

Wishing all a safe and joyous Eid

Let us spread the joy of Eid around through charity and generosity

As Ramadan draws to a close, let us carry forward the valuable lessons it instils in us. As a nation, we should strive to be more charitable, moderate, and grateful—virtues that Ramadan inspires. These values should not be confined to the month of fasting but should guide our actions throughout the year, fostering a more compassionate and just society. Let us hope that, as the month of Ramadan nears its end, we will have rekindled these values within ourselves and, indeed, passed them on to others.

At the same time, the joyous occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr is fast approaching. In anticipation of celebrating with their loved ones, tens of thousands of people have already begun leaving Dhaka by train, bus, and launch. Reports indicate that this year's Eid journey has been relatively smoother for most travellers, thanks to the strategic measures implemented by the authorities. The introduction of special train and bus services, along with enhanced traffic management, has helped ease congestion. We commend the government for its efforts to improve the transport sector and hope that such measures continue to be refined and expanded in the future.

However, despite these improvements, there have been reports of passengers being overcharged in certain areas. We urge the authorities to remain vigilant and take strict action against those exploiting travellers during this festive season. Additionally, with a significant exodus from major cities—particularly Dhaka—law enforcement agencies must remain extra cautious to ensure that law and order are maintained. The risk of accidents, extortion, and theft increases during this period, and it is crucial for security personnel to remain on high alert on highways, in public transport hubs, and across both urban and rural areas.

We also call on citizens to prioritise their safety and security during this time. Travellers should be cautious while commuting and follow traffic and safety guidelines. Moreover, as we embrace the spirit of Eid, let us extend a helping hand to those less fortunate. Many underprivileged individuals struggle to partake in the celebrations due to financial constraints. We urge individuals, businesses, and organisations to come forward with donations, food assistance, and support so that the joy of Eid is shared by all, regardless of economic status.

Eid-ul-Fitr is a time of unity, compassion, and generosity. Let us ensure that these values remain at the core of our actions—not just during Eid, but throughout the year—so that Bangladesh continues to progress as a nation built on empathy, harmony, and social responsibility. We wish everyone a safe and joyous Eid.

What if a major earthquake strikes Dhaka?

Myanmar earthquake should serve as a wake-up call

We are deeply saddened by the loss of life and widespread devastation caused by a major earthquake that struck Myanmar and parts of Thailand on March 28. Reportedly, a 7.7-magnitude quake occurred northwest of Sagaing, a city in central Myanmar, followed just minutes later by a 6.7-magnitude aftershock. The quakes caused extensive destruction, including collapsed buildings, damaged bridges, and buckled roads across large areas of Myanmar. Mandalay, the nation's second-largest city with a population of over 1.7 million, was particularly hard hit. The death toll in Myanmar has already exceeded 1,000, with nearly 2,400 individuals injured. The full extent of the catastrophe is yet to emerge as the rescue efforts are still ongoing.

This earthquake, one of the most powerful to strike Myanmar in decades, serves as a stark reminder of Dhaka's earthquake vulnerability. Reportedly, Bangladesh is located in one of the world's most tectonically active regions, where the Indian, Eurasian, and Burmese Plates converge. The Myanmar earthquake occurred along the Sagaing Fault, which is part of the Indo-Burma subduction zone, and Bangladesh also sits in it. Therefore, experts have warned that, without urgent preparatory measures, Dhaka could face catastrophic consequences in the event of a major earthquake.

Research also revealed that the Indo-Burma subduction zone, covering Sylhet and Chattogram, is building up stress that could trigger a powerful earthquake of up to magnitude 8. Similarly, the Dauki Fault remains a highly active seismic area. Over the past decade, the region has witnessed 550 earthquakes of magnitude 4 or above. Experts warn that these frequent smaller tremors could be a precursor to potentially larger quakes.

Dhaka also faces a high risk of catastrophic earthquake damage due to dense urbanisation, poor building regulations, and its geological location. A RAJUK study indicates that a 6.9-magnitude earthquake along the Madhupur Fault Line could destroy 865,000 buildings, resulting in up to 210,000 deaths, 229,000 injuries, and financial losses exceeding \$25 billion, with \$44 billion required for rebuilding.

We, therefore, urge the government agencies concerned to expedite our earthquake preparedness before it is too late. A comprehensive plan should be developed to demolish unsafe buildings across the city and conduct regular inspections to ensure structural safety. Using earthquake-resistant technologies in new constructions and strictly implementing the building codes has become crucial at this stage. Additionally, we need to design and implement extensive awareness and training programmes, including regular drills in schools, offices, etc., as part of preparedness. Let's not neglect the threat of a major earthquake.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Failed assassination attempt against Reagan
On this day in 1981, in Washington, DC, barely two months after his inauguration as the 40th president of the United States, Ronald Reagan was shot and seriously wounded by would-be assassin John W Hinckley, Jr.

EDITORIAL

DHAKA'S EARTHQUAKE GAMBLE

Built on sand, bribery, and blind faith



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If Dhaka were a person, it would be that overconfident, pedestrian jaywalking across the highway—blind to danger, immune to consequence, and utterly convinced that trucks will swerve in time. But nature doesn't believe in last-minute swerves. Nature, like a strict schoolmaster, has a way of reminding cities that arrogance has a price. And Dhaka, with its labyrinth of high rises, its tangled mess of traffic, and its people who live life with an enviable mix of bliss and oblivion, stands precariously on the edge of a seismic disaster.

Every few months, we feel a tremor. Some shake our coffee cups, others rattle our windows, and a few make us rush to Facebook to post dramatic status updates about how we "almost died." But as quickly as these discussions arise, they dissipate, like a morning fog evaporating under the glare of the midday sun. After all, we are a resilient bunch. We survived decades of political instability, relentless traffic, floods that turn streets into Venice, and power outages that make candlelit dinners a daily routine. Surely, a little shaking of the ground beneath our feet is nothing to panic about?

The true marvel of Dhaka isn't just its resilience but its sheer talent for ignoring imminent doom. The 2015 Nepal earthquake was a wake-up call, but in typical Dhaka fashion, we hit snooze and went back to constructing high-rises on sand and silt. Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (RAJUK), our esteemed urban planning body, continues to dish out building permits like candy at a carnival, often with about as much concern for structural integrity as a roadside jhalmuri seller has for hygiene standards.

Experts have been screaming from their ivory towers (which, ironically, might be the first to collapse in a major quake) that Dhaka is sitting atop an active seismic zone. But what are facts in the face of real estate profit? The show must go on! Developers keep building, officials keep approving, and the citizens? Well, we continue our existence in a city where roads double as garbage dumps and public parks are an endangered species.

One might assume that, with all the warnings, the government has at



least a half-baked plan to deal with a large-scale earthquake. You'd be half-right—because the plan is indeed half-baked. The official response strategy is a dazzling display of bureaucratic optimism. It involves emergency drills that are conducted once in a blue moon, usually with more photo-ops than actual training. The fire department, bless their hearts, is already struggling to reach burning buildings in the city's daily gridlocks; in an earthquake scenario, it's more likely that rescuers will need rescuing themselves.

The roads, those narrow veins of chaos, will become impassable within minutes. Collapsed buildings, broken bridges, and fallen metro rails will ensure that emergency services are as effective as an umbrella in a tsunami. And let's not even talk about hospitals. Most are already overwhelmed by a normal day's patient load. What happens when thousands are crushed under debris, waiting for help that will never come?

Let's not put all the blame on the government. We, the residents, have our own admirable level of apathy. Our emergency preparedness strategy consists of reciting religious verses and

hoping for the best. Earthquake safety training? Most people don't even know where the emergency exits are in their own apartment buildings (spoiler: most buildings don't have them). In fact, if an earthquake were to strike during rush hour, you'd find half the city live-streaming the disaster while the other half debates on social media whether this is a punishment for our sins.

Old Dhaka, fires break out as gas lines rupture. There's no water to douse the flames—because, let's be honest, even in normal times, many areas barely get running water. The death toll rises not just from collapsed buildings but from stampedes, panic, and lack of medical care. The lucky ones are those who die quickly. The unlucky ones wait under rubble, their cries for help

FILE VISUAL: STAR

fading into silence.

The greatest tragedy of all? We know this will happen. We have the data, the research, the expert opinions. We have seen what happened in Nepal, in Turkey, in Mexico, and recently in Myanmar-Thailand. Yet, we continue to build recklessly, live carelessly, and plan inadequately. We place our faith in fate, in luck, in divine intervention—anything but actual preparedness.

There is still time to act, but not much. Retrofitting weak buildings, enforcing stricter construction laws, creating open spaces, and conducting genuine emergency drills could save thousands of lives. But will we do it? Or will we continue our blind march forward, whistling a happy tune, hoping that the ground beneath our feet remains merciful?

Dhaka is a city of miracles, a place where logic takes a backseat, and hope is the currency of survival. But hope alone won't save us when the earth decides to remind us who's really in charge. And when that day comes, the only question left will be: did we do enough to save ourselves, or did we simply wait for disaster with open arms and empty plans?

Should Bangladesh be divided into four provinces?

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TAYEB HUSAIN

Recent media reports suggest that the Public Administration Reform Commission of Bangladesh has proposed dividing the country into four administrative provinces as a means of decentralisation, aiming to establish a more efficient administrative system. However, it remains unclear whether this proposal also entails replacing the existing unitary parliamentary democracy with a federal system of governance. While federalism may be advantageous for vast nations such as the US, Russia, Indonesia, and India—where diverse social, cultural, and religious groups coexist—it is entirely unnecessary for a small and relatively homogeneous country like Bangladesh. A unitary parliamentary democracy remains the most suitable model for our governance.

What Bangladesh truly requires is an effective and manageable administrative framework rather than an expansion of the flawed system we currently endure. The administrative structure we have inherited, dating back to colonial rule in 1793, is profoundly obsolete and continues to hinder national progress, exacerbating poverty and contributing to social, cultural, and political deterioration.

No modern, civilised nation retains such an antiquated system, which bestows excessive power upon administrative officials—such as upazila nirkabi officers (UNOs), deputy commissioners (DCs), and divisional commissioners—who function almost as viceroys. While certain superficial

fully autonomous administrative unit tasked with implementing and enforcing its decisions. This unit would oversee essential public services, including primary and secondary education, healthcare, infrastructure, law and



FILE VISUAL: SHEIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

modifications have been made, the core structure remains largely unchanged and retains its colonial character. In essence, the UP would bear direct responsibility for the well-being of every citizen. A more in-depth discussion of the advantages of a strengthened UP system warrants further exploration.

It is imperative that we dismantle this antiquated framework and transfer all administrative authority to the union parishad (UP), thereby eliminating the district and upazila administrative tiers. The UP should be reconstituted as the primary governing authority at the local level. Urban and rural areas alike should be divided into UPs, with all members and the chairperson elected through a party-list proportional representation system (PRS), where feasible. The UP should function as a robust local legislative body, complemented by a

order, social welfare, and employment opportunities for both men and women. In essence, the UP would bear direct responsibility for the well-being of every citizen. A more in-depth discussion of the advantages of a strengthened UP system warrants further exploration.

By abolishing the offices of the DCs and UNOs, we would effectively curtail excessive bureaucratic dominance, ensuring that governance is truly by the people and for the people. Rather than being subjected to distant bureaucratic rule, citizens would be served by locally accountable representatives within the UP.

Dividing Bangladesh into four provinces would necessitate an expansion of the bureaucracy at both the

central and provincial levels, inevitably leading to increased administrative expenditures, corruption, nepotism, and favouritism. The long-term financial, social, and moral transformation of Bangladesh—particularly in rural areas—can only be achieved through a robust local government, not through the reinforcement of the colonial administrative "iron frame." Advanced nations owe much of their stability and efficiency to the strength of their local governance structures. The US and UK, despite their imperfections, remain effective democracies largely due to the resilience of their local government systems.

Introducing a federal structure in Bangladesh would be catastrophic, not only due to the financial burden of sustaining multiple layers of government but also because of the nation's low levels of education and the deeply entrenched culture of political corruption. Such a transition would drive Bangladesh towards fragmentation, particularly given its sensitive geopolitical reality.

Therefore, Bangladesh requires a strong central government wherein authority is concentrated within a single national framework—eschewing regional governments while ensuring that local UPs are empowered to function under national directives. Laws and governance must remain uniform across the nation and should be executed solely by the local government (UP) through its own independent administrative apparatus. The sooner we abolish the ineffective and corrupt DC and UNO offices, the sooner Bangladesh can progress towards a truly people-centric governance system, underpinned by an efficient and accountable UP administration.