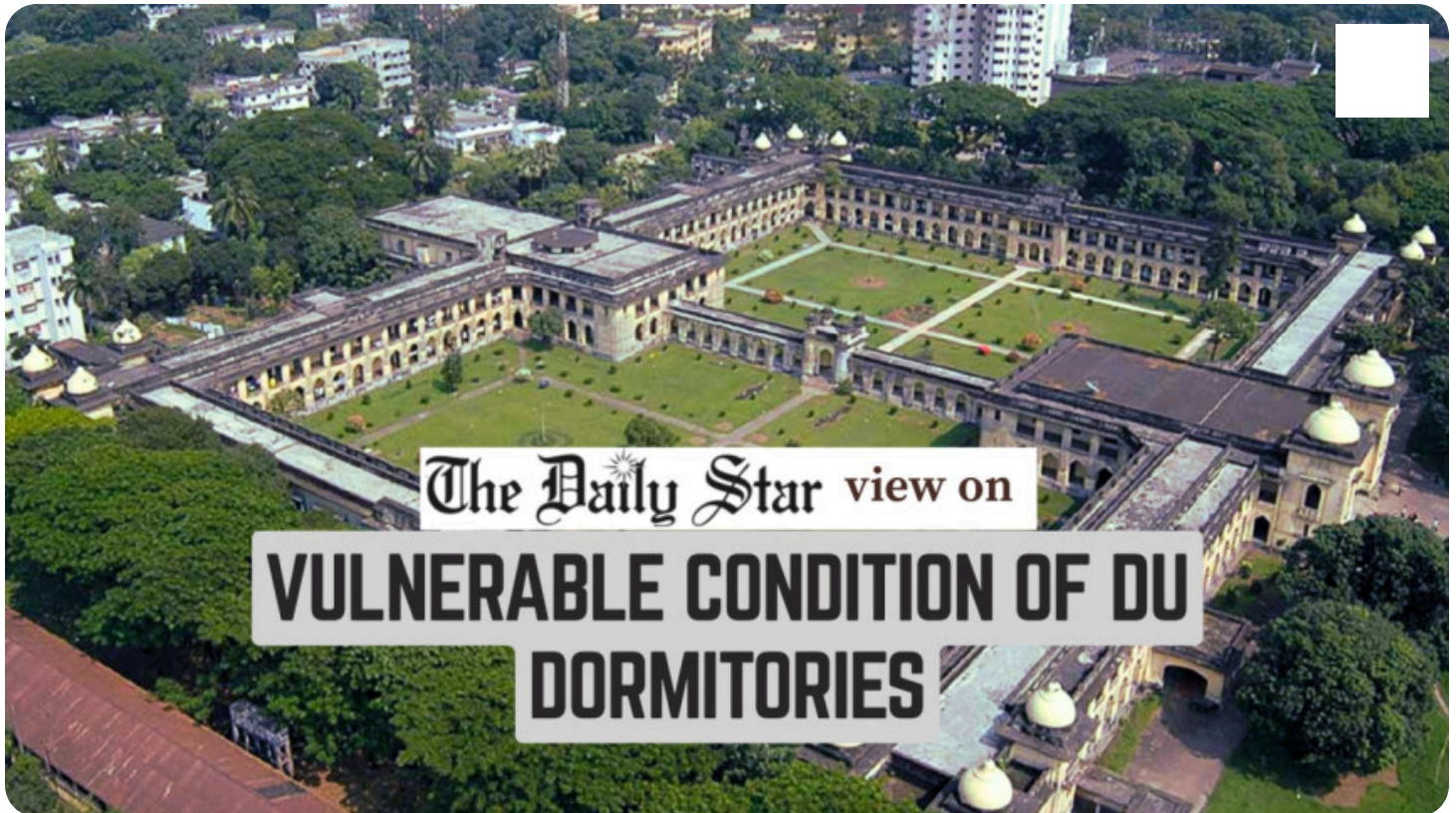


# DU dormitories need urgent repair

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Neglect and weak maintenance are putting thousands at risk



We are deeply concerned by the vulnerable condition of many Dhaka University residential halls, which were once again exposed by the recent earthquake. For years, experts have warned that these ageing dormitories are structurally weak, yet university authorities have repeatedly ignored the warnings. The 5.7-magnitude quake left fresh cracks in at least 12 halls and plaster peeled off in numerous areas, injuring several students. Thousands now live in constant fear that the next tremor could bring catastrophic collapse. Meanwhile, frustrated by years of inaction by the authorities, students of Mohsin Hall temporarily moved into unused staff flats to protest their unsafe living conditions. This is truly unfortunate.

Reportedly, since 2008, experts, including teams from Buet, have inspected multiple halls and recommended major structural repairs, retrofitting, and even evacuation in some cases. But only emergency fixes were carried out. Mohsin Hall, Surja Sen Hall, Shahidullah Hall, Zahurul Huq Hall, and others remain in the same compromised state identified more than a decade ago. Sir Salimullah Muslim Hall, flagged as the most vulnerable, was recommended for evacuation by Buet in 2021, yet no impactful action has been taken. Instead of being renovated or rebuilt, these halls continue to house thousands of students everyday.

According to DU engineers, at the core of this crisis lies chronic underfunding and longstanding neglect in building maintenance. While money is allocated for development, almost nothing is provided for routine maintenance. Only emergency repairs are undertaken, and expert recommendations for major renovations are left unimplemented. Around Tk 22 crore has been spent on the maintenance of seven to eight halls in the last five fiscal years, when fully renovating a single hall would cost nearly Tk 20 crore. This mismatch in funding makes meaningful repairs impossible.

After the quake, DU announced a two-week vacation to repair the dormitories, and some other universities, including Jagannath University, temporarily suspended classes and exams. But campus closures will not solve the problem; all public universities must ensure that student halls are structurally safe. They must establish proper evacuation systems with clear exit signs, regular drills, trained staff, and designated gathering points. Most importantly, campuses must be integrated into the national disaster preparedness framework. For DU, both immediate and coordinated long-term action are essential. High-risk halls need full structural audits, and unsafe buildings must be evacuated and retrofitted or rebuilt. The government should allocate dedicated maintenance funds, and a joint task force of DU, Buet, and relevant agencies should oversee the implementation. DU must act before a preventable tragedy unfolds.