



Participants of a discussion on the preparedness for earthquake disaster management at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Preparedness way too precarious

FROM PAGE 16
The AFD made its contingency plan a decade ago dividing Dhaka city into eight zones for earthquake disaster management.

It was important to ensure enforcement of the national building code immediately and introduction of automatic shutdown of gas and electricity supply lines in the event of an earthquake to reduce the impact of the disaster and the number of casualties, Sadeque observed.

It was also crucial to have the central command and also the second and third alternatives for an effective and efficient rescue operation, said Kazi Golam Nasir, chief architect of the Department of Architecture.

He said Bangladesh should learn management lessons from Nepal, incorporate chapters on earthquake and fire hazard in academic curriculum, prepare local database on the number of inhabitants and location of safe buildings with the help of ward councillors.

He particularly put emphasis on taking caution against marking any certain building as vulnerable without well-founded assessment.

Three active fault lines of the tectonic plates in Modhupur, Dauki and eastern boundary may trigger a major earthquake anytime with the epicentre within Bangladesh territory, says Prof Syed Humayun Akhter, chairman of geology department at Dhaka University.

The government buildings constructed recently by the Public Works Department were comparatively safer in earthquakes, but the old ones were risky, said Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department Md Kabir Ahmed Bhuiyan.

Housing and urban development made on soft soil by filling marshy land stand most vulnerable to a major earthquake, according to the experts.

Out of 127-square kilometre Dhaka city corporations area, around 35 percent land had been prepared by earth filling and one-third of it had

RECOMMENDATIONS

- SHORT-TERM**
- a) Increase public awareness
 - b) Install auto shutdown devices in gas and electric supply lines
 - c) Ensure central command and control
 - d) Assess vulnerability of government buildings
 - e) Ensure building occupancy certificate
- MEDIUM-TERM**
- a) Enforce national building code
 - b) Prepare ward-level database
 - c) Procure required rescue equipment
 - d) Ensure at least 20-feet wide road
 - e) Place electric cables underground
 - f) Ensure water sources for firefighting
- LONG-TERM**
- A) Retrofit/rebuild key government establishments
 - B) Build sea ports and int'l airports for foreign aid
 - C) Stop unscientific filling of marshy land

already been used for structures, said Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of civil engineering at Buet and founding general secretary of Bangladesh Earthquake Society.

Such marshy land had been filled up without any scientific soil improvement method and the rest of the soft soil was also made ready for erecting structures, he observed.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, a noted civil engineer and founding president of Bangladesh Earthquake Society, who chaired the discussion, said, "Wetlands have been filled up indiscriminately and the softer the soil is, the more vulnerable it is to earthquakes."

Conservable flood flow zones earmarked in the Detailed Area Plan of Dhaka city had been massively filled up mainly for housing with the relevant authorities keeping mum, said Prof Isharat Islam of urban planning at Buet.

With the current DAP expiring this year, Rajuk was preparing a Regional Development Plan, in which the earthquake concern had not been incorporated despite availability of relevant findings and data, she added.

Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, chairman of the department of disaster science and management of Dhaka University, however said 65 percent of 300-square-kilometre Dhaka metropolitan area surrounded by four rivers was earth-filled marshy land that remained extremely susceptible to a major earthquake of 7.5 magnitude on the Richter scale with the epicentre within or on the border of Bangladesh.

An estimated 78,000 structures out of 3.26 lakhs were likely to collapse in the event of such a jolt with the epicentre in Dhaka, he said, adding that there was no tangible preparedness of the relevant government agencies.

He put emphasis on public awareness on probable earthquake disasters and life-saving safety measures.

Anwar Zahid, deputy director of groundwater hydrology at Bangladesh Water Development Board, said groundwater table depletion did not necessarily mean earthquake risk had increased in Dhaka.

Md Eftekarul Alam, a water and environment engineer, said river pollution had to stop as a major earthquake might lead to contamination of deeper aquifer with highly polluted river water and lead to a drinkable water crisis.

Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said building safety had to be ensured at design level and multiple use of a single building must be avoided.

PWD Superintendent Engineer Ahsan Habib and former IAB president Mubasshar Hussain also spoke, while Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, and Brig Gen (ret'd) Shahedul Anam Khan, editor, Op-Ed and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star were present.

Bodies of Australians executed in Indonesia arrive home

AFP, Sydney

Prime Minister Tony Abbott said he was confident Australia could restore its relationship with Indonesia despite anger over the execution of two drug convicts, whose bodies reportedly returned home yesterday.

Andrew Chan, 31, and Myuran Sukumaran, 34, were killed by firing squad on Wednesday over their role in a plot to bring heroin to Australia from the Indonesian resort island of Bali, despite international pleas to Jakarta for clemency.

Abbott said he understood the dismay and anger over the executions but respected Indonesia's sovereignty.

"It really was terrible that these cruel and unnecessary executions went ahead," he told reporters in Sydney.

"Our anger and our grief, sadly, is not going to bring those two young men back.

"The important thing now is not to do anything that would make a difficult situation worse."

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was unable to confirm reports that the men's bodies were on a flight which touched down early Saturday in Sydney.

The flight was carrying Sukumaran's parents, brother and sister and Chan's wife Febyanti Herewila, who married him on the eve of his execution.

Congress, BJP

FROM PAGE 16
in 2011 when the chief minister had visited Dhaka with then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Gogoi belongs to the Congress party which has already conveyed to the federal government that the party will oppose any move to keep Assam out of the amendment bill.

He pointed out that the protocol's provisions were integral part of the 1974 agreement between India and Bangladesh. The protocol is an enabling legislation to implement LBA.

Trashing out the claim that Assam will lose 268.40 acres of land to Bangladesh, he said as a result of the re-demarcation, approximately 714 acres of land in Lathitilla area will formally become part of Assam in India while 193.85 acres of land in Kalabari (Boroibari) and 74.55 acres in Pallathal will formally go to Bangladesh.

"268.40 acres of land are already under adverse possession of Bangladesh. Therefore, Assam will formally get a net land area of 445.6 acres with reference to the Radcliff Line", Gogoi said.

The LBA has three components - (i) Demarcation of 6.5-km undemarcated land boundary in three sectors - 1.5-km is at Doykhata under Nilphamari district with West Bengal, 2-km at Muhurir Char in Feni with Tripura and 3-km at Lathitilla in Moulvibazar with Dumabari in Assam (ii) Exchange of 162 enclaves and (iii) settling adversely possessed land.

There were disputes between the two countries about the issue of adversely possessed land in 25 points along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam.

According to foreign ministry officials, West Bengal will lose 1,957 acres

but will get 2,398 acres, while Meghalaya will lose 41 acres and get 250 acres.

Bangladesh will lose 650 acres to West Bengal and Meghalaya, and 445 acres to Assam.

India's 119th Constitution Amendment Bill aims to facilitate the transfer of 51 Bangladeshi enclaves to India.

In return, 111 Indian enclaves will permanently become part of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, there is confusion over Dhaka's stance on New Delhi's move to exclude Assam from the proposed bill.

Officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said they were unaware of any such move to amend the proposed bill.

However, highly placed sources at the Prime Minister's Office and High Commission of India said Dhaka has given green signal to New Delhi to go ahead with its new plan following assurances that India is committed to fully implement the agreement.

Asked about the Indian move, Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi said he is not aware of any proposal from the Indian side regarding amendment of the LBA.

"I have not seen the proposal and therefore, I cannot comment on it," he said.

"But our position is that the Land Boundary Agreement was signed by the two governments. It cannot and will not be changed. It must be implemented in full. Whether the government of India does it through one parliamentary amendment or more, it is for them to decide," he added.

Gowher Rizvi, however, said he is confident that the LBA will be implemented and the government of India will honour the agreement through its full implementation.

BNP might've had killing plot for polls day

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the BNP-Jamaat alliance might have had a plot to kill people during the city corporation elections as they had done during their 92-day blockade and hartals.

She came up with the observation while exchanging greetings with Buddhist religious leaders and distinguished persons of the community on the occasion of the Buddha Purnima at her official residence Gono Bhaban. Buddhists Religious Welfare Trust organised the programme.

Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat alliance could not materialise its evil design as the law enforcement agencies were active and on sharp vigil alongside the mass people.

"Killing people is their [BNP-Jamaat] movement... all of a sudden they boycott the city corporation elections, they might have had some evil intentions, but could not materialise that as the mass people and law enforcement agencies were on sharp vigil," she said.

The Awami League chief also alleged that the BNP might have planned to withdraw from the city corporation elections after killing some more people.

"But they didn't get the chance. There was a tremendous vigilance both by the mass people and law enforcement agencies," she said.

She mentioned that the BNP-Jamaat nexus had announced to participate in the elections, but they were not there in the field.

"There was neither any representative [of the BNP] nor any agent. All of a sudden they boycotted the elections after a couple of hours of the beginning of the elections."

The BNP-Jamaat alliance never tolerates the welfare of people, Hasina said, adding, "That's why they kill people through arson attacks."

Religious Affairs Minister Motiur Rahman, State Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing and President of the CHT Buddha Bhikkhu Sangha Srimat Progyananda Mahathero, among others, spoke on the occasion.

British PM in 'career-defining' election slip

AFP, London

Politicians are often accused of pursuing their own interests and British Prime Minister David Cameron did little to dispel the impression Friday when he called next week's general election "career-defining".

"This is a real career-defining, country-defining election that we face now in less than a week's time," the Conservative leader said as he urged people to vote on May 7.

He was addressing workers at the ASDA supermarket chain's headquarters in Leeds, northern England.

Opposition Labour leader Ed Miliband immediately seized on the apparent slip, accusing Cameron of being more focused on his legacy than the state of the country.

"That tells you the difference between us. He thinks this election is about him. I think it's about you the British people," he told voters on the campaign trail.

Cameron later denied that he had slipped by referring to the election as career-defining as well as crucial for the country.

"I meant both," he told ITV television.

"I was looking out at that big audience at ASDA and for them it is career-defining."

"I meant both country-defining and career-defining."

Breakthrough

FROM PAGE 16
was diagnosed helped researchers at Harvard and Northwestern University make the breakthrough.

Their research, published in the online journal Ebiomedicine, found protective caps on the ends of chromosomes, which prevent DNA damage were more worn down those who went on to develop cancer.

Known as telomeres, these were much shorter than they should have been and continued to get shorter until around four years before the cancer developed, when they suddenly stopped shrinking.

"Because we saw a strong relationship in the pattern across a wide variety of cancers, with the right testing these procedures could be used eventually to diagnose a wide variety of cancers," said Dr Lifang Hou, the lead study author.

"Understanding this pattern of telomere growth may mean it can be a predictive biomarker for cancer... We found cancer has hijacked the telomere shortening in order to flourish in the body."

'No more survivors'

FROM PAGE 16
As well as updating the death toll to 6,621, Dhaka put the number of injured at 14,023. More than 100 were also killed in India and China.

While multiple teams of rescuers from more than 20 countries have been using sniffer dogs and heat-seeking equipment to find survivors in the rubble, no one has been pulled out alive since Thursday evening.

Nevertheless, relatives of those missing have refused to abandon hope.

"I believe he must still be trapped and will be rescued alive," said Suntali Tamang, whose husband Langte, 41, was believed to be in the same neighbourhood of Gongabu where the last survivors were found.

"I reached here three days ago after he went missing," she told AFP after travelling to Kathmandu from the family's home in the northeastern Dolakha district.

"He was the family's breadwinner and I am praying for him to be brought back safely."

The exact scale of the disaster was still to emerge, with the mountainous terrain in the vast Himalayan nation complicating the relief effort.

With relief workers still to reach many areas, it is likely to be some time before authorities come up with a comprehensive list of people missing but police said the task of compiling names had begun.

The list so far only contained 204 names, national spokesman Kamal Singh Bam told AFP, as relatives had only just started approaching authorities.

"We have only just begun to draw up the list, the number will obviously go up," added the spokesman.

The numbers of foreigners who have died was also unclear with around 1,000 EU citizens still unaccounted for in Nepal, according to diplomats.

Tens of thousands of survivors have been living out in the open in Kathmandu in the week since the quake, having either lost their homes or fearful that aftershocks could bring teetering buildings to the ground.

"We are not living in this tent out of choice. We are here because we have nowhere to go," said Dhiraj Thakur who has been camped out for the last week in Tundikhel Maidan, an open area in the centre of the city.

"I have seven family members with me which includes my wife, my sister, nephew and my parents. The rented room where we were living in Kathmandu is now in ruins.

"Most of our stuff is lost and even the person for whom I used to work as a driver is dead, so I don't know where I will get the money for renting another room," said the 24-year-old.

Shambhu Thapa, who worked as a cook in a hotel before it was wrecked in

the quake, had decided to move back to his home village with his wife and three children now that he had no means of supporting them in Kathmandu.

"Even our village home is damaged, but at least it is our own land," he said after another night out in the open.

Rameshwor Dangal, of Nepal's National Disaster Management Division, said many were waiting to receive aid supplies or else be airlifted to safety.

"In many areas people are not getting relief and it is natural that they are unhappy about it," he told AFP.

UN aid chief Valerie Amos yesterday said she was extremely concerned that Nepal's customs authorities were slowing the delivery of aid.

Amos said she had reminded Prime Minister Sushil Koirala that Nepal had signed an agreement with the United Nations in 2007 that provides for simpler and faster customs clearance for relief aid in the event of a disaster.

"He has undertaken to ensure that happens, so I hope that from now we will see an improvement in those administrative issues," she told AFP.

In Sri Lanka, visiting US Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States had provided \$22.5 million in aid relief to Nepal.

US experts

FROM PAGE 3
United States House Foreign Affairs Committee arranged the hearing, "Bangladesh's Fracture: Political and Religious Extremism", in Washington DC on Thursday.

Two experts called on the international community as well as the US to coordinate efforts with India to use its influence with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to convince her to reach out to the opposition.

Bloggers Avijit Roy and Oyashiqur Rahman were murdered in February and March.

Jay Kansara, director of Government Relations of Hindu American Foundation, called that both Bangladesh and US governments declare Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir illegal organisations and Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs) respectively.

Lisa Curtis of the Heritage Foundation said Jamaat-e-Islami's youth organisation has a reputation for militancy and provoking violent clashes with opposing groups.

She said Sheikh Hasina should provide political space to the BNP.

Noted Bangladeshi-American educationist Prof Ali Riaz said Indian policymakers need to take a long-term approach instead of being driven by a myopic view, as "an unstable Bangladesh will pose more danger to India than any other alternatives."

Press Freedom Day today

FROM PAGE 16
media owners, said the annual report by human rights group Freedom House recently.

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in a statement yesterday urged the government and other stakeholders to create a congenial atmosphere where the media can play its role freely and impartially.

Though Bangladesh's position remained unchanged at 115 among 199 countries and territories studied in 2014 by the US based Freedom House, the report said the media are "partially free" in the South Asian country.

A total of 63 were rated "free" for the news media, while 71 were "partly free" and 65 "not free". Only 14 percent of the world's inhabitants live in countries with a free press, it said.

However, Bangladesh has slipped down two places in World Press Freedom Index 2015 of Reporters Without Borders. Bangladesh ranked 146 among 180 countries this year while Bangladesh was in the 144th position among 178 countries last year, said a recent RWB report.

According to Ain O Salish Kendra, this year 106 incidents took place in between January and March in the country when journalists were harassed, tortured or received threats from government officials, law enforcers and others and cases were filed against the media for publishing news.

According to the rights body, two journalists were killed while one died after being tortured by police and another went missing in 2014.

A total of 239 newsmen were tortured last year. Of the victims, 21 were tortured by law enforcers while 56 were criminals and 78 were tortured by different political party men, ASK said in its 2014 annual report.

At least 10 journalists were assaulted allegedly by the ruling party men during the recent city corporation elections in Dhaka and Chittagong, while some reporters were robbed of their mobile phones, handbags and cash.

Also, polling officers, law enforcers and the ruling party men allegedly prevented reporters, photographers and cameramen from entering polling centres.

Under the circumstances, World Press Freedom Day is being observed today with the theme "Let Journalism Thrive"

In a joint message yesterday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said "...journalism must be able to thrive, in an enabling environment in which they [journalists] can work independently and without undue interference and in conditions of safety."

"The world has recently witnessed horrendous attacks against journalists -- at least one journalist is killed each week, in conflict and non-conflict zones. We must redouble efforts to enhance the safety of journalists and put an end to impunity, and this is the goal of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists," they said.

To mark the day, Bangladesh Federal Union Journalists is set to hold a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club at 11:00am today.

TIB In yesterday's statement, TIB expressed its concern and frustration over the "unexpected interference" on media, torturing journalists and barring them from discharging their duties by a section of law enforcers.

The watchdog also expressed concern over the killing of bloggers by religious fundamentalists, murder of journalists Sagar and Runi two years back and other security concern related to journalists.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the government, in one hand, enacted the Rights to Information Act-2009 and the Whistleblower Protection Act-2011 in its last tenure, on the other hand it amended the section 57 of Information and Communication Technology (amendment) Act-2013 and added some provisions to the National Broadcast Policy, which has posed threats to the freedom of expression of media and individuals.

He condemned the "unwritten embargo imposed discriminatorily" on some journalists to enter the office of the prime minister.

Iftekharuzzaman also urged the journalist leaders to enact and implement ethical code of conduct for professional development and to ensure objectivity and impartiality in journalism, said the statement.

The UN declared May 3 as World Press Freedom Day in 1993 and the day has been observed since then.