

# Take immediate action to prepare for earthquakes

Experts urge govt at Star roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the country shaken three times in just 32 hours and bearing a history of major earthquakes, experts yesterday urged the government to take immediate and coordinated action to minimise casualties and damage.

Infrastructures with high public gatherings like schools, hospitals and critical facilities should be checked without delay, said Israt Islam, a professor at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

Inspecting buildings is a major task, she said, adding that government buildings must be checked by the government and private building owners must be compelled to carry out inspections.

"This can be done immediately, and it will reduce the risk," she said at the roundtable titled "Wakeup Call for Dhaka: Earthquake Risks and Public Safety" organised by The Daily Star at its office in Dhaka.

About the hospital readiness, she said the health authorities should identify in the shortest time possible how many hospitals are equipped to handle patients from disastrous events like an earthquake.

"After an earthquake, hospitals won't treat routine illnesses -- they will treat injured people," she said.

If an 8 magnitude earthquake occurs, over 2 lakh deaths and 4 lakh injuries are feared, said Tajul Islam, director of operations of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-Term
Inspect, seal off high-risk buildings
Assess hospital capacity, identify alternative routes
Prepare field hospitals for immediate response
Conduct earthquake rehearsals

  

Mid-Term
Complete building assessments within 6-9 months
Implement 3rd-party structural assessments
Introduce awareness edn at schools, community levels
Set up institute for urban safety, resilience

  

Long-Term
Establish national earthquake research institute
Enforce Building Regulatory Authority under BNBC
Begin gradual retrofitting of vulnerable buildings
Capacity Enhancement of Rescuers

"How will we treat these patients? Hospitals must be prepared, but 40 percent of the hospital buildings may be in affected zones. We need field hospitals immediately."

He stressed on the golden hour, which is crucial for saving lives.

"We must clear routes, ensure emergency access and coordinate all agencies under the ministry of disaster management and relief."

Field hospitals must have doctors, power backup, oxygen and first-aid capabilities.

"We must identify alternative routes like helicopter and water access as 60 percent of the land routes could be unusable."

He called for a national earthquake rehearsal involving fire service,

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The struggle to cope with rising salinity, depleting sweet water, and diminishing livelihoods continues on the frontlines of climate change in the rural south west. This is the 2nd of a 5-part series.

# A daily battle for every drop

Shrinking ponds, salt-filled tubewells leave thousands relying on murky water to survive

WASIM BIN HABIB, back from Khulna, Satkhira

Carrying an aluminium pitcher, 27-year-old Hosneara walks nearly two kilometres through Dakhin Kalikapur village in Khulna's Koyra upazila every morning. Her destination: a shrinking pond that still holds some murky water.

A thin, yellowish film floats on its surface. She sweeps the scum aside with her pitcher and begins filling it with the faintly greenish liquid.

"We filter the water using a piece of cloth and then drink it. The pond is our only source of water. It's our lifeline," said Hosneara, a mother of two, adjusting the pitcher on her hip.

All other nearby ponds turned brackish long ago, and the tubewells in the area spew salty water.

Her family needs two pitchers of water a day, so she returns in the



afternoon for a second round. But when she stays home due to illness, the family must buy a jar of purified water for Tk 20, plus an additional Tk 20 for a rickshaw-van to deliver it.

"For poor people like us, buying water regularly is a luxury. We measure every drop," Hosneara, whose husband works in a small tailoring shop, told this correspondent in mid-October.

Her daily ordeal mirrors the struggle of thousands living along Bangladesh's southwestern coast, where safe drinking water has become scarce due to rising salinity. Close to the sea, Khulna and Satkhira have long battled saline intrusion caused by a combination of climate change and damaging human activities.

Rising sea levels, erratic rainfall, tropical cyclones, tidal surges, reduced river flow due to upstream diversion,

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Resident students of Dhaka University's Ruqayya Hall leave with their belongings yesterday morning, as evacuation continued till 5:00pm. Following the post-earthquake emergency, the university declared all residential halls closed until December 6.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

16 months on, quake safety assessment facility awaits nod for launch

DIPAN NANDY

A project to construct and equip an institute to assess the seismic vulnerabilities of Dhaka's buildings ended 16 months ago, but the Rajuk renewed preparations for its launch only after three earthquakes shook the country in just 32 hours.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) yesterday sent a letter to the housing and public works ministry, along with a draft Deed of Trust for the proposed institute, namely the Urban Safety and Resilience Institute (USRI).

The construction of a building for the USRI in Mohakhali under the World Bank-funded Urban Resilience Project cost Tk 150 crore while it took another Tk 100 crore to procure specialised equipment from the UK and several European countries.

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# Bangladesh on track for LDC graduation

Says govt report to UN panel

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh remains on track to sustainable graduation from the least-developed country (LDC) category, reflecting its resilience and strong policy commitment, according to the annual country report sent by the government to the UN Committee for Development Policy (UNCDP).

The report was submitted to the UN panel early this month, said Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, special assistant to the chief adviser.

"The submission of the report does not mean the government is leaning one way or the other on graduation -- this is an annual practice by the governments of all countries."

The UNCDP will assess the report and will give feedback, he said.

The report comes at a time when businesses, especially exporters, are demanding that the government take measures to defer Bangladesh's graduation by up to six years as they are not prepared to face the challenges in the post-LDC era.

Bangladesh is projected to lose around \$8 billion in exports after graduation as the duty-free and quota-free market access it currently enjoys will no longer be available.

The country remains on track to officially leave the LDC category on November 24 next year upon completion of the five-year preparatory period that began in 2021, said the report termed Bangladesh Annual Country Report 2025.

The interim government mentioned the US's reciprocal tariffs, the ongoing energy shortage and rising energy costs, financial sector

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Dhaka again seeks Hasina's extradition after death sentence

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has once again reached out to New Delhi, formally requesting the extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who was sentenced to death last week by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) for crimes against humanity committed during the July uprising.

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain confirmed the matter to reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

The foreign ministry had earlier sent a letter to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs for Hasina's repatriation in December last year.

India, however, did not respond.

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Army to extend full support to govt, EC in polls Says General Waker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Army General Waker Uz-Zaman yesterday said the army would extend full cooperation to the government and the Election Commission in the upcoming national election.

"We are heading towards an election, and in that election, we will properly cooperate with the government and cooperate with the Election Commission so that we can have a good election."

He made the remarks while attending a reception for Bangladesh Army's gallantry award recipients, valiant freedom fighter soldiers and their family members, alongside the ceremony for peacetime medal recipients.

The event was held at the Army Multipurpose Complex in Dhaka Cantonment.

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Every day, these women walk miles in search of fresh water, as local sources turn saline. The photo was taken recently in Khulna's Koyra upazila.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN