-rise buildings in the capital have not been constructed with proper precautionary measures, making the city one of the riskiest in the world. The building code should be rewritten as a legislative act and strictly enforced. Existing structures which need to be renovated or even demolished in the interest of public safety should be done so.

Secondly, the adequate financing, equipping and training of the fire department and civil defence and their coordination with the disaster management ministry are vital as they are the first responders to such disasters in terms of emergency services and rescue operations.

Finally, it is important to be well-prepared for the aftermath of the catastrophe, which includes medical services and shelters.

On top of it all, awareness of the general public, not to mention the relevant authorities, in order to reduce panic and know what should be done in the event of an earthquake, is important.

We hope the authorities will devise a comprehensive plan ensuring all the above in order to minimise the risk of death, injury and damages to people and infrastructure in the event of such potentially devastating disasters.

Return of the opposition to the House

What we saw was what we did not want to see

THE BNP's return to the parliament was a much anticipated event. In fact that was one of the popular demands of the people in general that the BNP ought to attend the parliament, and ventilate their points in the House. It was a welcome event. Regrettably, much of our expectations of a productive and healthy session were dashed to the grounds by what we witnessed transpire on the floor on the very first day of the BNP's joining the parliament.

It seemed to us that after a long absence of one year, and whatever might have been the motivation of the BNP to rerun to the parliament, a healthy debate was perhaps the last thing in their mind. One got the impression from the very first sentence of the very first person of the BNP to take the floor that its MPs were in fact raring for a fight and they had come not to make the parliament effective but more to create commotion in the House.

Given that there are so many important issues of national concern that must be addressed by the House, the level and intensity of personal rancour and bitterness that pervaded the atmosphere of the House, generated through the most insensitive, rude and indecorous utterances by some of the members from either side of the aisle, leaves little hope that anything substantive would ever get done at all.

In this regard we are constrained to comment on the utterances of the leaders of both the AL and the BNP that leaves much to be desired. While it is they that should be setting examples to their party MPs, regrettably, it is their remarks, which in recent times have gone beyond the norms of civility, that have spurred their party MPs to spew venom at their opponents. They are taking the wrong cue.

We would urge upon both the leaders not only to set the tenor of behaviour by personal examples, they must strictly demand the best of behaviour of their parliamentarians and let them know that crossing the line would not be tolerated. They must understand that the people have very little stomach for what they are witnessing in

KHURSHEDUL ALAM

THE present government has attached utmost importance to the maritime affairs of the country; therefore, it has taken substantive, practical and time-bound initiatives to resolve maritime boundary disputes with the neighbouring coastal states as well as to ensure legal entitlements of the people of Bangladesh to the apportionment of maritime area and exploitation of maritime resources therein.

Bangladesh took a calculated risk of going to court and handed over the letter of arbitration in October 2009, and then case was transferred to the ITLOS. Finally the verdict was announced by the ITLOS on March 14.

Salient features of the judgment of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea:

**Territorial Sea:** Bangladesh placed two alternative proposals for delimitation of 12 nautical miles (nm) territorial sea. The Tribunal disagreed with Bangladesh that the 1974/2008 Agreed Minutes between Bangladesh and Myanmar constituted a binding international agreement. It, however, agreed with Bangladesh that "St. Martin's Island is a significant maritime feature" entitled to a full 12nm territorial sea. It, therefore, rejected Myanmar's argument that the island should be limited to a territorial sea of as little as 6nm. The territorial sea boundary adopted by the Tribunal consists of an equidistance line between St. Martin's Island and the Myanmar mainland, almost exactly identical to the 1974 agreed boundary as argued by Bangladesh.



WAHID ADMAN / DRIK NEWS

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**Exclusive Economic Zone/ Continental Shelf within 200M:** The Tribunal rejected Myanmar's argument that the strict equidistance line was equitable even though it prevented Bangladesh from reaching out to 200nm. The Tribunal agreed with Bangladesh that the concave shape of its coast was a relevant circumstance necessitating an adjustment to the equidistance line. The Tribunal, therefore, substantially adjusted the equidistance line in order to alleviate the effects of the concavity on Bangladesh and enable it to reach 200 nm across a large area and opening of Bangladesh to the Continental Shelf beyond 200nm.

The Tribunal arrived at almost exactly the same result as that proposed by Bangladesh; i.e., a 215° line. The result is fully consistent with the "equitable solution" international law requires. For over 30 years, Myanmar had insisted on an unadjusted equidistance line that cut Bangladesh off well short of its 200 M limit rather cut off at 130nm only. Bangladesh now has access to a full 200 M across a broad area. It also has broad access to its rights in the outer continental shelf beyond 200 M.

**Continental Shelf beyond 200M:** The Tribunal rejected Myanmar's argument that it should decline jurisdiction over the issue of the

delimitation in the outer continental shelf. The Tribunal also rejected Myanmar's argument that Bangladesh has no rights in the outer continental shelf because the delimitation should stop it from ever getting there. In delimitating the outer continental shelf, the Tribunal decided that the concavity of Bangladesh's coast continued to be relevant. Any cut-off of Bangladesh should be minimised. Accordingly, the Tribunal decided to extend the same 215° line it adopted within 200 M into the area beyond 200 M. The Tribunal did not specify the end-point of the 215° line but rather put an arrow on the end of it, saying it should continue in the same direction until it reaches the area where the interests of a third state (namely, India) are affected.

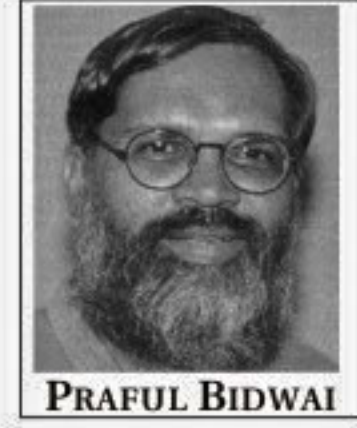
Never once either in negotiations -- or even before the Tribunal -- did Myanmar recognise Bangladesh's rights beyond 200 M. It insisted that Bangladesh should be kept out of the area altogether. Now, as a result of the Judgment, Bangladesh will enjoy sovereign rights over a sizable portion of outer continental shelf. The Tribunal's decision to accept jurisdiction is a path-breaking one. In so doing, it became the first international tribunal to delimit in the outer continental shelf.

Although the Tribunal did not specify the end point of the boundary, the result is clear. The Bangladesh-Myanmar boundary continues along the 215° degree line until it meets the location of the future boundary between Bangladesh and India, which will be decided by the arbitral tribunal. When the India judgment is delivered, Bangladesh's maritime boundaries will be fully and finally delimited.

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PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

The end of the nuclear illusion



PRAFUL BIDWAI

A year after the Fukushima a nuclear catastrophe began in Japan, the world has a historic chance to end one of the

biggest-ever frauds played on the public to promote a patently unsafe, accident-prone, expensive and centralised form of energy generation based upon splitting the atom to boil water and spin a turbine. Candidly, that's what nuclear power generation is all about.

The promise of boundless, universal prosperity based on cheap, safe and abundant energy through "Atoms for Peace," held out by US President Dwight Eisenhower in 1953, was deceptive and meant to temper the prevalent perception of atomic energy as a malign force following Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Eisenhower was a hawk committed to building up the US nuclear arsenal from under 1,500 to over 20,000 warheads. He sought to "compensate" for this by dressing up nuclear energy as a positive force and camouflage the huge US military build-up.

The nuclear promise was based on unrealistic assumptions about safety and being "too cheap even to metre." The US Navy transferred reactor designs developed for nuclear-propelled submarines to General Electric and Westinghouse for free. The US also limited the nuclear industry's accident liability to a ludicrously low level.

The world has since lost over \$1,000 billion in subsidies, cash losses, abandoned projects and other damage from nuclear power. Decontaminating Fukushima alone is estimated to cost \$623 billion, not counting treatment costs for thousands of likely cancers.

All of the world's 400-odd reactors can undergo a catastrophic accident. They will remain a liability until

decommissioned (entombed in concrete) at huge public expense -- one-third to one-half of the cost of building them. They will also leave behind nuclear waste, which remains hazardous for thousands of years, and which science has no way of storing safely.

All this for a technology which contributes just 2% of global final energy consumption! Even the Economist magazine, which long backed nuclear power, calls it "the dream that failed."

Nuclear power declined on its home ground because it became too risky and "too costly to hook to a

about democracy, public opinion or safety standards.

Nor are India's rulers moved by these. They are desperate to award the reactor contracts promised to the US, France and Russia for lobbying for the US-India nuclear deal in the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Dr. Manmohan Singh has even stooped to maligning Indian anti-nuclear protesters as foreign-funded, as if they had no minds of their own, and as if the government's priority wasn't to import reactors.

Nuclear power is bound up with secrecy, deception and opacity, which clash with democracy. It

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metre." The US hasn't ordered a new reactor since 1973. Western Europe hasn't completed a new reactor since Chernobyl (1986).

As a former member of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission says: "The abiding lesson [from Three Mile Island meltdown (1979)]... was that... reactor operators... could turn a \$2 billion asset into a \$1 billion cleanup job in about 90 minutes."

Nuclear power is now on the run globally. The number of reactors operating worldwide has fallen from the historic peak of 444 (2002) to 429. Their share in global electricity supply has shrunk from 17% to 13%. And it's likely to fall further as some 180-plus 30 years-old or older reactors are retired. Just about 60 new ones are planned.

Post-Fukushima, nobody will build reactors without big subsidies or high state-guaranteed returns -- or unless they are China or India. China's rulers don't have to bother

evokes fear and loathing and can only be promoted by force while violating civil liberties.

A recent BBC-GlobeScan poll shows that 69% of people in 23 countries oppose building new reactors, including 90% in Germany, 84% in Japan, 80% in Russia and 83% in France. This proportion has sharply risen since 2005. Only 22% of people in the 12 countries which operate nuclear plants favour building new ones.

Nuclear reactors are high-pressure high-temperature systems, in which a fission chain-reaction is barely checked from getting out of control. But controls can fail for many reasons, including short circuits, faulty valves, operator error, fire, earthquakes or tsunamis.

No technology is 100% safe. High-risk technologies demand a meticulous, self-critical and highly alert safety culture, which most countries lack.

The world has witnessed five core meltdowns in 15,000 reactor-years.

At this rate, we can expect one core meltdown every eight years in the world's 400-odd reactors. This is simply unacceptable.

Yet, the nuclear industry behaves as if this couldn't happen. It has a collusive relationship with regulators, highlighted in numerous articles on Japan, including one by Yoichi Funabashi, chair of the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation: "We Japanese have long prided ourselves on being a society that provides safety and security... [But this] has been matched by our aversion to facing the potential threat of nuclear emergencies..."

He adds: "Any drills for a nuclear emergency were meticulously designed to avoid giving any impression that an accident could possibly progress to the severity of a meltdown.... But avoidance ultimately translated into un-preparedness."

Nuclear power is bound up with radiation, which is harmful in all doses, at each step of the nuclear fuel cycle. Nuclear plants routinely expose surrounding populations to harmful radioactive and chemical emissions.

Nuclear power is costlier not just than coal- or gas-based electricity, but increasingly, renewable energy. The European Pressurised Reactor of the crisis-ridden French firm Areva, and earmarked for Jaitapur in India, is now quoting for \$6,500-plus per kilowatt, compared to under \$2,000 for wind turbines.

Nuclear power cannot be a solution to the climate crisis. Its potential contribution is too small, it's too slow to deploy, and too expensive. By contrast, renewables have already emerged as a safe, flexible, quickly deployable solution, with a typically lower carbon footprint than nuclear power.

The world needs a new climate-friendly, safe, decentralised energy system with smart grids and high efficiency. Nuclear power can have no place in it.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- March 20
- 1602**  
The Dutch East India Company is established.
- 1815**  
After escaping from Elba, Napoleon enters Paris with a regular army of 140,000 and a volunteer force of around 200,000, beginning his "Hundred Days" rule.
- 1916**  
Albert Einstein publishes his general theory of relativity.
- 1952**  
The United States Senate ratifies a peace treaty with Japan.
- 1956**  
Tunisia gains independence from France.
- 1985**  
Canadian paraplegic athlete and humanitarian Rick Hansen begins his circumnavigation of the globe in a wheelchair in the name of spinal cord injury medical research.
- 2003**  
2003 invasion of Iraq: In the early hours of the morning, the United States and three other countries begin military operations in Iraq.