

CHATTOGRAM CITY

# Quake risk looms amid building code violations

ARUN BIKASH DEY, *Chattogram*

While Chattogram city is already vulnerable to severe earthquakes due to its geographical location, experts warn that unplanned urbanisation, widespread building code violations, and poor monitoring have further heightened the risks.

At least 70 percent of the port city's multi-storey buildings are at risk of collapse in the event of a major earthquake of magnitude 7 or higher, they said.

According to the Chattogram Development Authority, the city has 4,11,721 buildings - 3,87,757 are up to six storeys high, 13,480 are seven to ten storeys, 415 are



PHOTO: RAJIB RAJHAN

## AT A GLANCE

- 70% of multi-storey buildings at risk in Ctg
- Many of the city's 4.11 lakh buildings built violating codes
- Groundwater over-extraction weakening foundations
- CDA lacks structural/design cell, faces manpower shortages
- CDA marked at least 100 buildings for demolition

## EXPERTS CALL FOR

- Identify vulnerable buildings
- Retrofit risky structures
- Demolish irreparable buildings
- Ensure strict compliance with building codes
- Make expert supervision mandatory

**A six-storey building in Chattogram's Mansurabad area tilted and leaned onto an adjacent structure following Friday's earthquake.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

11-15 storeys, 50 are 16-20 storeys, and nine are above 20 storeys.

Experts say a significant portion of these high-rises is vulnerable because many were constructed in violation of building codes. In coastal areas like Chattogram, construction materials also deteriorate faster, while narrow roads can severely obstruct rescue operations after a major earthquake.

"The failure to properly follow the plans approved by the regulatory authority has increased the risk of collapse during an earthquake," said Dr Muhammad Rashidul.

Experts say the current situation is the result of years of regulatory negligence.

During the 5.7-magnitude quake on November 21, a six-storey building in

Monsurabad tilted further towards an adjacent building. It had previously tilted during a 2016 quake, along with 11 other buildings in the city. A 6.1-magnitude earthquake in 1997 caused a five-storey building to collapse, killing over 20 people.

Small quakes, experts say, are often warnings of a major disaster.

"There is a risk of damage to 65-70 percent of multi-storey buildings in the port city in case of an earthquake of magnitude 7 to 8," said CDA chief engineer Kazi Hasan Bin Shams.

He said unlike Rajuk, CDA does not have a structural and design cell, and its manpower shortage makes regular inspections even more difficult.

Dr Rashidul said in Bangladesh, Chattogram and Sylhet fall in the highest-risk category. Yet many residents ignore building codes, and numerous buildings are constructed without proper expert supervision.

"CDA cannot avoid responsibility and must employ more manpower to monitor these irregularities," he added.

To minimise risks, Dr Rashidul emphasised identifying vulnerable buildings and retrofitting them with modern machinery and equipment.

Very old structures that cannot be repaired should be demolished, he said.

Residents, he stressed, must strictly follow building codes while constructing new buildings.

He also called for reducing groundwater extraction and prioritising the use of surface water.

Delwar Majumder, former president of the Institute of Engineers Bangladesh, Chattogram, said it is the duty of relevant government authorities to ensure compliance with building codes. "While we cannot construct fully earthquake-proof buildings due to high costs, we can at least make them earthquake-tolerant and minimise casualties," he said.

In Chattogram, the main concern is the lack of space for rescue due to the absence of emergency entry and exit routes in many buildings, he added.

Asked why the tilted buildings from the 2016 earthquake have not been demolished, the CDA chief engineer said the authority can only identify risky structures, not knock them down. Demolition is the responsibility of the Chattogram City Corporation.

"We have identified 100 risky buildings and submitted the list to CCC," he said.

Contacted, CCC Mayor Shahadat Hossain said he was not aware of the details. "I am speaking to my officials and will find out why the risky buildings have not yet been demolished," he said.

## Injured during

## Life inside DU female halls

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the rest are men, he added.

He also said the hospital is providing the highest level of care and has made special arrangements to ensure extra attention for the patients.

Meanwhile, 66 people received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital after being injured in the earthquake. Of them, five are still undergoing treatment.

"One of them is in the ICU. His condition is critical," said DMCH Director Brig Gen Md Asaduzzaman.

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Dr Mahbuba Sultana, provost of the hall, visited all damaged areas and checked on the injured student. "The buildings are old, but engineers confirmed there is no immediate danger. We're doing our best to comfort the students," she said.

said. Security has been increased, and gates will remain locked only at night, with the main gate open.

At Shamsunnahar Hall, resident Marzia Zahra Momo said the tremor caused panic but no injuries.

"Some areas developed cracks, and the chief engineer came to inspect everything," she said.

Sanzida Masud Momo, general secretary of the hall union, reported cracks in six washroom pillars in the Mid and Honours Buildings,

one damaged room on the fifth floor, and plaster falling from several areas.

The Extension Building near the kitchen also developed cracks. The hall accommodates nearly 1,400 students, with around 96 on each floor.

Herem Akhter Era, social

welfare secretary of Sufia Kamal Hall Union, said the hall's four buildings sustained minor structural damage.

Pratyasha Building had cracks in one room; Pradipta Building saw damage in seven rooms and one common space; Pratay Building experienced cracks in two rooms and a corridor.

Each room houses six to eight students, while the only legal guest room accommodates 25 girls temporarily until they receive permanent rooms, she added.

The hall's provost Prof Salma Nasrin said engineers had checked all buildings. "By the grace of Allah, all my students are safe. There is no cause for concern, and the authorities will take the best steps for their safety," she said.

At Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnisa Mujib Hall, VP Tasnim Akhter Alif Nabila said minor cracks were found, but there was no major structural damage.

However, the chief engineer declared the house tutor's residential area unsafe due to the age of the building.

She added that all students were safe and no injuries occurred.

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