

Dhaka at high risk of major tremor: experts

BSS- Dhaka is currently at earthquake risk as it has already been over hundred years after a major tremor struck Bangladesh in 1918.

As one of the world's most densely populated cities, Dhaka is alarmingly ill-prepared to face any such disaster.

Dhaka is more vulnerable to earthquakes due to its geological location, and human and economic exposure, said Rubyet Kabir, meteorologist and deputy project director of Bangladesh Weather and Climate Services Regional Project.

According to the earthquake disaster risk index, Dhaka remains at the top of the list of the 20 most vulnerable cities in the world, he said.

Experts said a major earthquake usually occurs in every 100 years. The last major earthquakes on the Madhupur fault occurred in 1822 and 1918. As such, Bangladesh is on the verge of another major earthquake. So, Dhaka is at the high risk, they said.

Though various projects and plans have been implemented to reduce the risk of this densely populated city, most of those have not seen the light, Rubyet said.

According to the Earth Observatory Center report, Bangladesh is located at the joint of three tectonic plates- Indian, Eurasian, and Burmese, creating a high risk for the country.

A joint survey of the Integrated Disaster Management Programme and JICA in 2009 found that about 72,000 buildings in the city would collapse and 1,35,000 buildings would be damaged if an earthquake of 7 magnitude or higher on Richter scale was

occurred in Dhaka. Seventy million tons of concrete would be piled up.

According to the Fire Service and Civil Defense sources, 76 percent of Dhaka city's roads are narrow, making it difficult to conduct rescue operations in the event of an earthquake.

In addition, as 60 percent of buildings were built changing their original design. It is feared that these unplanned buildings could collapse immediately during a major earthquake. At the same time, explosions in gas, electricity, and water lines could create a terrible situation.

Rubyet Kabir said the number of risky buildings in Dhaka is constantly increasing, along with the increasing risk of earthquake disasters. Most of the buildings are not tolerant to high-level jolt.

So far, very little has been done for preparedness of earthquake except procurement of some fire extinguishing equipment with government fund.

Rajuk has launched the Urban Resilience Project for monitoring earthquake resistance of buildings and take necessary measures in this regard. The project is being implemented for testing the earthquake resistance capacity of a handful number of important government offices, schools and hospitals.

Though there is no way to stop an earthquake, meteorologist Rubyet Kabir believed that it will be easier to manage the damage caused by the earthquake if preparations can be made before the accident.

The first goal step to reduce earthquake damage is identifying vulnerable buildings in large and densely populated cities and making them for earthquake resistant.

If the buildings are earthquake-resistant, he said the number of casualties will be much lower than. In all areas sufficient

number of volunteers should be created. Common people should also be prepared to face any disaster, he said.