

10m people in 16 districts affected

By Staff Correspondent

About ten million (one crore) people in 47 upazilas under 16 districts were affected by Monday's devastating cyclone, State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Lutfur Rahman Khan said Wednesday.

Addressing a press briefing in Dhaka on his return from the affected areas of Kutubdia, Moheshkhali, Chakaria of Cox's Bazar, he said the damage was colossal. At least another day will be required to make a preliminary estimate of the extent of damage.

The Relief Ministry put the official death toll at 2,977 at 8 p. m. on Wednesday. The figure was changing every hour. The deaths included 2,683 in Cox's Bazar, 193 in Noakhali, 56 in Bhola, 34 in Chittagong, seven in Barguna, two in Patuakhali and one each in Pirojpur and Bandarban.

Relief Minister put the number of people missing at 520. According to official figures 74 heads of cattle were lost.

The state minister said about ninetyfive per cent houses and cent per cent crops were damaged in the Cox's Bazar area. Loss suffered by shrimp growers alone would amount to Taka 400 crore.

Lutfur Rahman Khan who along with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia went to assess the devastation said their helicopter could not land as the affected areas were still filled with water.

Salt growers in Cox's Bazar area suffered enormous damage as their salt was washed

away. In Chakaria, Kutubdia and Moheshkhali only some buildings and semi-pucca structures were visible. All other houses were flattened.

He said that Army, Air Force and Navy personnel were on 24-hour rescue operation in the area.

People in Moheshkhali, Kutubdia and Chakaria were seen collecting debris of houses. At some places people were found working in groups, the state minister said.

Earlier Relief Secretary Col (ret'd) Hesamuddin Ahmed said the government had supplied 1200 metric tons of rice, 1200 metric tons of wheat, 4800 pieces of sarcel, 4800 pieces of lungi, 1580 tins and 600 cartons of biscuit, 300 jerry cans of water and cash 1.2 lakh Taka on Monday. On Tuesday 29,000 pieces of bread and one metric ton of sugar were air lifted to Char Zahrudin in Bhola.

On Tuesday flattened rice (chira), molasses, water purifying tablets, safety matches, and candles were airlifted to different affected areas by helicopters.

The Relief Secretary said that 2650 kilograms of flattened rice, 847 kg of molasses, 200 tins of biscuit and 200 jerry cans of water will be airlifted to Moheshkhali this (Thursday) morning by a fixed wing aircraft.

He said that ten tonnes of flattened rice and molasses have been procured for immediate airdropping in affected areas.



NO MOORINGS: Empty sampans drifting in the sea near Anwara (in the foreground) badly battered by the cyclone Monday. — Star Photo

Cyclone leaves 40,000 dead

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Many inaccessible parts could not be contacted so far. Telecommunication could not be restored.

The control room sources said the extent of damage in Cox's Bazar, Sandwip and Hatia is still being assessed. Sultan Habib Chowdhury, MP, claimed that thousands of people were killed in Banshikhali upazila of Chittagong district alone.

Eighty per cent of the dwellings and 20 per cent cattleheads were washed away.

He said Sandwip Island is still under seven to 10 feet of water as a result of the tidal surge. Sixty to 70 per cent houses and all standing crops were damaged.

Reports from offshore islands of Urr Char and Hatia are still awaited. Death of 270 people was reported from Sitakunda where 50 per cent of the dwellings were blown away.

Power supply to more battered areas of Chittagong and southern districts was re-

stored. Chittagong Medical College, Radio Bangladesh and the railway station started receiving power supply, according to a latest report.

Eyewitness accounts said the roads blocked by fallen trees and other rubble hampered the repair work. About 217 electric towers and poles were either broken or damaged in and around Chittagong city.

Principal MM Nazrul Islam, MP, reported from Bhola that lives of 10,000 people would be at stake if relief materials were not despatched to the affected areas in time.

He said the marooned people were living under the open sky and nearly 100 of them were attacked with diarrhoea. He said innumerable cattleheads were lost and nearly 70 per cent dwellings were destroyed. Communications with Naldubirchar has been snapped and fate of 300 people there was unknown.

Cox's Bazar control room told The Daily Star that several thousand people were missing

in the district. In Hatia, 85 to 90 per cent people were rendered homeless. Crops worth Taka 25 crore at Charfesson were damaged.

Army, BDR and Naval forces have been deployed in the affected areas for conducting emergency relief operations.

Communications Minister Oli Ahmed is conducting the relief operations in Chittagong.

The embankments along the Sandwip islands were hit by the terrible rush of water and subsequently damaged. Thousands of cattleheads were washed away into the sea. The exact figures are not, however, available.

Volunteers working in the ravaged areas, however, fear thousands of dead may still have been untraced in wrecks and inaccessible areas. UNO, Sandwip has appealed for more relief supplies and rescuers. There is urgent need of food, medicine and volunteers for the demolished areas, he said.

Gunfight on DU campus

Two rival student groups fought a brief gunbattle on the Dhaka University campus yesterday evening, creating panic among students and passers-by, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the armed clash occurred in the TSC area between activists belonging to pro-JSD (Inu), Chhatra League (N-S) and pro-Awami League Chhatra League (A-A).

The incident was apparently a sequel to manhandling of a BCL (A-A) worker on the campus in the morning.

An altercation over the issue turned into a gunbattle with both groups using firearms.

At least six gunshots were fired. None, however, was hurt. The TSC area was, as usual, full of students when the clash took place.

A large number of police was posted nearby, but they didn't intervene.

PM's relief

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It was also decided in the meeting to give the charge of overall supervision of relief and rehabilitation activities to some ministers and state ministers in their respective areas.

The ministers and state ministers who have been given the responsibilities are State Minister for Environment and Forest Abdullah al-Noman for Cox's Bazar, Communications Minister Oli Ahmed for Chittagong, Commerce Minister Keramat Ali for Jhalakathi and Patuakhali, Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf for Pirojpur and Barguna, State Minister for Textiles MA Mannan for Noakhali and State Minister for Education Principal Md Yunus Khan for Bhola.

The meeting also decided to give an additional amount of Taka 10 lakh to the Commissioner, Chittagong Division for relief and rehabilitation work in his division.

Ministers, Chiefs of the Three Services, Secretaries, PSO, and the concerned officials were present in the meeting.

759 medical teams working

A total of 759 medical teams have been working round the clock in 11 storm-hit districts in southern Bangladesh. An emergency review meeting of the Health Ministry held in Dhaka Wednesday informed that 85 more medical teams were formed from the nearby district for deployment in the affected areas, reports BSS.

Two killed in road mishaps

Two people were killed in two road accidents in the city Wednesday, police said, reports UNB.

Samar Ali, a 50-year-old man, was knocked down by a speeding truck on Biswa Road near Khilgaon rail crossing at 6 a.m. injuring him seriously. He died soon after admission to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Subybag police seized the truck, while the driver fled the scene after the mishap.

In another incident, an unidentified girl, aged 25, died on the spot when a speeding mini-bus ran over her while crossing the road near Maghbazar rail crossing at 2 p.m.

The driver of the mini-bus sped away along with the vehicle soon after the accident.

Ramna police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for post-mortem.

Venkataraman, Shekhar shocked

The Indian President, R Venkataraman and Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar Wednesday expressed his profound sorrow at the terrible sufferings caused by the serious cyclonic storm in Bangladesh last Monday, reports BSS.

Cambodia steps to truce in 12 years

PHNOM PENH, May 1: Cambodia's warring parties laid down their arms today for the first time in 12 years of fighting as a temporary ceasefire came into effect, reports AFP.

The ceasefire coincided with the May Day holiday, and all government offices and foreign embassies were closed.

The government here has expressed guarded optimism about the chances of the unsupervised temporary ceasefire lasting for any length of time.

Kek Galabur, daughter of a minister and head of Phnom Penh's Information Office in Paris, said: "a ceasefire is the first step, the second step is that they will make a permanent ceasefire."

With offices closed, there were no immediate reports from the battlefield on how the truce was holding up but one Cambodian official said, "I'm sure that along the border it will be quiet... but inside the country they cannot avoid skirmishes."

Several officials have said they fear the China-backed Khmer Rouge will violate the truce despite agreeing to honour the ceasefire along with its two non-communists partners and the Phnom Penh government.

Vietnamese forces ousted the Khmer Rouge from power in January 1979 after almost

four years of brutal rule. He Khmer Rouge has been fighting the government ever since at the head of the resistance.

The call for a ceasefire came last week from UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar as well as Indonesia and France, which co-chair and international conference on Cambodia.

They want the ceasefire to be honoured at least until the four sides have convened a meeting of their Supreme National Council (SNC).

The body, which groups six Phnom Penh members with three representatives from the three Resistance parties, is expected to meet in Jakarta later this month.

It will represent Cambodian sovereignty once a comprehensive settlement is reached and be dismantled when the United Nations holds free and fair elections.

BNP relief body formed

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has formed a central relief committee with Mirza Golem Hafiz and NI Khan as its Convenor and Secretary respectively for smooth conducting of relief operations in cyclone affected areas, reports UNB.

Khaleda: Relief coodination

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dead in the island.

The seven unions of the Cox's Bazar sadar have been worst affected. Eight shelter camps have been established in the areas where seven thousand people took refuge. Seven relief teams have been formed in Cox's Bazar.

The meeting pointed out that a large number of people could be brought to the shelter camps because of the extensive mite announcement by the local administration.

The Prime Minister was informed that 95 per cent kutcha houses and 75 per cent semi-pucca houses were damaged in Cox's Bazar. The cyclone also damaged roads extensively in the area.

Begum Zia was told that 50 per cent of fishing boats and five to seven speed boats were damaged. The speed boats could not therefore be used for transport of relief materials. The rescue teams of Navy could help in expediting the

distribution of relief materials through their sea truck and launch.

Medicine, dry food, water purifying tablets, tubewells, bleaching powder, building materials and shrouds were needed on emergency basis in the areas. A list has been given to the Health Minister and the State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation in this regard.

The meeting was attended, among others, by Health Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Lutfur Rahman Khan, State Minister for Environment and Forest Abdullah al-Noman, MPs and high officials of the local administration.

The Prime Minister later, visited the three affected places in Cox's Bazar.

The Prime Minister distributed cash, medicine, cloths and water purifying tablets among the affected people. She also handed over sarrels, lunges, dry food and

medicine to the local relief committees.

The Prime Minister was informed that more dry food and rice were needed in the areas on an emergency basis. So far, three lakh tons of rice had been distributed in Chakoria.

The Control Room in Bhola said that there were 58 deaths in the district while it registered about one thousand injured.

The cyclone left 50 per cent of the kutcha houses, 30 per cent of the tin houses completely damaged. About 40 per cent of crops were damaged. 20 per cent of trees fell in the cyclone. 50 per cent educational institutions were badly damaged. Damages totalled around 50 crore Taka.

The control room said 150 tons of rice, 148 tons of wheat, 102 tins of biscuits and oral saline have been distributed among the victims.

Fert Control Room said that four persons were killed in the cyclone and about 2500 houses

damaged. During the relief operations about 3400 lungis and saris, 103 tins of biscuits and 53 maunds of rice were distributed. A few telephone lines could be restored and 70 per cent of electricity lines have been connected.

Chandpur Control Room said there were no deaths in the district. About 341 houses were completely damaged while 957 others were partly damaged. About 36 educational institutions were completely damaged and 77 others were partly damaged.

Two family welfare centres were also damaged. 4039 acres of jute fields, 45902 acres of paddy fields and 3000 acres of other crops were damaged. 29 shops of Purnabazar were destroyed by the river. Property worth Taka five crore was damaged. Two pump houses of the railway station were submerged. A pontoon of BIWTA terminal was also lost in the river.

The Midnight File

'Saddam a humiliated dictator'

NICOSIA, May 1: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei today dubbed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein a humiliated dictator who awarded himself a medal for "shedding rivers of blood" of his own people, reports Reuter.

'Soviets killed 35 Armenians'

MOSCOW, May 1: The Soviet republic of Armenia accused Soviet and Azerbaijani troops today of killing 35 Armenians as they set up a village near the disputed southern territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, reports Reuter.

Pakistan for N-free S Asia

ISLAMABAD, May 1: President Ghulam Ishaq Khan said today that Pakistan would consider any fair proposal for keeping South Asia free of nuclear weapons. "Pakistan is committed to the goal of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament," he said in a message to a national conference of physicians, according to the official Associated Press of Pakistan, reports AFP.

May Day observed

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ering in the city was held in front of the Jatiya Press Club where SKOP organised a rally. The spot in front of the Press Club witnessed several gatherings of workers almost throughout the day, one group making room for others to hold rally.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a discussion meeting on May Day said her government would take necessary measures to remove all laws contrary to the interests of workers. She assured workers her government would sympathetically review just demands of labourers and find out realistic solutions to their demands.

Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) and chief of Bangladesh Awami League Sheikh Hasina addressed a May Day rally at Adamjanagar, where she said her party together with other parties in the parliament would work to uphold the rights of workers.

Awami League leaders including Tofael Ahmed also addressed the rally.

The day was a public holiday. Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh put up special programme on the significance of May Day and national dailies brought out special supplements.

Bangladesh-China Friendship Association held a discussion meeting at the Public Library auditorium in observance of the May Day. Presided over by Mrs. Sarwar Rahman, MP, the meeting was also addressed by Minister for Law and Justice Mirza Golem Hafiz, State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Dr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, State Minister for Labour and Manpower Rafiqul Islam, State Minister for Information Nurul Huda.

Mirza Hafiz said the present government would be always with the workers to establish their rights. He thanked the working class for their glorious role in the anti-autocracy movement.

The Dhaka Mohanagar Dak Karmachari Kalyan Samity held a meeting at the GPO in observance of the Day. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy arranged a discussion meeting and cultural programme.

Rail service normal

Train services throughout the country, including Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Noakhali, remained normal despite Monday night's cyclone, a Bangladesh Railway press release said Wednesday, reports BSS.

Hasina

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The meeting was also addressed by Awami League leaders Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, MP, Momtaz Hossain and Sramik League leaders Habibur Rahman Siraj, Habibur Rahman Molla, Momtaz Hossain, Abdul Mattin and Joinul Abedin, Reazuddin Ahmed Renu presided.

Referring to country's political scenario, Hasina said her party was pledge-bound to introduce parliamentary system of government replacing the presidential form for consolidating democracy.

She sought support from ruling BNP for passing a constitutional amendment bill to switch over to parliamentary democracy in light of the joint declaration of the three alliances. Backing out from implementation of the joint declaration by any quarters would be considered as a national betrayal, she warned.

The opposition leader said a famine-like situation was prevailing all over the country and people were dying of starvation and diseases. She demanded adequate supply of food and medicines to cyclone-hit and diarrhoea-affected areas.

Hasina also expressed concern over the price-hike of essentials and deterioration of law and order and asked the government to take steps to improve the situation.

Divisional and district-level officials of the administration, police and education department, different upazila parishad chairmen, UNOs and secretaries of various examination centres of Rajshahi division attended the meeting, official sources said.

Among the candidates, 1,77,379 are male and 85,290 are female.

A total of 28,889 students are appearing from different centres of Dhaka city. Of them 15,536 are male and 13,353 are female.

Measures in Rajshahi

UNB reports say: A coordination meeting for ensuring smooth conduct of the SSC Examination under Rajshahi Board was held in Rajshahi Wednesday with Divisional Commissioner Md. Saifur Rahman in the chair.

A total of 13,061 female students are appearing at the examination beginning today (Thursday) under the Rajshahi Board.

Divisional and district-level officials of the administration, police and education department, different upazila parishad chairmen, UNOs and secretaries of various examination centres of Rajshahi division attended the meeting, official sources said.

Cries of help

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Pirojpur and Bandarban. The cyclone caused damage to property worth about Taka five thousand crore in Chittagong, a source said, adding, the extent of ravage and destruction in Cox's Bazar district, Sandwip and Hatia was still being assessed. The newly-constructed Karnafully Bridge has also been damaged.

Sultan Kabir Chowdhury MP, claimed that in Banshikhali upazila of Chittagong district alone thousands were killed by the sweeping tidal surge.

Almost 80 per cent of houses and 20 per cent of cattlehead are believed to have been washed away.

Chittagong remained cut off from outside world for several hours as telecommunication, road communication and power supply were totally disrupted.

The microwave tower of T and T had been razed to the ground resulting in total disruption of telecommunication between Chittagong and outside. Telecommunication cannot be restored unless the tower is reinstalled, said an engineer of the concerned department.

Almost 90 per cent local telephones went out of order but 80 per cent of them were restored by Wednesday noon.

The Railway (East Zone) had been badly affected as its signalling system had failed and its tracks were blocked here and there by fallen trees. Railway services were, however, maintained with much difficulty, railway sources said.

Urgent aid

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In the coastal districts of Chittagong, Noakhali, Feni, Lakshipur, Bhola, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Khulna, Pirojpur, Satkhira, Buriguna, Barisal and Chandpur.

Earlier on Tuesday the US Ambassador presented the Health and Family Welfare Ministry with nearly three metric tons of medical and surgical supplies for use in emergency treatment of cyclone victims.

The 25,000 US dollars humanitarian pledge is an immediate response to help alleviate the sufferings of the people in the affected areas.

Canada

Meanwhile, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), through the Canadian Red Cross, will contribute 150,000 Canadian dollars as emergency relief for victims of the cyclone which hit Bangladesh on April 29, a press release said.

The Canadian assistance responds to an emergency appeal from the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and equals nearly ten per cent of the appeal.

Foreign envoys

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The group saw the devastations along the Meghna river and its estuaries during the two-hour view of the affected areas.

The group had a brief stopover in Chittagong, where Communications Minister Oli Ahmed briefed them about the conditions of the cyclone-hit areas.

Earlier, the Foreign Minister also briefed the envoys in Dhaka on different aspects of the trail of devastations left by the cyclone and the measures the government had taken to cope with the situation.

The heads of missions felt that the damages were colossal and they would wait for a report from Bangladesh government on the situation.

Additional Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman who also accompanied the group said, the group of heads of missions comprised Chen Songlu of China, May J Makiaker of Germany, William B Milam of the United States, Henricus Gajentaan of the Netherlands, Toshio Saiki of Japan, Charles Henry Lasrimont of the UNDP and Christopher R Willoughby of the World Bank.

Editor: S. M. Ali