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The Daily Star

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Save the survivors



A DROP IN THE OCEAN: Unfed for four days, a group of the cyclone survivors scramble for a tin of dry food airdropped in Moheshkhali yesterday and an old man — edged out by the youngsters — looks upward to see if any more is coming. — Photo: Mohsin

PM rejects criticism, invites Opposition to a meeting today

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on Friday invited leaders of opposition political parties to a meeting today to discuss how to strengthen relief and rescue operations by enlisting support of all.

Winding up a general discussion on the impact of the cyclone in the Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) she said the government would welcome co-operation from opposition leaders in mitigating sufferings of the distressed people.

The parliament which after three days resumed its session, adjourned in view of Monday's cyclone, unanimously adopted a resolution condoling the deaths of hundreds of thousands and offered 'munajat' for their salvation.

The Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed, Baksal leader Mohiuddin Ahmed, Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Memon, JSD (Siraj) Shahjahan Siraj, AL member Tofael Ahmed, NDP member Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and 12 other MPs took part in the discussion.

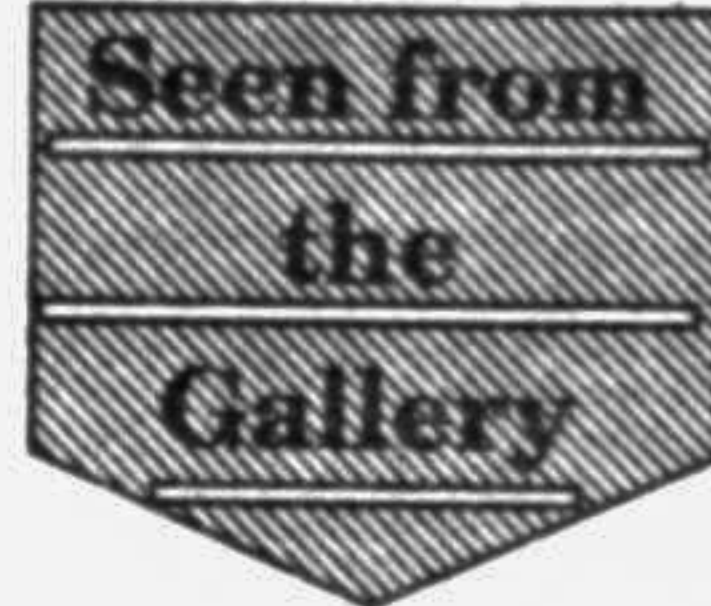
Begum Zia said the cyclone was the worst in history. More people would have been killed, had the government not taken adequate preparations to remove people to safe places. Ten lakh people were killed in the 1970 cyclone, she said adding the population had increased manifold since then.

The Leader of the House said the government had started sending relief goods to all cyclone-hit areas, giving priority to the worst affected areas. Supply of relief goods might be inadequate due to transportation problems but it was not true that people in many areas were yet to get relief.

She sharply criticised the Leader of the Opposition without naming her and said she could visit affected areas by helicopter only because a responsible government is in power.

She said her party was in the opposition for nine years but never got a helicopter to visit areas affected by natural disasters.

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By Mahfuz Anam

It was a grief stricken parliament that resumed its session yesterday. As the Speaker called the House to order the mood was sombre and the atmosphere, sad and tense. The Leader of the House reflected the general sentiment in her condolence resolution which was followed by a prayer for the salvation of the departed souls.

The Speaker's move to go into the business of the day was interrupted, at this stage, by the Opposition demand that a discussion should be held on the catastrophe that hit the nation. With the concurrence of the Leader of the House the

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Death toll mounts : Diarrhoea breaks out : Reaching succours to victims hits snags

A Star Report

Rushing pure water, food and life-saving drugs to the vast area of coastal belt ravaged by Monday's cyclone and tidal surge is now the crying need of the hour to save hundreds of thousands of survivors. With each passing day the physical strength of the cyclone victims is fast waning. They now face a grim future.

In many remote places, diarrhoeal diseases have reportedly broken out. Hand tubewells which are the only known source of safe drinking water in this region were blown away by the storm and tidal surge. The survivors are now left with soiled water to drink.

Our Staff Correspondent,

who extensively toured Kutubdia, Maheshkhali, Chokoria, St. Martin's Island, Cox's Bazar and Teknaf on Friday saw the agonies of the survivors writ on their faces. A gale raging upto 80 kilometres per hour at times in gusts accompanied by rain swept the offshore islands on Friday aggravating the sufferings of coastal people. Most of them were found bare bodied. Relief materials so far provided to them are negligible. In many places the rescue workers could not reach even on Friday. The people out there are yet to get any relief.

All along the coastline of offshore islands, our staffer saw oil slick while overflying in

a helicopter. Oil released from the damaged oil tankers has caused pollution of sea water. Large crowd of survivors were desperately waving their hands to attract the helicopter crew for relief. Some relief workers say that they are afraid of approaching the desperate islanders who rush for relief as soon as an aircraft lands on a devastated area.

Meanwhile, the cyclone victims seemed to be losing their courage and will to survive. Friday's inclement weather resisted airborne relief operation in most of the affected coastal areas.

The death toll in the cyclone and surge hit areas may exceed one and a half lakh, ac-

ording to reports reaching Dhaka from various sources. Death of 92,294 persons were officially confirmed till Friday.

The area-wise break-up of the casualties is :

Chittagong

City Corporation 3,000, Sandwip upazila 30,000, Banskhali 25,000, Anwara 1,000, Sitakunda 500, other upazilas 500.

Cox's Bazar

Sadar Upazila 48, Chakoria, 10,000, Moheshkhali, 11,000, Kutubdia, 8,000, Teknaf, 12, Ramu, 1.

Noakhali

Sadar 6, Hatiya, 3,001, Companyganj, 32, Senbag, 11

Bhola

Manpura, 12, Char Fasson 102, Borhanuddin 6, Doulatkhan 4, Lalmoan 4, Tajmuddin 3, Bhola Sadar, 2, Patuakhali district 16, Borguna, 7, Lakshmpur 5, Fent, 4, and Pirojpur, 1.

Our Staff correspondent Chapal Basbar who visited coastal islands of Noakhali district reported that the cyclone victims were now exposed to serious health hazards. Pure drinking water is hardly available. Relief materials did not reach the distressed people living in remote char areas. They are crying for help.

The affected people in the

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Sonadia: Panorama of death and devastation

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

Umme Begum was standing there, starting at the sky. She had been doing that for the past four days, ever since she lost her home and husband in the killer cyclone of Monday night. She always looked skywards, because she believed the Almighty would surely help her. She had reasons to believe, because miraculously, her baby child had survived with her.

I stood with Umme Begum on Sonadia Islet in Maheshkhali upazila, as she mumbled her story. The air force helicopter in which we flew stood about a hundred yards away, with scores of desperately hungry men virtually mobbing it. With no local administration or police around, it was difficult for the crew to distribute relief goods — water, bags of 'cheera', molasses — in an orderly manner. The crew did the best they could under the circumstances.

At Sonadia, around 100 families were stranded without a roof over their heads. People didn't want to leave the spots where their homes once stood. Amid the rubble, they sat, starting listlessly; some held on to bamboo poles, trying to stay on their feet. These little homes on tiny pieces of land were all they had before the tragedy struck last week. They didn't want to leave it for a second, but the empty stomachs and dry mouths drove

some of them to do just that as soon as our helicopter came in. Earlier we left Dhaka 8.30 am on board Antonov An-32 transport aircraft, loaded with dried food, water, molasses etc. We switched over to the helicopter at Patenga and headed for St. Martin's Island at the south-eastern edge of the country, followed by a Bell chopper with Air Chief Air Vice-Marshal Mumtazuddin Ahmed on board.

On the way, signs of devastation came before, or rather below, us. Between Cox's Bazar and Teknaf, several ships had sunk. "They are oil tankers", pilot Capt. Shaifque told us. The result was an oil slick that stretched over miles along the coast.

No relief work was necessary at St. Martin's, as the cyclone had done little damage there. We didn't know which place was hit how hard, not even four days after the fateful night. So, on to Maheshkhali. After Sonadia, the crew decided not to land the helicopter anywhere, as it didn't seem safe enough to do so.

At western Maheshkhali and Kutubdia, we hovered about five to 10 feet above ground, and threw the bags to the hungry people below. They were waiting directly below the chopper, thinking little of the danger. They held out their hands upwards and caught

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Khaleda receives Tk. 44,16,785 as donations

Relief materials and a sum of Taka 44,16,785 in cash and cheque were received as donations for the Prime Minister's Relief Fund Friday. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia received the donations at her office at Sugandha in Dhaka, reports BSS.

The organisations and persons who donated cheques to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund are:

BTC—Taka 10,00,000 Laban Malik Samity—Taka 50,000
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US reviewing additional assistance

WASHINGTON, May 3: The United States has so far provided 2.1 million dollars in relief aid to Bangladesh to deal with the effects of Monday's devastating cyclone and is reviewing Dhaka's request for helicopters, the State Department said today, report AFP.

Spokesman Margaret Tutwiler said the aid included roughly two million dollars in medical supplies which were already in Bangladesh and see Page 10 Col. 3

Cuellar assures all help

NEW YORK, May 3 : UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar has assured Bangladesh of all possible assistance from the UN system in the aftermath of the disastrous cyclone, reports Agency.

The assurance came during his meeting with Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman at the UN Headquarters in New York this afternoon.

Perez de Cuellar expressed his profound grief at the loss of life and property.

While giving his assurance for help, Cuellar said a team of UNDRO officials was already in Dhaka to assess the damage

and requirements of assistance.

The UN system would be fully mobilised for the purpose, he said, as had been the case on prior occasions.

Saifur Rahman broke his journey to London on way home to have an emergency meeting with the UN Secretary-General to apprise him of the magnitude of the loss of life and property in the wake of the natural calamity.

Relief and rehabilitation would require considerable diversion of scarce resources, Rahman said stressing the im-

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Armed Forces rush more relief

The members of the Armed Forces are carrying on relief and rescue operations at the cyclone-hit coastal areas with renewed vigour, according to an ISPR press release, reports BSS.

Chief of Air Staff Air Vice-Marshal Mumtazuddin Ahmed on Friday visited different cyclone-hit areas including the St. Martin's Island. He took some relief materials for the marooned people.

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UN agency runs out of funds for Iraqi refugees

GENEVA, May 3: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said Friday that her agency had run out of funds to help Iraqi refugees and that humanitarian efforts in the Gulf were in "dire jeopardy," report agencies.

In a statement, Sadako Ogata criticised governments for the poor response to an appeal by UNHCR 238.5 million dollars needed for stricken Kurds and Shi'ites who fled to Turkey and Iran.

She said UNHCR had spent

or committed "every cent" of the 94.4 million dollars so far pledged and warned that relief efforts could not continue "on credit."

Meanwhile, UNHCR spokeswoman Sylvia Foa said the Geneva-based agency was "very, very concerned," at reports that Kurdish refugees were being persuaded to leave Turkey for "false assurances," about the security situation in Iraq.

She said UNHCR feared some Kurds were under the

illusion they would be safe even outside the security zones created by American, British and French military forces.

"That is not the case," she told journalists.

Also Friday, Iran's Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri said foreign countries should be ashamed of their meager help to the Kurdish refugees, and another official said rotten food and used items were included in the foreign aid.

"Despite widespread propaganda, foreign countries

have provided the refugees with little help," Nouri was quoted as saying by the Islamic Republic News Agency, monitored in Nicosia, Cyprus. He said "the world ought to be ashamed of its insignificant assistance to the Iraq refugees."

Ruhollah Mirza-Beigi, described by IRNA as a health care official, said 1,500 boxes of canned fish were discarded because their freshness date had expired.

In Geneva, Foa said UNHCR also was worried about its lack

of ability to protect Kurdish refugees if allied forces withdrew from Iraq and handed over camps presently in the security zone to the UN.

"UNHCR does not have a police force or a protection force," she said. "That has to be provided by the international community or there have to be (safety) guarantees from Iraq," she said.

The statement by Ogata said UNHCR believed there were now 2 million Iraq refugees at high risk from malnutrition

She said the need for medicines was "desperate as warm weather arrives and the fear of epidemic turns into reality."

An Iraqi newspaper said today talks between Iraqi officials and Kurdish rebel leaders would resume in Baghdad next week.

The ruling Baath Party daily Al-Thawra said a Kurdish delegation, headed by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) leader Massoud Barzani, would be in Baghdad.

Mother Teresa arrives today, Pak PM tomorrow

The Pakistan Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, will arrive Dhaka tomorrow (Sunday) to express his country's sympathy with the people of Bangladesh in the wake of the havoc caused by the cyclones.

A Foreign Office spokesman told BSS that the Pakistan Prime Minister will meet Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and visit the cyclone-battered

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