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# The Daily Star

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## An offshore battle for survival



Cyclone-battered Char Torab Ali, an offshore island of Noakhali district, is still under water.

— Photo: Chapal Bashar

### Every possible help: Sharif

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who flew over the cyclone affected areas (Sunday) described the situation as 'very grave' and assured all possible assistance of his country in alleviating sufferings of the people, reports UNB and BSS.

Sharif accompanied by an 8-member delegation dashed to Dhaka in an Atr Force plane earlier in the day and soon after left for the affected coastal areas and offshore islands where more than 1.25 lakh people died in last week's cyclone.

On return from the whirlwind tour to the devastated areas, the Pakistan Prime Minister called on Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban Sunday night.

He appreciated the way the government has been working to mitigate the sufferings of the affected people.

The Pakistan Prime Minister also expressed his heartfelt sympathy for the cyclone victims and assured all possible assistance of his country for alleviating their sufferings.

The Acting President thanked the Prime Minister for visiting Bangladesh at this hour of distress.

Justice Shahabuddin also expressed his gratitude to Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan for his message of sympathy for the affected people.

The Pakistan Prime Minister earlier said the visit was only a 'mission of solidarity' — a

mission to reassure our brothers that in their hour of grief, they are not alone.

In a statement at the airport he said he had come to Bangladesh at a moment of 'great human tragedy' caused by the catastrophic cyclone.

The Pakistan Prime Minister was received at the VVIP tarmac of Zia International Airport by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

"As I step on the soil of Bangladesh, it is anguish and heartache rather than joy and excitement that predominates my sentiments," Prime Minister Sharif said in the statement.

The Pakistani Prime Minister said 'millions of our brothers and sisters have been rendered homeless while hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives and many more have lost all they possessed.' Pakistan will provide every possible help and assistance, he said.

"Our own limitations and inadequacies notwithstanding", he said Pakistan would like to extend to its brothers and sisters in Bangladesh every possible help and assistance.

Prime Minister Sharif said Prime Minister Begum Zia was faced with a problem that was both gigantic and colossal and her's task was herculean.

Paying tributes to Bangladesh Prime Minister, he said she was a person who was never deterred by adversity and was a leader who had always demonstrated qualities

See Page 10 Col. 2

### Inclement weather slows relief operations: Relief ships run aground: Communication with many affected areas yet to be established

Star Report

While woes of the survivors of Monday's cyclone and tidal bore are multiplying with each day passing, a vigorous relief operation still remains a far cry. Squabbles between the local public leaders and the government functionaries, both of whom appear determined to take the lead have made the formation of relief committees difficult in many of the badly ravaged upazilas and unions in the offshore islands.

Inclement weather which has been persisting for the last three days has slowed the progress in airborne relief operations. The rivers are not

navigable due to submerged vessels and other objects. As a result, ships and motor launches fail to carry relief goods to offshore islands. A large number of cargo vessels and patrol boats belonging to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BITWA) which were sent for relief and rescue operations now remain stranded at Choukighat under Daulatkhan of Bhola district. A pilot of an IWTA vessel told The Daily Star on Sunday that it was uncertain as to how long it would take for making the waterways navigable.

Our staff correspondent

Syed Issa writes from Bhola: With the recovery of 27 more bodies, official death toll in Manpura upazila rose to 115. Fifteen trawlers went to the deep sea before a day of the cyclone with 1500 fishermen aboard. Only two returned and the rest were missing. The relatives of the missing people are crowding the upazila headquarters to know their whereabouts. There was fresh rain on Sunday which aggravated the miseries of the affected people. Communication with Dhalchar, a remote offshore island, could not be established as yet. A relief team

with Deputy Commissioner, Bhola left for Dhalchar on Sunday braving the inclement weather.

Several vessels belonging to BIWTA plying on Barisal-Dhaka and Khulna routes ran aground at Choukighat. Three naval patrol boats, three oil tankers, one coastal ship and one tug have been grounded. The waterways will require more time to be navigable, sources said.

A spokesman of the Cyclone Preparedness Programme told The Daily Star that 4,000 more bodies were recovered in Hatya island and death toll mounted to 7331 in the island.

In Companyanj, 500 more bodies were recovered. Thousands of cattlehead were found floating in the river and seashores.

Distressed people are asking for help but relief officials are scared as to how they will address the vast requirements of the needy people.

Our staff correspondent further reports from Bhola: 37 more cyclone victims were traced on the bank of the Meghna and in the char areas of Manpura under the district during the last 48 hours.

Two of some 1500 fisher- See Page 10 Col. 1

### UN special envoy, LICROSS head arrive

The United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation (UNDRRO) Coordinator, Hamed Essafi, arrived in Dhaka Sunday as the special envoy of the UN Secretary General for making an assessment of the situation caused by the catastrophic cyclone, reports BSS.

Essafi said the United Nations would do its best to mobilise international support to aid the cyclone victims.

The UNDRRO Coordinator, soon after his arrival, left with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for the cyclone affected areas. See Page 10 Col. 1

### Press Note Govt clarifies utilisation of Relief Fund

The government Sunday termed baseless the news item captioned 'need of money for the relief of affected people but 211 crore Taka has been stuck up with the President's Relief Fund' that appeared in a section of the press, reports BSS.

In a Press Note, the government also termed the remarks in news review that the Prime Minister had to appeal to the international community for help as the Acting President did not do so. See Page 10 Col. 3

### Foreign aid for cyclone victims

The United States has provided more than 2.1 million dollars in assistance to the cyclone-ravaged nation of Bangladesh, a USIS press release said in Dhaka Sunday, reports BSS.

According to the US State Department Fact Sheet outlining total US assistance and aid from other sources to Bangladesh as cyclone relief and US government response till Sunday: total — US dollars 2,139,000.

The total include dollar 25,000 from the Ambassador's Emergency Fund, 5,500 pounds of medical supplies worth dollar 2,000,000, 727,000 water purification tablets, worth dollar 14,000 such as water purification, ors, and plastic sheeting worth dollar 100,000 to Bangladesh. See Page 10 Col. 2

### Revenue spending stopped

The government had decided to stop revenue expenditure and other incidental expenses to maintain austerity in view of the crisis arising out of the severe cyclonic storm that devastated the country's south Monday last, an official hand-out said Sunday night, reports BSS.

According to the decision there will be no buying of furniture, books and magazines, nor there will be any funds for entertainment at the government level till June 30 this year. A single cup of tea or coffee will, however, be served during meetings only, the handout added. The decision comes into force immediately with all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies, the handout mentioned. The government also stressed the need for austerity and reduction of expenses at all levels.

### Writ asking for elections to offices of President and Vice-President By Supreme Court Correspondent

A writ petition was filed in the High Court Division on Sunday for a Rule Nisi upon the Election Commission and the Chief Election Commissioner to show cause as to why they should not be directed to hold elections to the offices of President and Vice-President by June 4, 1991 in pursuance of Clause (2B) of Article 123 of the Constitution. See Page 10 Col. 6

### The Doomsday and the need of the hour

Star Special

On the sixth day of the Doomsday elemental strike no workable 'beachhead' has as yet been established on any of the main hit areas separated by channels of water from mainland Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Rough sea continues to balk at the feeble attempts to set relief bridges to them. Helicopter missions dropping dry food cans only underline the hopelessness of the situation.

The scores of chars beyond the Maizdee-Sonapur line used to be reachable on foot. Many of them till yesterday could not be reached and connected to any relief effort.

While the above failings have been pushing thousands of survivors to a death that

they had avoided on Monday's surge, it is buying precious time for all agencies and organisations hoping to reach scourg out in those islands, — among them being the government.

Strange is the hollowness of human vauntings on achievements in technological process—look at a modern sovereign state on the threshold of the 21st century failing to land on some parts of its territory because of nothing but a rough sea. Bangladesh now in the throes of one of history's greatest human tragedies — this failure is not only Bangladesh's failure, it is a failure of humanity as a whole. This is but a child's play of a job for US or the Soviets or

even China. And neighbouring India can set up ramps and jetties on the island beaches and run regular ferries and shuttles of relief missions with their own not-two advanced wherewithal if they are persuaded to—all in spite of the heaving seas.

An hour earlier to the islands now counts for more than a million dollar some weeks later. Every hour counts and yet days pass by without any contact being established. This is hardest reality of all to take—more than the mounting figures of death which by body-count have gone beyond one lakh and twentyfive thousand by last night. Very evidently, many things have eluded the See Page 10 Col. 7

### Navigability of Ctg port demands priority

By Moazzem Hossain

The economy will suffer still heavier losses in the coming weeks, if urgent and effective steps are not taken to make the country's main seaport at Chittagong operational. The port after the devastating damage wrought by last week's cyclone is out of operation.

Trade and industry circles in Dhaka have expressed their serious anxiety over the situation prevailing at Chittagong Port.

Delays in making a complete assessment of the immediate and most pressing needs to put the port back in gear, and lining up needed, technical and financial support for its repair and rehabilitation works will cause more set-

backs for the economy, the same circles have felt.

The port is now inoperative. The government is yet to take up any firm initiatives for its most urgently needed repair works. The equipment and other facilities at the port are valued at Taka 350 crore. Imports on Cost and Freight (C&F) will not resume unless the Port is reopened to international shipping.

Opening of Import Letters of Credits (ILCs) is virtually suspended after the port was rendered inoperative.

Trade and industry circles told The Daily Star that industrial output would fall because of disruptions to supply of imported raw materials. Bulk ex- See Page 10 Col. 3

### Polluted environment makes survival unbearable

From Moinuddin Naser

carcasses. Even in the suburbs and rural areas, people are having to drink badly contaminated water, risking diarrhoea and a host of other water-borne diseases.

Almost every pond, river, canal and well has been badly polluted by the tidal surge.

The scale of the relief operation mounted so far has been nowhere near matching the requirement.

The most overriding need of the hour is to clear the city areas of rotting carcasses of both humans and animals. This correspondent found

the whole environment of the city most unhealthy with a heavy stench of decomposing bodies vitiating the air.

The people of Sandwip, Kutubdia and the coastal areas of Chittagong are having to breathe in a most putrid, nauseating stench.

Efforts to recover the carcasses have been so inadequate that many of the affected city areas are yet to be searched by the rescue operators and cleaners.

The Chittagong City Corporation sweepers remained the only workforce still trying to find out and dis-

pose of the decomposing bodies with a helping hand from the Anjuman-i-Mufidul Islam, a humanitarian organisation that engages in the disposal of unclaimed bodies.

Each four-man team of sweepers has been scouring city and suburbs for carcasses. The leader of one such team told this correspondent that they had recovered 71 bodies from just a one mile stretch along the Patenga sea beach in the three days following the disaster.

He said a complete combing operation will need at least another week.

Innumerable bodies have been recovered from Patenga, north and south Halishahar, Bangla Bazar, Chakhat and along the southern bank of the Karnaphuli river.

The sweepers complained that the stench was often so unbearable that they needed time-off to catch their breaths.

One of them, himself a victim of the cyclone, said his house was totally levelled by the storm. The Anjuman-i-Mufidul Islam's facilities are so limited, lacking sufficient manpower, that burying the bodies has become a great challenge.

Anjuman sources said that more bodies may be trapped under the heaps of garbage and collapsed houses.

The death toll of livestock is anybody's guess. On Friday last this reporter saw at least 50 carcasses north of the Patenga naval base.

The air over the city has been rendered heavy not only by the stench from corpses and animal carcasses but also by the rotting rice, pulses, and other perishable foods in the different godowns of the city markets.

The businessmen in order See Page 10 Col. 1

### Inside today Article

#### Many jostle to become next Indian PM



India goes to the polls at the end of May in a confused political state. No one believes a clear victory by any party is likely. D. K. Joshi writes from New Delhi  
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### Metropolitan

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### International



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### NEWS BRIEFS

#### Sharif's departure delayed

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who came in Dhaka on a day's visit Sunday, could not leave for home because of inclement weather. The Pakistan Premier decided to stay overnight in the city. He is scheduled to leave Dhaka for Islamabad in Monday morning, reports BSS.