



S Jagannathan (L) and Chanchal Sarkar.

Indian Editors appalled by dimension of disaster

By S. Y. Bakht

A two-member delegation representing the Editors Guild of India arrived in Dhaka recently to express solidarity with the people and the media in the aftermath of the April 29 cyclone.

The delegation is led by S. Jagannathan, the Chief Editor of the Indian Express group of newspapers — one of the single largest newspaper chains in Asia.

The other member of the delegation is Chanchal Sarkar, a noted columnist for the Indian Express, the Hindustan Times and several other newspapers in India and abroad.

At the beginning, the news of the cyclone just trickled in, but suddenly we were appalled by the dimension of the disaster. S Jagannathan said in an interview with The Daily Star.

He said that the President of the Guild, Nikhil Chakravarty, decided that two members should visit Bangladesh to show "that we care, that we are concerned and to express solidarity with the media there."

Although the visit primarily aims at expressing solidarity with the people and the media here, Chanchal Sarkar said that the trip would also enable them to assess the situation better and project it in the Indian media.

"What the press or the media in India has to say does have an impact in the country", Jagannathan pointed out, adding that the visit by the Indian Prime Minister arriving today, was perhaps prompted by the wide coverage of the disaster by the Indian media.

The two members of the

Guild also expressed their desire to establish closer links with newspaper Editors of this region, particularly with the Editors of Bangladesh.

The Editors Guild of India initiated a bilateral meeting of the Editors of India and Sri Lanka recently in India.

It was an informal meeting which turned out to be an extremely valuable experience, they said.

The Editors of Sri Lanka are going to arrange the next round of meetings and they have proposed inviting Editors from Pakistan as well.

A similar arrangement can also be made to include Editors from Bangladesh.

Exchange of ideas among professional peers can be beneficial to all parties involved, they added.

"We are part of the same culture which we have inherited. It is rooted in the same thing and we also have common democratic experiences," Jagannathan explained.

Jagannathan felt that a more structured confederation among Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and other countries in the region holds great potential, which can even reach beyond the scope of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation grouping. Such a confederation could stand up strongly to other similar regional groupings that are cropping up in various parts of the world, he added.

S. Jagannathan is scheduled to leave Dhaka today (Sunday), while Chanchal Sarkar will remain for a few more days to visit some of the affected areas.

Storms disrupt

From Page 1 Col. 4 supply was disrupted by snapping of wires, short circuits, burning out of fuse wires and other trouble during the storms.

Some areas of Dhaka city also plunged into darkness after the storm Thursday evening.

According to a Power Development Board (PDB) source, the storms during the last week had affected only local distribution systems in some areas of the country, but the national grid and the sub-stations remained unaffected.

Meanwhile, restoration of power supply in the April 29 cyclone affected areas is now in progress.

PDB sources informed that the part of the national grid and other sub-stations damaged by the cyclone, have been repaired and are now in operation.

Only the Hailshahar sub-station still remained out of operation as damage to it was severe.

The PDB had initially put the damages caused to the power systems in the cyclone affected districts at worth Tk. 80 crore. But it said this is likely to go up further.

Walkout

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cluding the ministers was not favourable for the continuation of the Parliament session.

She said that the government in power was trying to make the parliament ineffective by ignoring it during a national crisis.

Sheikh Hasina said that questions were already being raised in different quarters whether the government was trying to continue the Parliament or not.

She said that some ministers and members of the Treasury Bench sometimes seemed to be forgetting the difference between the Parliament and other places.

She said that their utterances and attacks against the Opposition sometimes seemed intentional and aimed at undermining the prestige and dignity of the Parliament members.

Sheikh Hasina said that she was not given any helicopter by the government as claimed by the Deputy Leader of the House.

She said that she availed the chance of visiting the cyclone-hit areas with the Speaker and some other ministers who went there by helicopter.

The Leader of the Opposition said that there was a complete mismanagement of the relief work and the cyclone affected people were not getting adequate relief materials to sustain themselves.

Meanwhile the Chief Whip of the Treasury bench Delwar Hossain and Mir Sawkat Ali came to the office of the Leader of the Opposition and talked to her over the dispute.

The Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali called a meeting of the members of both the Treasury and the opposition benches at his office.

In the meeting it was decided that M. K. Anwar would withdraw his remarks and regret them.

However, the members of the Treasury bench did not agree to continue the parliament after May 15 and to start any debate on the form of government.

After that the Speaker Assembled the House again. And with the resumption of the session Deputy Leader Badruddoza Chowdhury made a statement on the dispute while M. K. Anwar withdrew his comments and regretted.

But the opposition members, still in the room of the Leader of the Opposition could not decide whether they would join the yesterday's session.

The Jamaat and Awami League members agreed to join the session while the Jatiya Party and the NDP did not join.

The House was adjourned at the request of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to resume today at 11 a.m.

Sylhet

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Room sources. Rainfall recorded on Saturday at Sylhet was 98 mm. at Habiganj-97.8 mm. Maulavibazar-42 mm. Bhairabazar-40.6 mm. Sunamganj-35 mm and Comilla-25 mm.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Division said in Dhaka Saturday the situation would remain unchanged for next few days due to incessant rain.

At least 12 unions including Tetulia, Gaglachur and Magna in Mohanganj and Khaliujuri upazilas of Netrokona district have been inundated by flash floods during the last 24 hours.

River Dhanu was rising sharply and threatening the existence of several flood protection embankments and sluice gates. Other rivers of the area have also registered sharp rise during the period.

Deputy Commissioner, Netrokona said, the situation followed three days of rain incessant and onrush of water from Sylhet.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia visiting tornado-hit areas of Gazipur Saturday. —PID photo

Building

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Razzak, Chief Whip of the Opposition Mohammad Nasim, Jamaat member Moulana Abdus Subhan, BNP members A B M Zahidul Hoque, Alamgir Kabir, Aminul Haq, Nizamuddin Khan, Harunur Rashid, Salahuddin Kamram, Syed Shahidul Haq, AL members Anwarul Islam, Principal Nazrul Islam, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Jatiya Party members Mantrul Haq Chowdhury, Moq-sud Ibne Aziz Lama, independent member Redwan Ahmed, and CPB member Nazir Hossain.

Badruddoza Chowdhury said there was no permanent solution to problems of cyclone and tornado which were experienced also by the United States, Japan, and the Philippines. Only losses could be minimised through concerted efforts. Quoting from a newspaper report he said, UN relief coordinator Hamed Essafi had said 1400 crore US dollars was needed for immediate rehabilitation of the cyclone affected people.

B. Chowdhury said, the April 29 cyclone devastation was at least 100 times greater than that of the Urir Char cyclone of 1985, and many times worse than the 1988 flood. The international response for help is greater because an elected government is in power, he said.

He urged the Opposition for appreciating the fact that a huge amount of money was required for rehabilitation of the cyclone victims.

He brushed aside an Opposition criticism that the Government was involving BNP in relief activities, and said as a party BNP was organising its relief activities separately just as was being done by Awami League, CPB, Jamaat and other parties. The government was encouraging participation of all political parties, NGOs and groups in relief and rehabilitation work.

He said relief materials have been sent to all affected areas where 200 medical teams were engaged to fight epidemic like diarrhoea. Questions like waiving of loans of cyclone affected farmers, and supplying them with seeds and other inputs are under consideration, he said.

B Chowdhury said it was but for adequate preparedness that the cyclone death toll was not much higher. Army has been carrying out relief activities from April 30. A committee was inquiring into the damage of aircraft at Chittagong airport, he added.

Shipping Minister M.K. Anwar said the Opposition was behaving as if they were on a fault-finding mission and were making remarks about the Government by going out of the way.

The house is adjourned till 11 a.m. today.

Seen from the Gallery

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with the Deputy Leader of the House, Dr Chowdhury, giving the Treasury bench's roundup of the debate on disaster relief work done up till now.

Dr. Chowdhury, of course, "rebutted" all allegations of inefficiency and partisanship heaped on them by the Opposition, but in no instance of the considerable work done by his government did he give any facts and figures.

In one instance — no in two, because he repeated the same information twice — he gave figures about how many tubewells were being repaired and how many new ones installed. But curiously enough he was citing these figure not from his briefing files but from a local newspaper.

The absence of the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition from yesterday's proceedings robbed the debate of much of its seriousness and made it lacklustre.

Most of the ministers of the Treasury bench were also absent. The reason of course was that all ministers were busy doing relief work.

If any minister did appear, by chance, he would seem not to be doing enough relief work. After much waiting the Opposition returned to the House, following a statement by M. K. Anwar in which he withdrew his remarks and expressed his regret at having made them. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition A. S. Azad informed the House that the AL leader would be making the Opposition's roundup remarks on relief work on Sunday.

The day's proceedings also enlightened us to the fact that Md Nasim (AL) had a "genetic habit" (whatever that means) of misrepresenting facts, courtesy Mrs Farida Rahman (BNP). My heart missed a beat when a colleague of mine reporting the incident to me, mispronounced the word, and his use of a superfluous "I" gave me the shivers as to the state of language used in our parliamentary debates. I was greatly relieved as he soon corrected himself.

The action of the day — we shall call it so, for want of a better word to describe four hours of forced suspension of parliament's work — was triggered by shipping minister M. K. Anwar's use of a word meaning "local toughie", "musclemen" and "goondam" (hoolliganism) in describing the opposition's activities during his speech.

The seasoned bureaucrat but not so seasoned politician lost his cool as the Opposition bench repeatedly interjected as he was speaking. At one stage he appeared livid and uttered the above words.

The House burst into a cacophony of protest and in an atmosphere in which nobody heard anybody, the minister withdrew his remarks, but by then the Opposition members had already walked out.

The proceedings continued

Mostafiz

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The main theme of the Forum is — the potential of the development of the LDCs under the conditions of interdependence.

Bangladesh has been invited to the Forum as an important representative of the LDCs group. In this Forum Bangladesh will stress effective cooperation with development partners and international organisations for our socio-economic progress specifically on resource flows, debt relief, access to markets; human resource development, environment and natural disasters particularly after the recent cyclone.

The decision to hold this Forum was taken during the Second UNDP/Japan Multi-bilateral Cooperation meeting held in New York from May 1-2, 1990.

During the visit Mostafizur Rahman is expected to meet prominent Japanese dignitaries, business and industry representatives and also members of the media. The Foreign Minister will highlight the death and devastation caused by recent cyclone and tidal surge and convey gratitude and appreciation to the Japanese government and people for their assistance in relief and rehabilitation.

The instruments of ratification for the convention on avoidance of double taxation between Japan and Bangladesh will also be exchanged ceremonially between the two foreign ministers.

From the developed countries, apart from Japan, USA, Netherlands, and France will also participate. UNCTAD will be represented by its Secretary General K K Daudiz, while W H Draper will represent UNDP.

Mostafizur Rahman is likely to have a one-day stopover at the Thai capital on his way back.

UK Marines

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It has also sent a naval supply vessel equipped with medical facilities and carrying disaster relief supplies.

Chinese Red Cross

AFP reports from Beijing: The Chinese Red Cross will provide 200,000 Yuan (37,700 dollars) in supplies to victims of the destructive cyclone that hit Bangladesh late last month, the Xinhua news agency said Saturday.

The Midnight File

Iraqi newspaper without Saddam

BAGHDAD, May 11: Iraq's small band of English-language newspaper readers had a shock on Saturday: For the first time in more than 10 years, the Baghdad Observer failed to carry a cover picture of Saddam Hussein. A spokesman for the Information Ministry, which publishes the paper, said the absence of the President's picture — or even a story about him — reflected a new policy; such photos will be used only when news events merit them. It appears to be part of the government's pledge to create a more open and democratic society in Iraq, reports AP.

Sudanese rebels down plane

KHARTOUM, May 11: The army on Saturday accused Sudanese rebels of shooting down a civilian aircraft carrying medicine and money to a besieged southern relief centre. The Christian rebel-led Sudan People's Liberation Army has claimed the shooting down of at least two other civilian planes and several relief planes since 1988. More than 70 people have died in the crashes, reports AP.

Roh promises political amnesty

SEOUL, May 11: President Roh Tae-woo promised amnesty for political prisoners Saturday as thousands of students and workers battled riot police for the 15th consecutive day to demand sweeping reforms. An Information Ministry statement said Roh was asking the government to release prisoners jailed for national security law violations, reports AP.

2 blacks hurt in S. Africa

JOHANNESBURG, May 11: Thousands of white farmers on Saturday clashed with black squatters who tried to reclaim land lost under apartheid, and police said two farmers were injured when security forces opened fire. There were unconfirmed reports white farmers had rampaged through a second squatter camp and stabbed several residents, injuring 10, reports AP.

Illness from N-arms tests

MOSCOW, May 11: Soviet officers and soldiers are breaking a 30-year imposed silence to denounce illnesses they say result from radioactive fallout caused by nuclear weapons testing in the 1950's and 60's. Tass news agency reported Saturday. Veterans of nuclear weapons units, who took part in atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, held a conference in Leningrad Friday to call on the government to provide benefits and better medical facilities to those now suffering from a number of radioactive-related diseases, including leukaemia and malignant tumors, reports AFP.

Army to act on Serbs, Croats

MAKARSKA (Yugoslavia), May 11: Prime Minister Ante Markovic on Saturday told Serbs and Croats, who are nearly at war with each other, to surrender their weapons or have the army take them away by force. The fear of an immediate renewal of the bloodshed between the special police and the Serbs, which has left at least 20 people dead since May 2, appeared to ebb slightly Saturday, reports AP.

Commentary

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the relief operation, without any mention of the opposition as such, rather than with what had appeared in the press.

It was in the opening statement that editors got the first clear hint that while the Prime Minister welcomed cooperation from all quarters, including the opposition, she had no intention of setting up a formal arrangement, like an all-party relief committee, at the national level.

When the editors got their chance to speak and put questions to Begum Zia, it was the issue of the setting up of an all-party relief committee that got the most attention. They saw it as the need of the hour, one that defuse political tension, boost public confidence and increase popular participation in the relief operation.

Asked one editor, "when will the public see you, the Prime Minister, and Sheikh Hasina riding in the same helicopter flying over a devastated area?"

Referring to a press report that Sheikh Hasina might soon visit Japan, another editor suggested that the government could use the help of the Opposition Leader in generating support from foreign countries, and hence she should be involved in a consultative mechanism on relief operation.

"The decision-making process must remain in your hand", said the editor, "but there can be some kind of a system, purely a consultative one, that involves all the parties represented in the parliament."

The Prime Minister looked relaxed and at ease as she listened to the editors, but made it clear that at this moment she was not thinking of formally involving the opposition in the relief operation. No one can of course say that as more and more members of smaller parties increase pressure on the government to set up an all-party relief committee, Begum Zia would not change her position. But most analysts rule out such a change of policy.

Among many reasons given by observers why the Prime Minister has taken a seemingly rigid position on the issue, one is that she deeply resents Sheikh Hasina's sweeping criticisms of the relief operation as well as her demand that the Acting President, and not the Prime Minister, should head the so-called all-party relief committee. According to one source, the Prime Minister feels that at this moment there exists no common ground between the administration and the opposition for collective efforts, especially after the Awami League Leader had publicly asked for the resignation of the BNP Government, as she did in her press conference on Friday, for its alleged failure in the relief operation.

The meeting between the Prime Minister and the editors was otherwise cordial. Begum Zia smilingly acknowledged unqualified appreciation from journalists for the freedom that the press now enjoyed in the country. Above all, she appeared to be in complete command and well conversant with all the facts relating to the relief operation. In short, she seemed to be telling the editors, "I know the challenge I am faced with. I will tackle it in the way I think best."

Eighty four journalists of Daily Ittefaq and its group of publications in a statement on Saturday made a strong appeal to the government for immediate release of former Editor of the Dainik Ittefaq and Member of Parliament Anwar Hossain Marju, reports BSS.

In a joint statement Saturday night they said Anwar Hossain ably edited The Daily Ittefaq for about 14 years and was never considered other than an Editor even after his becoming a minister. They also recalled his contribution in the construction of the present Press Club building during his tenure as its President.

The journalists said Anwar Hossain took oath as an MP with the permission of parliament on a date fixed through a letter to the Speaker.

Five BDR jawans injured in brickbattling were admitted to local hospital.

1 killed, 15 hurt as smugglers clash with BDR

RAJSHAH, May 11: One person was killed and 15 others injured in a clash today between alleged smugglers and border securitymen at Baneshwar, 20 kilometers from here, official sources said, reports UNB.

Manik (35) of village Shibpur in Putia upazila was killed when BDR opened fire. Five other civilians also received bullet injuries later they managed to escape.

BDR officials said they had to open fire in self defence when the alleged smugglers surrounded them as went to seize smuggled cattle. The alleged smugglers and villagers numbering several hundred also pelted stones at the security personnel, they added.

Five BDR jawans injured in brickbattling were admitted to local hospital.

Ittefaq newsmen demand Anwar's release

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Diarrhoea

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mate or exaggerate what had actually happened on the fateful night of April 29.

The 12-foot tidal surge that accompanied the cyclone that night washed away whole villages and their inhabitants along the beach line.

The surge only spared some buildings along the coast, a survivor told The Daily Star.

There were at least 70 shops along the beach, all blown away by the cyclone.

Some hawkers were selling chips, chocolates and cigarettes; as their only means living but no one was interested in buying.

Seema, a seven or eight year-old girl, wearing a frock twice her size donated by a relief team said that she used to sell flowers and shell garlands. She has now nothing to do but beg relief and play with her friends near the beach.

Meanwhile, the deputy commissioners of non-affected areas collected 1,24,239 kgs of beaten rice and 26,747 kgs of molasses. Sixty-three truck-loads of relief materials were sent to the affected areas from four divisions.

Chittagong and Cox's Bazar airports are now operational. On Saturday, one French aircraft touched Zia International Airport with medicines. Another aircraft with luggage arrived from Indonesia.

In the cyclone affected areas, 1,063 medical teams drawn from government, non-government and NGOs have been working.

Total foreign assistance received so far is 217.80 million US dollars, according to official sources.

Thirty-three power pumps of BADC have been engaged in pumping out polluted water from the affected areas. 6,654 tubewells have been repaired while 55,132 were made operational in the affected areas till Friday.

Chittagong Port has been made operational on Saturday. Two ships sailed out while 3 others arrived at the port on the day.

Total crop damage was estimated at Tk 276.06 crore. Crops on more than 2.91 lakh acres of land were totally damaged. Boro crop loss is estimated at Tk 155.49 crore while Aus crop loss Tk 16.40 crore.

Tornado-hit Gazipur

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told that immediately after the tornado the local authorities had initiated relief and rehabilitation work in the areas.

Taka five lakh has been sanctioned for affected areas of the district. Temporary offices of district administration and other concerned offices have been set up for expediting relief work. Makeshift houses and tents have been set up in the area to provide shelter to affected people.

Medical centres have also been set up in the area to provide medicare to injured people.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Mirza Abbas and State Minister for Religious Affairs prof M.A. Mannan were present at Gazipur. Prof. Mannan is supervising relief and rehabilitation work in the area.

Farida Hossain MP, accompanied the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister was

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