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The Daily Star

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Cyclone leaves over 40,000 dead



MANY FACES OF A CYCLONE: Distressed people rushing towards a helicopter for relief in Kutubdia, left, and survivors telling tale of their agonies in Chokoria, right, Wednesday. —Photo Mohsin

Survivors living under open sky: No food, no clothes, no drinking water: Thousands remain untraced: Many areas still inaccessible

By Staff Correspondent

The devastating cyclone and tidal bore that lashed the coastal belt of Bangladesh on Monday left over 40,000 people killed, according to preliminary reports reaching Dhaka.

The fate of thousands of others in the isolated offshore islands appears uncertain.

Our Staffer AKM Mohsin who could for the first time reach three devastated upazilas of Chittagong district — Kutubdia, Anwara and Chokoria on Wednesday saw all the dwellings and almost all trees razed to the ground.

The devastation was complete.

Women and children were hardly visible and the male survivors reported 50,000 deaths in the three upazilas alone.

All of them were found badly shaken with no food and shelter. There was no pure drinking water and the survivors were living under the open sky.

Some of the survivors told our Staffer that for the last three days they had had no food to eat and house to sleep.

Contaminated water in the devastated areas may well cause epidemics. According to reports, diarrhoea has already broken out in the cyclone af-

ected parts of Bhola district.

Cyclone shelters in all the upazilas were still under seven to eight feet of water.

The marooned people were crying for help.

Thousands of fishermen in Kutubdia, Chokoria and Anwara upazilas and offshore islands of Hatiya and Sandwip who did not leave their colonies to keep watch on their fishing nets and boats now remain untraced, according to survivors.

Star Staffer Mohsin found hundreds of boats moving listlessly in the waters of Kutubdia, Chokoria and Anwara

and the owners were not visible.

Many of the survivors were barebodied and shivering with cold.

The saline water has engulfed all the places and thousands of cattle carcasses were found floating decomposed. The stench unbearable.

Our staff correspondent Syed Issa reports from Barisal: The offshore islands of Sandwip, Kutubdia, Manpara, Dhalchar, Char Nizam, Char Kukrimukri and Nijhum Deep were still under water and remain cut off from the main land.

Those were approachable

only by rivercraft. Landing of helicopters was not still possible. The marooned people are passing their days in agony under the open sky.

In many places, survivors have had no food, water and life-saving drugs for the last three days. Pure water was not available. The storm had blown away all the hand tubewells from the affected areas.

Our Staff Correspondent Chapal Basher reports from Noakhali: Sixteen people were killed in Noakhali, according to official sources.

Over one lakh people in 150 square kilometres of 11 'mouzas' of Char Clerk were

passing their days without food and drinking water. They were yet to receive any relief materials.

Crops in the area have been completely damaged and water remains still stagnant.

No links could yet be established with Hatiya which remained cut off from Noakhali till Wednesday.

The Red Crescent control room in Dhaka told The Daily Star that nearly 20,000 people perished in Monday's cyclone in Sandwip Island alone.

Eyewitnesses' accounts said rescue workers could not count the bodies in the island.

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Foreign envoys feel damages are colossal

A group of heads of foreign missions and international agencies Wednesday flew over the cyclone affected areas in different districts and saw the extent of damages wrought in by the disaster, reports BSS.

Foreign Minister ASM Mustafizur Rahman accompanied the heads of missions during the aerial view in Hatiya, Sandwip, Kutubdia, Moheshkhali and some other places.

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US, CIDA, pledge urgent aid

The United States has pledged an initial 25,000 US dollars in connection with the tragic loss of life and property damage caused by Monday night's cyclone and tidal surge which hit the coastal districts of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh William B Milam made the pledge Wednesday after surveying the affected areas by air. He said further contribution would be determined after assessment of the damage

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SSC exams of 2 boards begin today

By Staff Correspondent

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examinations of 1991 under Dhaka and Rajshahi Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Boards begin today (Thursday).

The SSC examinations under two other boards, Comilla

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May Day observed

The historic May Day was observed in the capital and other parts of the country emphasising on maintaining workers' unity and urging authorities to protect legitimate interests of the working class, reports BSS.

Different labour organisations, political parties and socio-cultural bodies held separate functions, symposiums, discussions and rallies to highlight the importance of the day and voice demands of workers in the new democratic set-up.

The biggest workers' gathering

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Work in close coordination, Khaleda to relief workers

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has urged all involved in relief and rescue operation to work in close coordination so that they can serve the distressed people best.

The Prime Minister told this while visiting the cyclone-battered coastal belt Wednesday to see the extent of devastation there, reports BSS.

The helicopter which took her to Cox's Bazar hovered low over Sonalmuri, Dagonbuiyan, Sitakunda, Chittagong, Anwara, Kutubdia, Moheshkhali, and Chakoria. The Prime Minister saw that most of the places were still under water.

Begum Khaleda Zia witnessed that almost all the kutchha and semipucca

dwelling houses have been destroyed as a result of devastating cyclone and carcasses were floating on the water. She saw that a large number of mills and factories have also been destroyed in Chittagong.

The Prime Minister then flew to Cox's Bazar and held a meeting with the local administration there. The meeting apprised the Prime Minister of the extent of devastation caused by the cyclone, specially in the offshore islands.

The meeting informed the Prime Minister that all the 57 unions of Cox's Bazar have been damaged extensively. The Kutubdia off-shore island was still under 15 feet of water. With one-fourth of the popula-

tion of the island feared missing, so far, 2000 people have been buried there. The Prime Minister was told that the total population in the island is 1.22 lakh.

The meeting informed the Prime Minister that five out of seven unions of Moheshkhali have been worst affected. It was learnt that 1.40 lakh people have been affected by the cyclone.

In Chakoria, nine out of 22 unions have been affected badly. Three to four thousand workers of 23 thousand acres of shrimp projects in the areas are missing. The area is under 15 feet water and fifteen thousand people have been feared

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PM's relief fund opened

The high powered emergency relief committee in its first meeting in Dhaka on Wednesday night with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair decided to open a Prime Minister's Relief Fund, reports BSS.

The fund will receive donations of cash and kind from the members of the public.

The meetings decided that the ministers and state ministers would donate one month's salary to the fund.

The meeting also decided to sanction Taka 84 lakh to buy and distribute food items and ensure supply of drinking water in the affected areas. The local public representatives and Armed Forces have been given the responsibility to distribute the relief materials.

Hasina for reopening of closed mills

ADAMJEEENAGAR, May 1: Awami League President and Leader of Opposition Sheikh Hasina today called for implementing five-point demand of industrial labourers including announcement of wage commission, reports UNB.

Addressing a huge workers' rally at Adamjee Jute Mills this afternoon on the occasion of May Day, Hasina also demanded reopening of all closed mills and factories for increasing production and exports to achieve a self-reliant economy.

Hasina blamed past regimes for destroying industrial sector including the jute sector which lost its international market due to wrong policies of past 'autocratic govern-

ments."

Recalling the nationalisation policy of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's government, she said no new mills and factories were set up during the autocratic rules after 1975.

"We have been turned into a nation of beggars and our economy has been made dependent on foreign aid and assistance," deplored Hasina.

The Awami League government had undertaken steps for ensuring people's fundamental rights and economic emancipation through increasing production and exports, she added.

Awami League will always stand by the just demands of labourers, she said.

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Cries of help rend off-shore islands' air

A. K. M. Mohsin from cyclone-hit areas

An old man, clad only in a loincloth cried out, "Help me, help me, I have no one left", while others with him, half clothed, water nearly reaching their faces looked on in awe and total despair with tears in their eyes.

This was the scene in Kutubdia, an island off Cox's Bazar yesterday afternoon as the relief helicopter were travelling on touched down for only two minutes on a

patch of road, the only visible part of the submerged island.

The Bell chopper, laden with relief goods was on the verge of being ditched as the patch of road nearby gave way forcing the pilot to take us up barely we had touched down.

Chief of General Staff of the Army Major General Salam was also aboard.

No relief could be given to those hungry people excluding a bag or two of dried foodstuff. We were compelled to leave

them without food, medicine or water.

We left them to fate.

Kutubdia, a thriving habitat of thousands of people, mostly fishermen, had disappeared overnight.

A fisherman of the island told us that approximately 20,000 people were missing.

The pockets of survivors have had no shelter or food since the killer cyclone struck midnight Monday. They are vulnerable to various diseases

that came in the aftermath of such cataclysms.

Plots of land were clearly visible under the water, heaps of rubble that had once been dwellings.

Here and there a few people could be seen, seemingly looking for something or probably just moving about aimlessly.

Earlier as we flew along the coast we saw hundreds of boats, possibly fishing boats, drifting aimlessly, but there

was not a soul in sight, neither on the boats nor on the shore.

Hundreds of fishing boats and no fishermen in sight. The implications were too unbearable to ponder.

During our brief stop in Kutubdia we did not see any women or children, just hungry, sick, half-clad men who were tottering on the verge of insanity. Begging for food, for help.

BSS reports: Communications Minister Oth Ahmed

said in Chittagong on Wednesday that about 25 thousand people might have been killed in the coastal upazilas and off-shore islands of Chittagong district.

Relief Secretary Hishamuddin Ahmed told newsmen that 2,683 deaths have so far been reported from Cox's Bazar, 193 from Noakhali, 57 from Bhola, 7 from Barguna, 2 from Patuakhali and one each from

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BSS reports: Communications Minister Oth Ahmed

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Latin America tries again for a common market. A new, four-nation treaty, nudged along by US may just make the difference. Page 4

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day



Lonesome and in search of happiness GS Kabir paints a world of dark hues and frightening blacks. Page 2

NEWS BRIEFS

Ctg flights suspended

All Biman Flights to and from Chittagong will continue to remain suspended today