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Disaster warning falls on deaf ears

After last month's deadly landslide, authorities hardly took any effective steps to prevent deaths; 5 of a family perish in latest incident in Sitakunda hills

MINHAJ UDDIN and ARUN BIKASH DEY,
Chittagong, and HASAN JAHD TUSHER, Dhaka

It is a glaring example of how ineffective measures by the local administration and people's carelessness can lead to loss of lives.

Only five weeks ago, rain-induced landslides killed over 170 people in the hill districts, 120 of them in Rangamati alone.

Such a high death toll should have been an eye-opener both for the administration as well as for those living precariously in the hill slopes. But yesterday's deaths of five people in a Sitakunda landslide are evidence that last month's warning fell on deaf ears.

Settlements by cutting hills have been rising in the port city, like in other hill districts, but the local administration hardly took any effective measures to stop such risky living, environmentalists say.

The administration's role in evacuating people from hill slopes has been limited mostly to giving warnings, they add.

After receiving early warnings of landslides in Chittagong and elsewhere on Thursday, the administration asked the people through loud speakers to leave their homes and take shelter at government

shelter centres.

But the people took the warning lightly and remained in their houses, which led to the latest casualties, officials said.

Edris Ali, vice-president of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA), Chittagong unit, said it was saddening that five more people lost their lives just weeks after so many deaths in the hill areas.

"Had the administration worked sincerely, it could have prevented these deaths," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"To prevent deaths in landslide, permanent eviction of risky hill dwellers is a must. But the administration is not doing that," he noted.

Contacted, Director General of the department of disaster management Reaz Ahmed said, "Together with the local administration, we tried our best to evict people from the risky hill slopes after learning about the possible landslide."

The administration evicted most of the people from vulnerable areas, he said, adding that many people did not pay heed to the warning.

"Time has come to apply force to evict

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PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Rakib, son of Rabeya Khatun, cries his heart out after she died in a landslide in Jungle Salimpur village of Sitakunda yesterday. The disaster left five members of a family dead. Inset, the ruins of the landslide-hit house.



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EDRIS ALI
VICE-PRESIDENT,
BANGLADESH PARIBESH
ANDOLON, CTG UNIT

Batons, teargas not enough

Police now sue 1,200 students over demo; damaged eyes of injured protester 'in critical condition'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The college students were unarmed while protesting at Shahbagh on Thursday. Nobody saw them damage any vehicles or attack anyone. In fact, police pounced on them with batons and fired teargas shells and rubber bullets.

Yet, a case was filed against around 1,200 unnamed students of seven government colleges on charges of attempting to kill policemen, rioting with lethal weapons and damaging property.

Witnesses and students say the allegations are false.

The other charges include obstructing police from discharging duties and holding unlawful assembly.

Some onlookers, who witnessed the protest in Shahbagh, saw no brick chips or sticks, let alone any arms, in the hands of the protesters.

No law enforcers reportedly came under attack or got hurt. But one of the students, Siddiqur Rahman of Titumir College, suffered serious injuries in the eyes when police lobbed a teargas shell on their procession at close range

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Congested Dhaka city needs more space

Development of eastern part to help ease population density, congestion of the city, Prof Anthony Venables of University of Oxford tells The Daily Star

SOHEL PARVEZ

Development of the eastern part of Dhaka would help reduce population density and traffic congestion in the entire city, allowing it to stay vibrant and be more productive for a rapid economic growth.

"East Dhaka project will obviously create housing, jobs and increase the total area of the city... it will take pressure off the existing city," Prof Anthony Venables of University of Oxford's Economics department told The Daily Star in an interview on Thursday.

Venables, who has published extensive works in the fields of international trade and spatial economics, and economic geography, was in the capital last week to attend a conference on development



options for Dhaka towards 2035.

The World Bank organised the event where he presented a paper on the city's possible scenario by that year. The paper was authored by professor Venables and three other researchers.

Venables said Dhaka "is amazingly a vibrant city. But it is also a messy city. It needs to have more space. And eastern Dhaka is certainly an opportunity to get more urban space".

According to the WB, Dhaka's urbanisation originated along the northern corridor of the central region, and then expanded westward. Its eastern half is mostly rural but has the potential to develop rapidly.

Accounting for 40 percent of the city's surface,

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CASE AGAINST UNO AL suspends Barisal leader

Admin officers' association demands withdrawal of case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the face of severe criticism, the Awami League has suspended a party leader for his "over enthusiasm" to file a case against UNO Tariq Salman, who had published a portrait of Bangabandhu, drawn by a child, on an invitation card.

Obaidullah Sazu, a leader of the Barisal AL, was also served a show-cause notice asking him to explain why he should not be expelled from the party, General Secretary Obaidul Quader told reporters after a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhavan yesterday.

The suspension came a day after the PM criticised the filing of the case against the UNO and his subsequent arrest, which



Obaidullah Sazu

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WHEN'LL THE HASSLES END?

Commuters have been suffering for the last one year because of the poor and dangerous condition of the 15km stretch of the Gabtoli to Swarighat road in the capital. The situation worsens in the rainy season as large potholes, puddles and mud put pedestrians and vehicles in extreme difficulty. Spotty repairs add to the problem as dumped materials, including bricks, narrow down the road. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN