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## Friday's jolt lays bare Dhaka's fragility

Rajuk slammed as risky buildings go unchecked for years

HELEMUL ALAM, DIPAN NANDY and AHMED DEEPTO

Building owners often chase short-term gains during construction, flouting rules as Rajuk looks the other way. Every time a disaster strikes, experts raise alarms and the agency vows action. Then some more days go, the dust settles, and everything returns to the old, perilous rhythm.

After Friday's 5.7-magnitude earthquake, which caused at least four deaths in Dhaka, experts warned that far greater losses await if the authorities fail to act now.

According to the Dhaka district administration, at least 14 buildings in the capital sustained damage from the quake, while the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakka (Rajuk) put the number at over 50.

"We are still working. Many more buildings will be identified," Rajuk Chairman Md Riazul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday morning.

He said the next step was an immediate assessment of all buildings in Dhaka, at least those under the Detailed Area Plan (DAP), to determine which structures cannot withstand even minor shocks.

Rajuk is, by mandate, responsible for monitoring buildings from planning through construction and ensuring that rules are followed thereafter.

Criticising the agency for chronic failures, Professor Munaz Ahmed Noor, vice president of the Bangladesh

### RECOMMENDATIONS BY EXPERTS

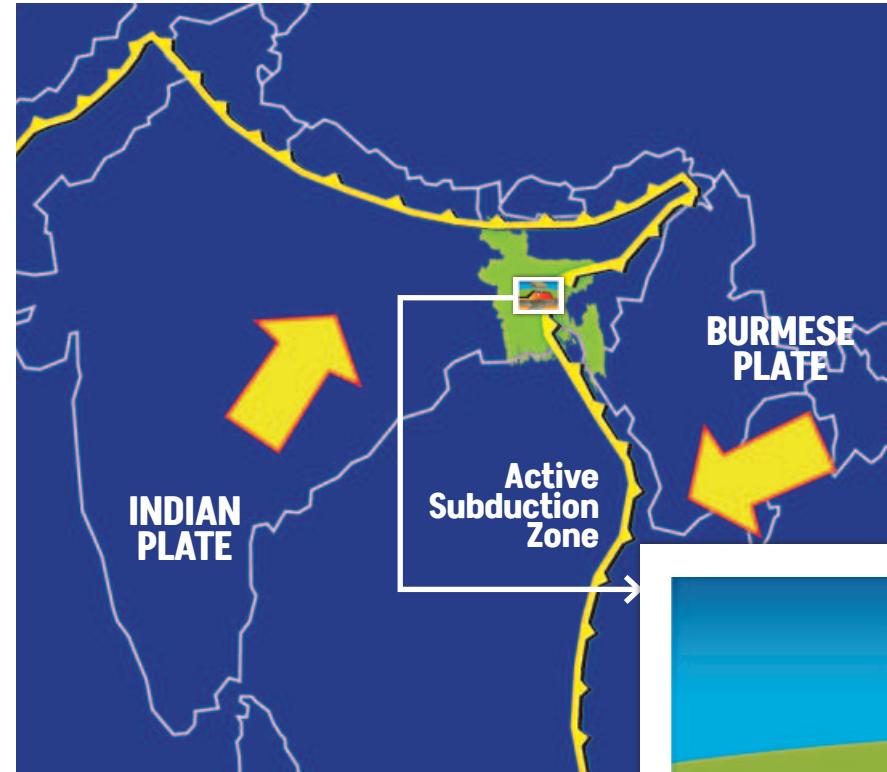
- Assess all damaged buildings, prioritise them by risk
- Demolish or retrofit unsafe buildings
- Strengthen Rajuk's manpower, monitoring capacity

Earthquake Society, said Rajuk "always wakes up after a major incident," largely because it lacks the manpower for sustained oversight.

Prof Munaz said everyone should follow the building code very strictly when constructing any structure. In the past, the National Building Code was neither properly regulated nor enforced, which led many buildings to be identified as vulnerable in the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Survey, he said.

"The loads used in design must be applied correctly, and after the design

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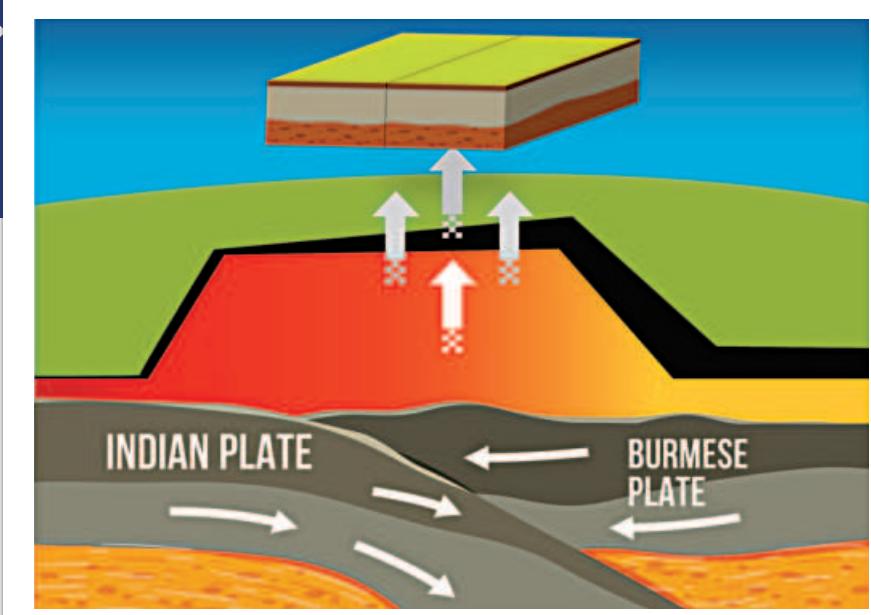


Indo-Burma subduction zone accumulating strain capable of generating a significant seismic event, up to a magnitude of nine'

Professor Syed Humayun Akhter, Seismologist, former faculty, Geology department, DU

I think these earthquakes are foreshocks of a bigger one. We must be prepared for that,"

Prof Mehedi Ansary, civil engineering BUET



## DU closed for 2 weeks to assess tremor risks

JnU suspends classes, exams today

### DU CORRESPONDENT

As the country experienced its third earthquake since Friday morning, the authorities yesterday decided to close Dhaka University for two weeks to assess tremor risks and carry out necessary renovations of residential halls.

Meanwhile, all classes and examinations at Jagannath University (JnU) will remain suspended today for the same reason.

At an emergency meeting of the DU Syndicate late last night, the authorities instructed residential students to vacate their halls by 5:00pm today.

The decision followed protests from female students of Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall, who demanded a safer campus.

Around 12:15am, many of them gathered in front of the 20-storey Swadhinota Bhaban, a residential building meant for third class staff, to take shelter there.

Students of Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall had already occupied 33 of the building's 144 vacant flats since Friday night, after a 5.7-magnitude earthquake shook the capital and triggered panic.

Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall Union Vice-President Nishita Zaman said, "A group of hall residents took position on the building's ground floor at 10:00pm, demanding safe accommodation. Minutes earlier, I heard they were trying to break the locks of vacant rooms to move in."

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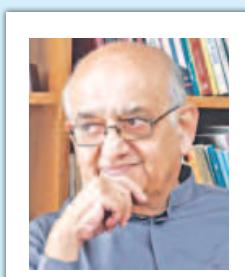
## Rethink strategy as global economic power shifts

Speakers urge policymakers at Bay of Bengal Conversation 2025



"If we want to reposition ourselves in the global system, we need to have smarter and more dynamic policy makers. We need to also have a much more adventurous and creative private sector who must get out of the 'LDC cocoon'..."

Noted economist Rehman Sobhan



### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh must rethink its place in a fast-changing global system where economic and strategic power is shifting towards the Global South, eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said yesterday.

Speaking at the "Speed Talk" on the opening day of the Bay of Bengal Conversation 2025 in the afternoon, organised by the Centre for Governance Studies in the capital, he focused on the political economy of the changing international order and how Bangladesh

should respond.

The three-day conference, themed "Rivals, Ruptures, and Realignments", will continue until November 24. It brings together 200 speakers, 300 delegates and more than 1,000 participants from 85 countries.

Prof Sobhan recalled that in the 1970s, developing countries pushed for a new economic order to counter "the then-hegemonic influence of the North Atlantic powers".

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## Prepare for referendum on polls day

Govt directs EC

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has asked the Election Commission to prepare for a referendum to be held alongside the upcoming 13th national election scheduled for February next year.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said the EC has received a letter from the government instructing it to make preparations for the referendum.

Speaking at a workshop organised by the Asian Network for Free Elections at a city hotel yesterday, the CEC said a referendum law would be enacted next week. Once the law is passed, the EC will begin its preparations.

Terming the arrangement of both the election and the referendum on the same day a challenge, he said no previous commission had ever faced such a situation.

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Agricultural workers sun-drying paddy at the Hatchery intersection in Khulna's Dumuria upazila. Men and women from nearby areas work here daily during the Aman harvest, earning Tk 5 per maund plus 300 grams each of rice and khud for parboiling, drying and breaking paddy. A team of 12 to 14 workers can process about 200 maunds in three to four days. The photo was taken on Friday.

## Experts flag growing underground stress

PINAKI ROY

Three earthquakes hit near Dhaka in just 32 hours, raising concern as seismologists warn they could be foreshocks of a much stronger one.

The first, a strong 5.7-magnitude quake on Friday morning, killed 10 people in the capital, Narsingdi, and Narayanganj.

A second quake, measuring 3.3 on the Richter scale, was felt in Narsingdi's Palash around 10:30am yesterday. The third, a 3.7-magnitude tremor, followed at 6:06pm, according to a Met office bulletin.

All three had their epicentres in Narsingdi, next to the capital.

Asked whether Bangladesh's many underlying fault lines raise the risk of more earthquakes, seismologist Prof Syed Humayun Akhter said the presence of fault lines alone is not the issue.

"The real concern is whether the energy accumulating in a subduction zone can cause a big quake," said Prof Humayun, who has studied earthquakes for 40 years.

Dhaka lies close to the Indo-Burma subduction zone, where the Indian plate dives beneath the Burma plate at the country's eastern margin. Experts have warned for nearly two decades that being situated near such a zone means sitting

atop a seismic time bomb.

Seismologists say this vast zone, from Sylhet down to Teknaf, is steadily accumulating strain capable of triggering a major earthquake.

"The energy that was locked in this subduction zone [a place where one tectonic plate slides under another]

**Dhaka remains deeply vulnerable because of its geology, density, and high economic exposure.**

for a long time is now being released in Narsingdi in small segments," said Prof Humayun.

He said it is impossible to forecast whether the next event will be a massive one.

"If the energy continues to come out in small segments like it did on Friday, then possibly there will be multiple small quakes. But we have calculated that the energy accumulated there could create a quake between magnitude 8.2 and 9," he added.

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## Israeli airstrikes kill 21 in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said 21 people were killed and dozens more wounded in multiple Israeli air strikes on the Palestinian territory yesterday, further straining the fragile truce between Israel and Hamas.

Both sides have accused each other of violating the ceasefire, which came into effect on October 10.

The Israeli military said an "armed terrorist" had crossed the so-called Yellow Line boundary within the Gaza Strip, behind which Israeli troops have withdrawn, and fired at soldiers, in a "blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement".

The Israeli military said that in response to the incident in southern Gaza, on a route used for humanitarian aid deliveries in the territory, it "began striking terror targets in the Gaza Strip".

Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defence agency which operates under Hamas authority, told AFP there were "21 martyrs this evening in five separate Israeli air strikes, in a clear violation of the ceasefire in Gaza".

AFP has sought a comment from the Israeli military on yesterday's air strikes.

The first reported strike targeted a vehicle in the Al-Rimal neighbourhood in western Gaza City.

An AFP photographer at the scene witnessed the burned out car.

Passers-by approached the wreckage, with children appearing to be trying to salvage food from inside.

Israel and Hamas agreed to a US-brokered ceasefire that came into effect last month after more than two years of war.

On Wednesday, Gaza saw one of its deadliest days since the truce between Israel and Hamas came into effect, with officials reporting 27 fatalities.