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Boost readiness as earthquake risk remains high  
Experts tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh faces a high risk of major earthquakes due to its location along three active tectonic plate faults, experts warned yesterday, stressing that preparedness, public awareness and modern technology are crucial to reducing casualties and damage.

The warning came at a seminar titled "Earthquake Awareness, Safety Protocol and Emergency Preparedness", organised by JCX Developments Ltd at a city hotel.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ⦿ Reinforce buildings
- ⦿ Push for safer structures
- ⦿ Ensure strict building standards
- ⦿ Strengthen emergency response

Speakers stressed the need for structurally sound and earthquake-resistant buildings, audits of existing structures, strict quality control in construction, strengthened emergency response capacity and an effective early-warning system.

They also underscored the importance of regular community drills, awareness campaigns and preparedness at family level.

Experts noted that Bangladesh sits at the junction of the Indian, Myanmar and Eurasian tectonic plates.

The Dauki Fault in Sylhet, the

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## HUMAN TRAFFICKING New law drafted as 95% of cases end in acquittal

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The government has finalised a new law aimed at ensuring justice for trafficking victims, responding to the fact that an average of 95 percent of migrant smuggling cases ended in acquittal over the last four and a half years.

The advisory council on Thursday approved the draft Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2025, introducing stronger measures to combat trafficking and hold perpetrators accountable.

Briefing the media after the meeting at the Foreign Service Academy, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said ensuring justice for victims is a core objective of the new law.

The new ordinance updates the legal framework to meet international standards, particularly the UN protocol on migrant smuggling.

Under the ordinance, individuals suspected of involvement in trafficking may face freezing of bank accounts, asset seizure and travel restrictions during investigation, subject to court order. It also addresses the growing use of online platforms for recruitment, he added.

A review of case disposal records paints a grim picture of how trafficking cases have fared in the justice system.

According to the home ministry database, in 2020 courts disposed of 14 cases, and 13 ended in acquittal, with 43 accused walking free. In 2021, both



### ORDINANCE AT A GLANCE

- Clarifies provisions related to investigation
- Strengthens investigators' authority, streamlines how cases move to trial
- Improves witness protection
- Seeks to prevent victims from being pressured into withdrawing complaints
- Introduces measures to prosecute syndicates that send migrants abroad

disposed cases ended in acquittal. In 2022, all 34 disposed cases ended in acquittal, involving 150 accused.

The volume surged in 2023, with 415 of 436 cases ending in acquittal and 1,617 accused cleared. In 2024, courts disposed of 363 cases, of which 342 resulted in acquittal, releasing 1,250 accused.

The first six months of 2025 followed the same pattern – 132 of 141 cases ended in acquittal, with 535 accused walking free, the ministry data show.

Officials involved in drafting the ordinance said it clarifies provisions on

investigation, inquiry and cognisance -- areas that previously caused confusion and delays.

They said the new law strengthens investigators' authority, streamlines how cases move to trial, improves witness protection and seeks to prevent victims from being pressured into withdrawing complaints.

The ordinance also introduces dedicated measures to prosecute criminal syndicates that send Bangladeshi migrants abroad through irregular channels.

It creates a separate chapter on the smuggling of migrants (SOM), a crime that had long remained legally undefined despite its widespread presence.

The absence of clear provisions previously meant many SOM cases were filed as trafficking offences even when they lacked the required elements -- often resulting in acquittal.

One such case was filed with Sabujbagh Police Station in July 2019.

A 28-year-old man paid Tk 4.65 lakh for a promised job in Iraq but was taken to Libya instead, and his family later paid Tk 2 lakh more in extortion. He was eventually sent back to Bangladesh.

Although the incident was smuggling in nature, the case was filed under the 2012 trafficking law. All six accused were acquitted in January 2024.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration and Youth Platform, said many Bangladeshis attempting to

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Voter confidence fragile ahead of national polls  
Debapriya tells discussion



### KEY ISSUES RAISED

- ⦿ Rule of law, corruption-free governance
- ⦿ Women's empowerment, improved living standards
- ⦿ Freedom of expression, better education quality
- ⦿ Strengthening Election Commission
- ⦿ Greater citizen participation in achieving SDGs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Eminent economist Debapriya Bhattacharya yesterday said voter confidence remains fragile, with many fearing the election may not be held at all and, even if it is, uncertainties persist over how free, fair, acceptable and participatory it will be.

He made the remarks at a regional pre election consultation meeting of Citizen's Platform in Rangpur.

Speaking to journalists after the meeting, Debapriya, the platform's convener and distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said participants expressed concern over a possible rise in political violence in the

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Prof Salimullah Khan speaks at a seminar titled "Bangladesh's Culture and Contemporary Bangladesh" at Khulna Press Club auditorium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

AMRA NOTUN  
AWARD 2025  
Three young  
changemakers  
honoured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Stories of Inclusion, Jol Shikha and Good Do Toys -- three youth-led initiatives -- were awarded the Amra Notun Young Changemakers Award 2025 in recognition of their efforts to drive social change.

The awards were presented at "Carnival of Change 2025", organised by Brac Youth Platform at the Brac CDM in Savar yesterday.

Stories of Inclusion focuses on promoting inclusion and supporting children, while Jol Shikha produces eco friendly coal from coconut shells. Good Do Toys develops sustainable toys that encourage hands-on learning and help reduce screen time among children.

Nandonik, Shunno and Eco Care -- three

Education in Bangla key to intellectual growth  
Speakers tell discussion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Education must begin in the mother tongue if a nation wants to preserve its cultural identity and develop a meaningful intellectual tradition, speakers said at a seminar on Friday.

Citing Abul Mansur Ahmad, they said the 1952 Language Movement was a "revolution" whose core message was national selfhood, something impossible without literature in the mother language.

Delivering the keynote speech, Prof Salimullah Khan criticised the absence of Bangla in the higher judiciary even after 50 years of independence.

He said remnants of colonial rule had created a "stagnation of speed and memory", deepening English dependency among the elite.

"How long will this continue? Even after 50 years of independence, the trend of sending children to English-medium schools is stronger than ever," he said.

He questioned the need to introduce English at the preschool

level. "If you want to improve the quality of education, you must start with Bangla," he said at the seminar, titled "Bangladesh's Culture and Contemporary Bangladesh", held at Khulna Press Club auditorium.

While acknowledging the lack of English textbooks in higher education, he questioned why early-grade Bangla books are still not prioritised.

"Teach ten languages if you want, but denying a child education in their own language is depriving them -- and deceiving the nation," he said.

Citing Abul Mansur Ahmad, he said education cannot be separated from politics. "Education is too important to be left only to educators. Students, guardians and society must all be involved."

He argued that a society that cannot educate its children and teachers in its own language, yet insists on English-medium kindergarten education, "cannot be called civilised, though it may have its own culture".

He also said Abul Mansur Ahmad

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