

'BNP manifesto professes presidential system'

The Jatiya Sangsad resumed its sitting Saturday at 11.57 am after a day's recess with Speaker Abdul Rahman Biswas in the chair, reports BSS.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury
After the recitation from the Holy Quran Awami League member Abul Hasan Chowdhury (Tangail) said on a point of order that there was a serious disturbance in the Firangate area. He said that he had heard a blast there.

The Speaker said that he had also heard the blast and asked the member to take his seat.

Taking up the business of the day, the Speaker said that the House had discussed the other day the situation arising out of cyclone and other natural calamities.

Anwarul Islam
Initiating the discussion on the devastating cyclone and tidal surge on the recent day, Anwarul Islam said that he was upset and shocked when he heard that the cyclone had hit his constituency.

Islam said the affected three unions of Patuakhali district including Kalapara and Galachipa situated on the southern coast of the country are highly inaccessible and it takes at least 48 hours to reach there by launch.

He said at least 30 people had lost their lives in the killer cyclone and hundreds of fishermen were still missing. He recalled that the areas were also badly hit by the cyclone in 1970.

Anwarul Islam said that the coastal unions which were battered by the cyclone should be declared a calamity area. The AL member regretted that no relief had reached the area.

Islam further regretted that although women members of the Treasury Bench were having helicopter trip to the cyclone hit areas but the opposition members could not get a place in the choppers.

The AL member pointed out that the cyclone affected areas of Patuakhali and Barguna districts were not included in the list of the zones divided by the government for carrying out relief operations.

He said although the death figure was low this time, the severity of the storm had surpassed that of the cyclone of 1970 and the damage was widespread.

Islam requested the government for sending relief materials including CI sheets, medicine and food stuff to the areas.

He said the trees of the local forest felled by the cyclone, should be distributed among the people free of cost.

Shahidul Huq Jamal

Speaking next, Shahidul Huq Jamal (BNP-Bakerganj-Pirojpur) said Bangladesh was a poor country and it was obviously a Herculean task for any government to cope with the situation caused by the natural disaster that had taken place in the coastal areas recently.

He said shelters in country's cyclone-prone areas were very important and a plan was first taken up by the erstwhile East Pakistan Red Cross in 1970. The cyclone shelters built in many a coastal district after the independence were the contribution of the Red Cross Society in collaboration with the League of Red Cross Societies, he added.

The Treasury Bench member said the autocratic regime of IIM Ershad had changed the "rules of the red cross" to exercise greater control over this humanitarian organisation. That regime also changed its name to Red Crescent. He demanded change of the rules brought about by the previous government so that status quo ante was restored.

Jamal said the government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was sparing no efforts to alleviate the suffering of the cyclone affected people and asked what else could have been done under this situation. One must not criticise the government just for the sake of criticisms, he added.

Nazir Hossain

Taking the floor next, Nazir Hossain (CPB-Sunamganj) expressed disappointment over the manner in which the relief operations were being conducted. He deplored the government that it did not consider such a disaster as a national calamity and that it did not involve all segments of the people including the opposition parties in the massive relief works.

The opposition member said the Communist Party of Bangladesh believed in constructive criticism and added that his concern was that failure of an elected government in holding the relief operation would come as a setback for the democratic forces.

"We would still urge the government to set up an all-party relief committee at national level for a coordinated effort to mitigate the sufferings of the affected people, Hossain said.

The opposition member, stressing the need for involving different sections of the people in the massive relief work, proposed that a parliamentary committee could also be set up to deal with the situation.

Salauddin Kamran

Speaking next, Salauddin Kamran (BNP-Laxmipur) said that cyclones and other natural disasters were not a new phenomenon in this country but the severity of recent catastrophe had surpassed all previous records.

It was untrue that government did not take precautionary measures, he said and added that 64,000 people were shifted to safe shelters in Hatiya alone.

The Treasury Bench member said the present government came to power through an election after bringing an end to autocratic rule and it was only natural that a people's government like the present one would make all out effort to tackle the situation.

The relief work might not be adequate given the magnitude of the destruction but the sincerity and the efforts of the government to cope with the situation were highly worthwhile, Kamran said.

Referring to the proposal of some opposition members for setting up a national level relief committee with the Acting President as its head, the Treasury Bench member said such proposal ran contrary to the concept of sovereign parliament.

Mohammad Nasim

Participating in the discussion, Mohammad Nasim (AL-Sirajganj) referred to newspaper reports on the difference of opinion between the Acting President and the Prime Minister and added that it was not denied by the either of the sides.

Referring to clause 56 of the constitution, he said under the present constitution, the President is all powerful. Nasim said the Acting President had suggested formation of an all party national relief committee headed by him which, he said, was reportedly refused by the Prime Minister.

He criticised the government for giving responsibilities of relief operation in different affected upazilas to some former MPs and also to those who lost in the election.

Criticising the government for its alleged failure to save the lives and properties of the people from the recent cyclone and tidal bore and mismanagement in relief operation, Nasim said undertaking of timely precautionary measures could reduce the loss of lives and properties and the sufferings of the people.

Nasim said during Awami League Rule 238 cyclone shelters and 138 Kellas (Mond) were constructed. After that period, no other government undertook any preventive measure, he added.

He said, we want to join relief activities which would be carried out unitedly and stand by the side of the affected people at the time of their need. But, he said, it would no longer be possible under the present situation.

Criticising the BNP, he said it came to power with a promise to uphold the constitution but it was now neglecting the constitution. He demanded an amendment to the constitution regarding the form of the government. In this connection, Nasim pointed out to the statement made by Zamiruddin Sircar, State Minister for Land, in the parliament in which he mentioned that BNP believed in the presidential system of government.

Zamiruddin Sircar

Rising on a point of order in the midst of chaos created by the opposition members, Zamiruddin Sircar clarified his statement saying that, he had stated in the parliament that the BNP manifesto professed Presidential system of government. He said unless the party manifesto was changed it was binding on the party to follow the same.

He also pointed out that the high-powered relief and rehabilitation committee was formed with the consent of the Acting President.

Niamatullah

Niamatullah (BNP-Dhaka) on a point of order demanded expunction of a portion of the statement by Mohammad Nasim (AL-Sirajganj) as it contained some unparliamentary words.

Farida Rahman

Farida Rahman (BNP-Jessore-Satkhira) also took the floor on a point of order for a personal clarification and said Nasim, in his statement, gave some wrong information. She pointed out that though she was defeated in the election her security deposit was not forfeited.

Participating in the discussion Haroon-or-Rashid Khan (BNP-Manikganj) criticised the opposition remarks regarding the disaster management and said it was easy to make remarks than to implement a programme.

Tofael Ahmed

At this point Tofael Ahmed (AL-Bhola) on a point of order drew the attention of the chair that the expunged portion of the statement made by State Minister for Land Zamiruddin Sircar was published in the daily Inquilab.

The Speaker said that a statement will be given in the House in this regard later. Referring to the mismanagement of relief during AL government Haroon-or-Rashid quoted Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who would say that the suckers ate up what he had brought by begging. He said, we can assure our leader Begum Khaleda Zia that the MPs of BNP would not do that.

Abul Hasan

As the House resumed its session at 3-13 pm with the Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali in the chair, Abul Hasan Chowdhury (AL-Tangail) on a point of order said that a woman member of the Treasury Bench had used two objectionable words "genetic behaviour" in her speech in the morning session.

The Speaker advised the concerned member that he should have raised it during that session.

Badruddoza Chowdhury

Taking the floor, deputy leader of the House, Badruddoza Chowdhury explained that there were innumerable genes in our body which determined the characteristics of the individuals and as such there was nothing wrong in uttering those words while describing someone's behaviour.

Matia Choudhury

At this stage, Awami League member Begum Matia Choudhury took the floor and agreed with the explanation given by the deputy leader of the House describing it as scientific. But, she said, the way the women member used the words in the House was objectionable and the House should give a considered opinion about it.

Manirul Haq

Thereafter, Manirul Haq Chowdhury (JP-Comilla) on a point of order demanded of the chair to inform the House about the arrest of Anwar Hossain, a Jatiya Party member from Pirojpur and a former Communication Minister.

The Speaker said that a statement about the arrest of Anwar Hossain was circulated

in the House. He asked Manirul Haq Chowdhury to collect it. Then the Speaker gave the floor to Abdur Razzak (BAKSAL-Shariatpur).

Abdur Razzak

Abdur Razzak said that lakhs of people were killed in the century's worst cyclone and thousands of cattleheads perished and property worth several thousand crores of takas were destroyed.

The situation is so pathetic that it should be handled in a manner equal an emergency situation, he said.

Razzak said it was expected that the Prime Minister and Leader of the House in her speech would inform the nation as well as the world about the real situation of the devastation. It was also expected that the government would declare the cyclone affected areas as calamity zone and involve the whole nation irrespective of political belief and opinion in the relief and rescue operations, he said.

Instead, Razzak said, the Prime Minister had tried to play down the situation. The BKSAL member said that a parliamentary team of opposition members including himself had visited several areas under Chittagong and Cox's Bazar districts to have an idea of the devastation. He said the situation was very painful. The whole atmosphere in the affected areas was becoming heavier with the stench of the decomposed bodies and carcasses.

He regretted that steps were not taken for burial of the bodies. He blamed the government for its failure to project the real situation prevailing in the calamity areas.

Quoting volunteers of NOG's working in those places, the BKSAL member said that there was a wide gap between the picture presented by them and the one given by the government about the damage wrought by the cyclone.

In this respect, Razzak sought to know as to what were the reasons with the government to conceal the facts about the destruction caused by the cyclone.

The BKSAL member Abdur Razzak said that if the correct picture of the devastation was projected by the government more help for the cyclone victims would have come from the international community.

Referring to a minister's speech that the situation was under control, Abdur Razzak sought to know how the post-cyclone situation was brought under control.

He said the activities of the members of the armed forces during natural calamities in the past were prompt and

faster but this time it was not noticed like before.

About the damage of aircrafts and navy vessels, Razzak also wanted to know why the government did not take any measure to save those before the tidal surge swept the areas.

Quoting a British journalist who visited the cyclone-hit areas, Razzak said that the journalist had seen devastations in the Philippines and Lebanon but the damage wrought by the last cyclone could not be compared with any other situation.

He accused the government of politicising the relief activities and called for involving people from all walks of life in the relief and rescue operations.

Razzak put forward a number of suggestions including reconstruction of coastal embankment, writing off the agricultural loans and sanctioning new loans, determining causes of cyclone and their solution through a global effort, modernisation of the fire brigades with the inclusion of helicopters and speed boats and construction of schools in the coastal areas which could also be used as shelter centres.

Nizamuddin Khan

Thereafter, Nizamuddin Khan (BNP-Manikganj) took the floor and said "let us implement what we say. We should not engage ourselves in mudslinging", he said.

Refuting the opposition charges that the government had failed to provide precautionary measures, Nizamuddin pointed out that Prime Minister and Leader of the House Begum Khaleda Zia proposed adjournment of the House forseeing the impending danger. But, he said, the opposition had opposed that move.

The BNP member from Manikganj said a huge number of blankets came to this country in 1972 but those blankets found their place in Calcutta markets. As a result, he said, when the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the foreign ambassador to the gruel kitchens opened in different places of the country during the famine in 1974, they did not even rely on those. Still we get help from abroad at times of our distress, he said and referred to relief the country received after Urr Char disaster and floods of 1987-88. He held, that we should give up mentality of receiving relief and try to stand on our own feet.

Mr. Nizamuddin said environment was degrading because of felling of trees. Quoting statistics, he said, 18 crore tons of trees were being burnt every year in about, 4,5000 brick fields in the

country.

He said Sangsad members should be involved in protecting the trees and checking their use in burning bricks.

Mr. Nizamuddin suggested for constructing buildings in cyclone and tidal surge prone areas on government initiative so that those could be used both as educational institutions as well as shelters. He also proposed for planting trees along the high ways and coastal belt of the country for maintaining environmental balance and containing tidal surge.

Redwan Ahmed

Participating in the discussion, Mohammad Redwan Ahmed (Ind-Comilla) expressed his indignation and said nothing effective was done in the Jatiya Sangsad excepting holding of debate on some issues during its more than a month-long session.

The Independent member from Comilla said the Prime Minister and Leader of the House could not apprise the members of the House about the extent of loss to the Navy and the Air Force since she was not the chief executive of the government.

He expressed his astonishment that the people still do not know the exact number of deaths due to the cyclone on April 29. He claimed that no life existed in ten coastal islands each of which is as big as the Urrchar Island.

Mr Ahmed said the extent of death and devastation could be assessed in three days through Upazila Nirbahi Officers of the affected areas if the government had taken prompt action.

He urged the Government for issuing a standing order to the local authorities so that relief and other help could be made available to the distressed people.

Mr Ahmed demanded of the government to build pucca houses instead of tin sheds in the cyclone-prone areas and pucca godowns so that people could be saved and provided with necessary relief in times of need.

Abdul Mannan

Rising on a point of clarification State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mr Abdul Mannan said each of the two ATP aircraft of Bangladesh Biman, now grounded, was purchased by the Ershad government at a price 3 to three and a half million dollars higher than the market price at that time.

He said that this was a serious criminal act and a criminal case had been filed in this regard.

The State Minister informed the House that due to groundings of the two ATP air-

craft Bangladesh Biman was undergoing a loss of US dollars 15,000 daily.

Nazmul Huda

Participating in the discussion State Minister for Food Barrister Nazmul Huda opposed the suggestion for forming an All-Party Relief Committee and said the BNP government was able to conduct the relief and rehabilitation activities properly under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia.

He said the present government being an elected one enjoyed the confidence of the people and also owes the responsibility to stand by the side of the people and save them from the natural disasters.

He said since the people had reposed their confidence in BNP which was also capable of running the government it would run the show according to their choice.

Refuting the Opposition allegation that the government had failed in post-disaster relief and rescue operation Mr Nazmul Huda said they (BNP) also opposed the formation of All-Party Relief Committee because, after the success of relief operation the Opposition would say the government would have failed had not the Opposition joined in the operation.

He said with confidence that the BNP government would succeed in carrying out the post-disaster relief and rehabilitation programme and would also be able to complete the 5-year term.

He said adequate government relief had reached everywhere and there was no report of death of starvation from anywhere in the disaster area. He said even the Opposition could not give any statistics where the relief goods did not reach.

Mr Nazmul Huda said the steps taken by the government were appreciated abroad. The NGO's also had no allegation about the relief operation and they were free to work according to their own programme, he pointed out.

Disputing allegations of the Opposition members in the House regarding relief activities, he said their objective was to malign the government politically. He said the Opposition should have played a constructive role. This was not observed during the last few days, he lamented.

He said due to timely precautionary measures taken by the Government the loss by the disaster was much less than it could be and the death figure did not exceed two lakh.

Abdus Sobhan

Moulana Abdus Sobhan (Jamaat-e-Islami) expressed his profound sorrow at the death

of thousands of people and destruction of huge property in the devastating cyclonic storm and called upon all quarters to work out suitable measures to save the people in distress.

He was of the opinion that the national disaster should be faced unitedly by taking steps at the national level. He suggested formation of a National Disaster Committee comprising members from both Treasury and Opposition benches to conduct rescue, relief and rehabilitation work effectively. This would demonstrate the broadness of mind of the Government and inspire confidence in the donor countries and agencies in helping us more vigorously, he added.

Moulana Sobhan said the Jatiya Sangsad should be the nucleus of all activities in the direction of saving the cyclone battered people. If the ruling party alone was involved in relief and rehabilitation programmes there would be a chance of misappropriation of relief materials as had happened in the past, he said.

The Jamaat member said the government had become too much dependent on the bureaucrats in the distribution of relief materials among the affected people. This, he said, would not augur well for the country. He regretted that though the calamity had struck the coastal belt of the country about 12 days ago the government had not yet been able to furnish correct information about the actual number of death of the people and the damages suffered by various sectors, and also our Air Force and our Navy.

Aminul Huq

Mr Aminul Huq (BNP-Rajshahi) said the opposition had the right to criticise any action of the government. But that criticism should be constructive and not destructive, he added.

He regretted that the opposition in the Sangsad had been harping on the same accusation for the last few days that the government had failed to provide succour to the cyclone affected people. In their speeches the opposition members bitterly criticised the government. They found nothing good by the government with regard to mitigating the sufferings of the distressed people.

This negative approach of the opposition and their criticism for the sake of criticism would only harm the country instead of doing any good to the affected people. This would also discourage the donor countries and agencies, he said.

Mr. Huq maintained that while criticising the government the opposition members failed to give any outline how to face the national disaster and rehabilitate the affected people and the damaged infrastructures in various sectors of national economy.

Refuting the charges that the government had failed to deliver the goods to the affected people, he said assurances of the donor countries and their help for the implementation of short as well as long term programmes for the battered people and damaged infrastructures amply proved that the government was moving on a right direction. The government had been doing its best for the affected people with very limited resources at its disposal, he said.

Criticising the reckless accusation of the opposition against the government, Mr. Huq said the people of the country would give the judgement on the performances of the government after five years. The present government came to power only 45 days ago and time has not come as yet to hand down judgement on its performances, he added.

Manirul Haq

Participating in the discussion Mr. Manirul Haq Chowdhury (JP-Comilla) said he would not discuss whether the government had succeed

or failed in tackling the situation in the aftermath of the devastation caused by the cyclone and off-shore islands.

Mr. Chowdhury said the main question today was whether arrangements could be made for the burial of the victims. Time and history will say that, he added.

He, however, posed a question as to who would take the responsibility of failing to bury the cyclone victims.

Referring to the outbreak of diarrheal diseases in the cyclone-hit areas the JP member wanted to know who would take responsibility if the people died of diarrhoea.

Mr Chowdhury described the situation as a national disaster. It was not something curse as some members described it, he said.

He said, since it was a national calamity, all people should be allowed to work together and unitedly to tackle the situation.



A singer rendering songs at Bangla Academy premises on Saturday during a function held to raise funds for cyclone victims —Star photo

All for relief



Children of Shishu Academy brought out a procession on Saturday calling for steps to save cyclone survivors.



Mudreka Bhai Saheb special emissary on behalf of His Holiness Dr. Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin Saheb Spiritual Head of International Dawoodi Bohra Community is presenting a cheque of Taka one Million to Prime Minister for cyclone relief.