

Preparedness programme proves effective

By Mostafa Kamal Majumder

The two-decade-old Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) which operated in cooperation with the Meteorological Department proved very effective in minimising the loss of human life in Monday's cyclone.

Timely warning messages of the Met Office relayed to the coastal people well in time led to movement of over 3.5 lakh people from storm surge-prone areas to three hundred cyclone shelters before the cyclone struck.

Hamiduzzaman Chowdhury, Director, Bangladesh Meteorological Department told The Daily Star, in respect of wind speed Monday's cyclone was worse than the November 12, 1970 cyclone that had killed an estimated five lakh people.

He said both the cyclones had struck after midnight. The difference was: in 1970 the coastal people were caught unawares in their sleep. On Monday, the people were prepared for the impending danger and many had taken to the cyclone shelters.

Emdad Hossain, Director, Cyclone Preparedness Programme said 20 thousand volunteers had started alerting about seventy lakh people in 24 coastal districts from Sunday.

CPP officials at 24 stations in these upazilas took initiatives for holding coordination meeting with upazila chairmen and upazila mirbahal officers to undertake evacuation, rescue and relief operations.

In some places, trawlers and mechanised boats were used to evacuate people from char lands.

CPP volunteers who had been trained over the years, went to all cyclone-prone coastal villages transmitting warning messages using sirens, microphones and megaphones.

Initiated in 1972 following the 1970 cyclone, CPP is meant for minimising cyclone devastation. Under an IDA credit 238 cyclone shelters (each one a three-storey structure) in 1972. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society had recently constructed another 62 shelters in the coastal belt. Besides the shelters, 157 killas (high earthen mounds) were constructed to shelter domestic animals during cyclones. All these proved useful during Monday's cyclone, CPP sources said.

The forecast made by the Meteorological Department proved accurate. By Saturday night Met Office indicated the possibility of movement of the cyclone towards Cox's Bazar. The following morning weathermen pinpointed the area where the cyclone was to hit. People of the cyclone prone areas thus got about two days' time to take to shelters or adopt safety precautions.

The three radar stations of Met Office at Dhaka, Cox's Bazar and Khepupara were very useful in monitoring the movement of the cyclone closely. The cyclone had come within the range of the three radars by Sunday afternoon, Hamiduzzaman Khan Chowdhury told The Daily Star.



REVERSE ROLE: Sampan replaced the airplanes at Patenga air port yesterday.

— Star Photo

Defence witnesses cross-examined

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General Muktadir as its Chairman.

At the inaugural function of the museum Ershad donated a weapon which was brought in a cassette. He did not open the cassette and that it was preserved at the Museum during his tenure as Army chief.

He also said that he did not know anything about the arms, the subject matters of the arms case. He also said that he had been the Army Chief since 1986 and that former President Ershad was the Supreme Commander of the Army.

The other defence witness produced yesterday was Administrative Officer Issam Noor Mohammad of the Iraqi Embassy who read the writing on the box of the pistols, claimed to have been given as gifts from Iraq.

He said that the certificate for the pistols was given by his Ambassador and that he had not seen the weapons before.

He read the writing on a box as "The weapon is a gift by the Iraqi women to the martyrs of war". He also read out the name of the company that manufactured the pistols, which was also written on the box.

General Atiqur Rahman said that he would remain present at gift presentation ceremonies as part of protocol.

He said that sometimes the ceremonies would be held at the Cantonment, some times at Bangabhaban and sometimes at the Sen Bhavan.

Attorney General Aminul Haque cross-examined the two defence witnesses starting with Atiqur Rahman.

Attorney General (AG): Were you commissioned in the Pakistan Armed Forces in 1954?

Atiqur Rahman (AR): Yes. I was commissioned in the Pakistan army in 1954.

AG: Did you work together with Ershad for 24 years?

AR: Former President Ershad and I served in the army for 30 years. And I worked for eight years under General Ershad.

You are saying everything seeing my record.

AG: What I am seeing belongs to me. But I have no record of yours with me.

You passed the IA examination from Rawalpindi Gordon College?

AR: Yes.

AG: You did a course in the USA when you were in the army?

AR: Yes.

AG: You have a son and a daughter?

AR: No, I have two sons and a daughter?

AG: Do you know that the qualified age for one to be a Major General is 55 and that after 55 one should be retired?

AR: Yes. One can be a Major General upto the age of 55.

AG: But you became a Major General at the age of 57 and you took grace for one year to become a Major General.

AR: This is not true that I became a Major General after the age of 55.

AG: You were given concession for one year.

AR: This is not true.

AG: Do you know that there are five categories of fitness in army? A, B, C, D, and E?

AR: Yes.

AG: A - fit for all services; B - unfit for general services but fit for ordinary services; C - fit for secondary services; D - temporarily unfit and E - temporarily unfit subject to the approval of the President.

AR: If anyone is unfit he cannot be promoted from Lt Col. What you are trying to say, I understand.

AG: What you are assuming, I may not say. A Medical Board

declared you invalid on Sept 22, 1979. It declared you permanently invalid.

AR: I was declared an invalid officer, by a Medical Board and the said opinion of the board was concurred approval by the then army chief Lt Gen Ershad. But the then President Ziaur Rahman did not approve it. Lt Gen Ershad forwarded the case for approval.

AG: The board found following defects in you. You were suffering from a Transient ischaemic attack (cerebral), b) ischaemic heart disease, c) gout, d) duodenal ulcer, e) deafness in the right ear.

AR: The then President Ziaur Rahman did not approve it.

AG: The Medical Board formed with Major Hamid found the diseases.

Defence Lawyer Strajul Haque made a passing remark that the country needs such a chief of Staff.

AG: You were later re-categorised as 'C' but the Medical Board declared you as 'E'.

AR: No, I was re-categorised as 'A'.

AG: How much land do you have?

AR: I don't have any land.

Defence Lawyer interrupting the Attorney General: Why are you questioning so much?

AR: I don't have any land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have only got a 10 katha piece of land at Banari.

AG: When did you become a Lt. General?

AR: Two days before the completion of the age of 55.

AG: One cannot be a Lt. General unless he crosses 58.

AR: This is not a fact.

AG: During your tenure as Chief of Staff you bought 110 Automillar guns at the cost of 10 crore Taka from Italy. But the guns were found unserviceable.

AR: This is not true.

AG: During your retirement you proposed setting up a bank with the Army, Navy and Senakallyan Sangstha?

AR: Yes, I proposed it during my IPR. I also talked to former President Ershad about it.

AG: The proposed capital was 20 crore Taka for the bank?

AR: Approximately 20 crore Taka.

AG: Did the Ministry of Finance give you concurrence?

AR: Yes it gave its concurrence.

AG: Was the bank named as National Trust Bank?

AR: Yes.

AG: The army did not co-operate in setting up the bank. Did the army oppose it?

AR: The army said that the bank was a commercial venture so it did not want to give an undertaking to set up the bank.

AG: Was the army in favour of setting up a bank of this category?

AR: No it was not in favour of setting up the bank.

AG: The proposed capital was 20 crore Taka?

AR: No this is not a fact.

AG: Earlier you said that the proposed capital was Taka 20 crore.

AR: It was Taka 10 crore.

DL: (giving objection) The secrecy of the army is being exposed. No one should expose the secrecy of the armed forces.

Judge: The army is a national army. So the nation has the right to know about the army.

DL: My objection should be noted.

AG: The Automillar-gun scandal is also there. That should also be on record. It is almost like the Bofors scandal.

AG: (to the witness) You wanted to invest Taka 4 crore

in the bank?

AR: Not a fact. I wanted to invest 40 to 50 lakh Taka.

AG: First you sought shares of Tk. 4 crore and later you sought 40 to 50 lakh taka shares.

AR: It is not a fact.

AG: Do you know that decoration pieces are put on display at the Sena Bhavan?

AR: Yes.

AG: Do you know whether guns, mortars and bullets are put on display?

AR: I have seen guns on display at the Sena Bhavan. But I have not examined them.

Judge: Do you know from where the arms, subject matters in the case, come?

AR: No, I don't.

AG: Did you ever examine the weapon which was given by Ershad to the Army Museum as you have said?

AR: No.

AG: You have come to give witness in this case because you were favoured by Ershad. You were a worthless, incompetent, unfit person, who was appointed chief of the army. Your appointment as chief of the army had tarnished the image of the Bangladesh Army and it was done only to favour you.

AR: This is not a fact.

AG: When you were in service you did everything in an incompetent way.

AR: This is not a fact.

Later the Administrative Officer of the Iraqi mission Issam Nur Mohammad was produced for cross-examination.

Judge: What is your job at the Iraqi Embassy?

Noor Mohammad: (NM) I am an officer at the Embassy.

Attorney General: Who went to collect the certificate from the Iraqi embassy?

NM: I don't know.

AG: How did they get the gift certificate from the embassy?

NM: I don't know.

AG: Is there any file on gifts at your embassy?

NM: I don't know.

AG: Have you seen the items for which the certificate was given?

NM: No, I did not see the items.

AG: Was the certificate signed in your presence?

NM: Yes.

AG: Is the certificate correct?

NM: Yes.

AG: Why did you attack Kuwait?

NM: Kuwait is an Iraqi city. The DW tried to say vituperatively Kuwait was a part of Iraq.

In the beginning of the Tribunal hearing yesterday the Attorney General pointed out that the statement of Ershad regarding supply of sub-standard food in the jail was wrong.

He said that he had talked to the jail authorities and that they made it clear that they were supplying Ershad the food division fixed for prisoner. So the question of supplying sub-standard food did not arise.

PM's appeal

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has not therefore been possible till Tuesday evening to collect full information about the damage caused. Preliminary reports indicate hundreds of lives have been lost and many thousands have been rendered homeless and more than 90 per cent of houses in some areas has been wiped out, she said.

She said, roads and bridges have been damaged, making communication impossible in many areas. There is water still standing on many parts of the affected areas. She said crops have been extensively damaged and cattle-heads lost. Many educational institution has either been razed to ground or badly affected.

People in the affected areas are in immediate need of food, shelter, pure drinking water, medicine and clothing, she said.

Begum Zia said it will take sometime before a full assessment of the situation can be made, the extent of damage clearly known and the requirement of the affected people fully realised. It is, however, evident that the damage has been both colossal and extensive, she said.

The government had taken adequate precautionary measures before the cyclone and this has minimised the loss of human lives, she said adding, but loss of other kind is huge and perhaps on an unprecedented scale.

The Prime Minister said, the government has mobilised all its manpower and resources, and already launched a massive relief operation. But the magnitude of the damage appears to be such that it might prove impossible for the government alone to meet the challenge and mitigate the sufferings of the poor, helpless people, she said.

An earlier report said: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on Tuesday visited the cyclone-affected coastal areas to see the extent of the devastation there.

The helicopter which flew her to the coastal belt hovered low over Sandwip, Hatiya, Utrichar and Kutubdia offshore islands to enable her to see the extent of damage. The Prime Minister's helicopter could not land because of the severe inundation of the areas following the tidal surge.

Telecommunication with most countries remains snapped

By Staff Correspondent

Telecommunication with rest of the world except seven countries remained cut off till Tuesday since the devastating cyclone hit the coastal areas on Monday night.

"A communicating tower of Betunia ground satellite station collapsed snapping telecommunication with rest of the world," an official of the Overseas Telecommunication Department told The Daily Star.

The 200ft tower collapsed during the cyclone on Monday night, the official said adding it would take time to restore communication.

"Now we have contract with only India, Bangkok, Bahrain, Paris, Seoul and Colombo through Talimabad satellite station, but it is also disturbing," he said.

Betunia station is used to maintain communication with the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, the USA, Pakistan, Germany, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Burma, Canada, Egypt, Italy, Iran, Qatar, Turkey, Lebanon, Libya and some other countries.

The Midnight File

Sino-Soviet accord on border dispute

MOSCOW, Apr 30: The Soviet Union and China on Monday reached an agreement on the settlement of their border disputes in the eastern part of their frontier, a Foreign Ministry spokesman announced. The accord was initiated by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev and his Chinese counterpart Tian Zengpei who have met here since Friday in a fifth round of talks aimed at defusing the long-standing border conflict. Vitaliy Churkin added, report AFP.

Ocean liner wallowing in Bay

NEW DELHI, Apr 30: Two Indian warships have reached an ocean liner with 800 passengers aboard wallowing in the Bay of Bengal after a cyclone disabled it at sea. The Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) liner bound for the Andaman Islands carrying 800 people lost its steering after pounding waves six metres (18 feet) high smashed into it while it was caught in a cyclonic storm, PTI said, reports AFP.

Lebanese Forces to surrender tanks

BEIRUT, Apr 30: Lebanon's most powerful militia, the Christian Lebanese Forces (LF) agreed to surrender its tanks and other arms from today, signalling a major breakthrough for a government plan to rid Lebanon of private armies. Lebanon's second strongest militia, the Syrian-backed Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), started giving up its arms at the weekend and other militias have already fallen into line with the plan to rid Lebanon of the militias that tore it apart in 15 years of civil war, reports Reuter.

Foreign Minister to visit Japan

Foreign Minister ASM Mustafizur Rahman will visit Japan in the first week of this month to take part in a meeting of the ministerial-level coordinating cell of Least Developed Countries (LDC), to be held in Tokyo.

The debt problems of LDCs at the meet which will get to know from Japan the outcome of leading industrialised nations' G-7 meeting recently held in Washington.

This will be Mustafizur Rahman's first official visit abroad as Foreign Minister. He will be accompanied by high-level officials.

Hasina's call

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tubewells for supply of pure drinking water, food, medicines and medical teams to the affected areas.

Sheikh Hasina called upon the wealthy people, different charity organisations, foreign states and organisations to come forward to help the distressed humanity.

She directed the leaders and workers of Awami League and its affiliated organisations to conduct relief operations.

Awami League has constituted a coordination committee, headed by Sheikh Hasina, to conduct relief operations in the cyclone battered areas.

Relief and social welfare secretary of the party Mafzul Islam Kamal will act as its convener.

The committee was formed in a meeting of the party Working Committee on Tuesday. The meeting called upon the Government to send necessary relief and rehabilitation materials to the cyclone-affected areas on war-time emergency basis.

The meeting decided to send a medical team to the affected areas. It will be led by the party's assistant publicity and publication secretary Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohtuddin.

It directed the district and thana committees of the party in the cyclone-hit areas to send reports of damages to the central office.

The helicopter which flew her to the coastal belt hovered low over Sandwip, Hatiya, Utrichar and Kutubdia offshore islands to enable her to see the extent of damage. The Prime Minister's helicopter could not land because of the severe inundation of the areas following the tidal surge.

High-powered body

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genuy relief committee with the Prime Minister as its Chairperson. Other members of the committee are the Minister for Education, the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, the Minister for Local Government and Rural Development, the Minister for Energy, the Minister for Communications, the State Minister for Relief, the Chief of the Army Staff, the Chief of Navy and the Chief of Air Forces, the Principal Secretary to the President, the Cabinet Secretary, the Principal Staff Officer, the Relief Secretary and Secretaries of the other concerned ministries.

The committee has been given full authority to take necessary decisions to meet the emergency. The committee will meet today (Wednesday) morning.

The council directed the concerned ministries and agencies to collect full information about the extent of damage caused and to intensify relief measures.

The council was informed that dry food had already been air dropped in the affected areas. The council asked the concerned authorities to air-drop more dry food in the affected areas immediately.

The president sanctioned Taka five crore for immediate relief operation.

The Council of Ministers also decided to make an appeal to international community for immediate help to the affected people.

President of Dhaka Union of Journalists Zahirul Haque and General Secretary Ruhul Amin Gazi in a statement said May Day will be observed this year in the backdrop of lay off at Dainik Deah and terminating of 14 of its journalists, lay off at Dainik Dinkal and harassment of journalists of the Bangladesh Observer.

Journalists will observe the day with the vow to intensify movement for a secure job, they said and urged the government to take steps to lessen the sufferings of journalists.

Bangladesh Krishak Samik Mukti Andolon will host national and party flags at its central office at 6 am. A discussion meeting will be held at the central office at 4 pm.

vehicles stranded at Aricha

About 65 night coaches were stranded overnight at Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia ghats as ferry services were suspended Monday night when a devastating cyclone hit the country, reports UNB.

Witnesses said about 3,000 passengers including women and children passed the whole night in their vehicles in serious inconvenience.

Although ferry services resumed this morning, the queue of buses and trucks could not be cleared till this afternoon as day coaches put additional pressure on the ferries.

many trucks loaded with perishables and medicines bound for diarrhoea-affected areas in northern and southern regions were also stranded.

Thousands feared killed

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extent of damage. The Prime Minister's helicopter could not land anywhere in these places because of severe inundation of the areas following the tidal surge.

In most of the battered areas power supply was cut off and in Chittagong, gas supply snapped too. The loss of cattlehead was also colossal.

The death of 366 persons was officially confirmed till 11 pm on Tuesday. The break-up of the death toll is as follows: Chokoria-42, Barguna-4, Teknaf-10, Companiganj-5, Mirsarai-2, Sandwip-12, Charchation-18, Daulatkhani-1, Sudharam-1, Manpara-2, Kalapara-1, Galachipa-1, Lalmothan-2, Patharghata-1, Ramgati-5, Noakhali-193, Lakshimpur-8 and Bhola-52.

Unofficial estimate suggests 1100 people were missing in Char Nizam of Bhola district and 7000 people in Nizhum Deep of Noakhali district.

The relief operations have been intensified in the affected areas. Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BRCS) sent a large quantity of relief goods such as rice, biscuits, emergency food, beans, pulse, plastic sheet, sarees, lungies and readymade garments.

A BRCS source said more relief goods would be sent after preliminary assessment of the extent of damage and destruction was available.

Volunteers and workers of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) of the BRCS have started emergency relief work with the materials available at their disposal.

Members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces have also been deployed for carrying out rescue and relief operations following the storm and tidal surge in the coastal areas.

Army teams from Jessore, Comilla and Chittagong cantonments rushed to the worst-hit areas and undertook relief and rescue operations in cooperation with the local administration and concerned agencies.

Our Khulna office reports widespread damage was also wrought by the storm there on Monday.

In Dacope upazila in the district, one Sukumar (26) died when a wall collapsed. Mongla port resumed functioning on Tuesday after necessary repairs. There was no damage caused to the ships anchored at the wharves.

Kutcha dwellings in Mongla and Dacope upazilas were damaged. There is no electricity in the Mongla Port.

One electric tower fell to the ground at Mongla and has not been repaired as yet.

Barguna control room told The Daily Star that there was widespread damage to life and property in the district following the storm.

Five upazilas are the worst affected.

Kutcha dwellings were damaged and electric lines snapped.

Five people were admitted to the Barguna Hospital.

In Noakhali, 70 to 80 per cent of the standing crops have been damaged following the storm. Relief materials had not reached the affected areas till the writing of this report.

In Barisal, at least 4000 dwellings were damaged. Ten upazilas of the district were badly affected.

Standing crops on