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The Daily Star

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Over 1 crore affected in 47 upazilas : Rescue workers yet to reach many areas : Relief inadequate

Death toll may cross 1 lakh

A Star Report

With more information pouring in from the areas in the coastal belt battered by cyclone on Monday, it is apprehended that the toll of human lives will cross one lakh. Even four days after the calamity, the rescue workers could not reach many of the places in the offshore islands.

What could be seen from helicopters and relief aircraft used by government agencies for dropping relief materials on Thursday, the destruction caused by the cyclone and tidal bore appeared to be total. Half naked and barebodied survivors, mostly male inhabitants, were seen waving their hands desperately to the hovering aircraft, crying for help. According to a preliminary estimate, over one crore people in 47 upazilas have been affected by the storm.

Our Chittagong-based correspondent Nurul Islam, who extensively toured some of the affected areas of Chokoria, Kutubdia, and Maheshkhali upazilas in Cox's Bazar district and Anwara, Bashkhali and Sandwip in Chittagong saw those places under six to seven feet of saline water on Thursday. More than one lakh people, mostly women and children, are feared killed in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar alone.

Communications Minister Oli Ahmed, who is supervising relief operations in greater Chittagong flew over the affected areas by helicopter on the day told Nurul Islam that hundreds of thousands of cattle had perished in the cyclonic storm and tidal bore which was the worst in recent memory. Poultry were totally washed away and there was no tree visible on the vast tracts of land. Electric poles and tubewells were blown away. Thousands of dwellings were swept away by the tidal bore and there was no sign of human habitation in the entire locality.

Sultanul Kabir, MP from Bashkhali constituency, claimed that over 40,000 people, mostly women and children were killed at Bashkhali alone. Nine unions out of ten were completely



TO MUDDY DEATH : The whole of the coastal belt is cluttered with bodies after Monday's cyclone that lashed the southern part with apocalyptic frenzy leaving, in areas, not a living soul to bury the dead as in Patenga, top, and Kutubdia, bottom. —Star photo

Let us face crisis unitedly : PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on Thursday night made a passionate appeal to all to stand by the cyclone-affected people of the country and provide succor to them, reports BSS.

In an address to the nation over radio and television she said according to reports received 37,543 people died in Monday night's cyclonic storm. "We are apprehending that the death toll might be much higher", she said.

Seeking united and all-out cooperation of all at this hour of peril Begum Zia said, "there may be differences of opinion in a democracy and it does exist but this is not the time for difference of opinion. The more we stand united, irrespective of party affiliations, the greater will be our strength during the current crisis". She said adding "let us all work in unison and save the distressed people".

Begum Zia reiterated her appeal to the world community to stand by the cyclone-battered people of this country. "My appeal to the world community for help has started getting response," she said.

The Prime Minister held out the solemn assurance that the help and donations from the people of this country and world community would be spent on the aid and rehabilitation of the affected people. It would be ensured that the help and donations reach them properly, she stressed.

The Prime Minister said, "At this moment it is the responsibility of all of us to restore confidence in the minds of the distressed people."

She laid paramount importance on surmounting all sorrows, pangs and crisis, however deep these may be, and winning victory to start life anew. She said, "howsoever immense is our loss, intense is our sorrow and deep is our crisis, we must survive and go ahead for a newer life. For this the blessing of Allah is our greatest asset."

Praying for the peace of the departed souls, she said she has no words to express how deep is the anguish at the loss of lives. How can I console the mother who has lost her offspring, the father who has lost his son or daughter and the infant who has become orphan? She said and added "Let us all come and share this sorrow."

She called upon the Muslims to offer prayer for the peace of the souls of the victims at mosques tomorrow, which is Friday. She also appealed to the people of other faiths to do so at temples, churches and other places of worship.

Begum Zia said relief work is in full swing in the affected areas. The government has put in all its efforts and placed all its resources in relief operations, she said and assured that we would do everything that we would do everything

World leaders shocked

US President George Bush has expressed his deep sorrow at the tragic devastation caused by the recent cyclone in Bangladesh, report Agencies.

In a message to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, President Bush has assured his government would stand by Bangladesh in its relief and reconstruction efforts.

President Bush extended condolence on his own behalf and on behalf of the American people to all who have been affected by the cyclone.

French President Francois Mitterrand has expressed deep shock at the loss of lives in the cyclone.

In a message to the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Mitterrand said, "It is with great sorrow that I have learnt of the violent cyclone that fell on the coastal areas of Bangladesh". See Page 12 Col. 3

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Economic loss in cyclone may run into \$1b

Star Economic Report

Preliminary reports from the coastal areas which were ravaged Monday by the century's worst cyclone and tidal bore in the region show a stupendous picture of staggering economic losses.

The appalling human tragedies apart, the damage to standing crops, physical infrastructure, dwelling units, livestock and stocks of goods will run into one billion US dollars (about Taka 3,500 crore), rough unofficial estimates suggested.

State Minister for Relief L R Khan told a meeting of the representatives of the aid giving agencies and the NGOs in Dhaka Thursday that the initial loss of property and infrastructure was estimated at Taka 3,000 crore. The meeting was addressed by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. She urged

the donor agencies and NGOs to provide succour to the cyclone-battered people.

Official sources said the total loss might finally exceed that of the 1988 flood. Official estimates put the total flood damage at about 1.5 billion US dollars.

With reports about losses still coming in from the cyclone-hit areas, a full picture about the extent of actual damage will be available within a week or two, the sources said. Communication network with the far-flung coastal areas is yet to be restored.

The Planning Commission will make a detail appraisal of the situation after complete reports from the affected areas are made available. The donor agencies including the World Bank will also be preparing the estimates about losses.

Preliminary reports said, over one crore people in 47 upazilas under 16 coastal districts, stretched over an area of 20,000 sq miles, have been affected by Monday's cyclone. About 60 per cent of the standing IRRJ-boro crops were fully damaged. The rest 40 per cent have been damaged partially. The crops were at the harvesting stage.

Reports said, salinity left back by the surging seas will not allow sowing any crops for another three months, particularly in the coastal islands under Chittagong division.

The crop loss will widen the country's food gap in 1990-91. Food production was earlier estimated by the government at over 10.4 million tons for the year.

About one million dwelling units, mostly kutcha structures

in the disaster-hit areas, have been blown or washed away. The damage to the housing sector will be several hundred crores of Taka. The loss of private household assets including stocks of food and other items is also colossal.

Besides standing crops and household assets, the livestock sector has borne the brunt of tidal surge. The loss of cattle-head is a matter of guessestimate as much as the loss of human lives, the sources said.

The physical infrastructural facilities like educational institutions, coastal embankments, irrigation projects, rural water supplies and sanitation arrangements have also suffered a severe blow. About 50 per cent of the educational institutions buildings were razed to the ground, the sources said. See Page 12 Col. 7

2,000 expelled on first day of SSC exams

By Staff Correspondent

More than 2000 examinees were expelled and eight invigilators were suspended from Dhaka and Rajshahi Boards on the first day of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations Thursday. Of the expelled students, 345 are from Dhaka Board and 1677 are from Rajshahi.

Of the invigilators expelled, three each were from Naogaon and Dinajpur and one each from Bogra and Gaibandha.

The breakdown of the expelled in Dhaka board is : Narayanganj 11, Gazipur 28, Rajbari 60, Faridpur 3, Mymensingh 196, Dhaka city one and Dhamrai five. The number of expelled from other areas could not be known till writing this report.

The number of expulsions of students from 14 out of 16 districts of Rajshahi is : Dinajpur 434, Rangpur 172, Natore 19, Chapainawabganj 123, Sirajganj 101, Ishwardi 4, Gaibandha 183, Jaipurhat 25,

Naogaon 19, Bogra 324, Kurigram 140, Rajshahi 65, Nilphamari 74, Thakurgaon 96, Lalmonirhat 3, Panchagar 85.

In Gaibandha, 23 persons were arrested for breaking Section 144 and trying to enter into centres. Police said they were involved in supplying copies. Two invigilators were also expelled from Buchaganj centre in Dinajpur. Another nine persons were arrested for supplying copies in Palaashbari.

The Bengali first and second paper were on yesterday's exam schedule.

The SSC examination began in 269 centres under Dhaka and Rajshahi boards. Examinations under Comilla and Jessore boards were suspended following Monday's cyclone.

A total of 2,62,669 candidates are appearing in the examinations from 269 centres of Dhaka and Rajshahi boards,

Chittagong : Greens gone with the wind and water

Waheedul Haque

Residents of port city Chittagong went out on the streets at 3 am on Thursday morning and spent hours in terrorised apprehension. Word has got around that an earthquake would hit the city anytime that morning. All the roads were spilling with crowds in their tens of thousands by 5 am.

That's part of the stupor the city is living in and will take time to come out of the shock of late Monday night's elemental fury, rather than relieved and dissipated with passage of time — is held and hangs over the whole place. No lights and no water — a ghost

city if there was one. But such inconvenience even if lasting interminably, have a way of losing its cutting edges soon enough. It was perhaps good that such problems are there making people move and exert in search of water and in efforts to fix up something to bundle. Such sweating preoccupations help wear off the sense of shirk. What's holding it and making life in the city an unending dazed trance — where everything is believable and nothing really matters?

The green canopy that formed Chittagong's charmed skyline is completely gone. The million trees that made it

so special an urban piece — are not all gone. The survivors stand as if on stilts — denuded, de-limbed, their tops with semblance of leaves here and there burnt into deep brown. Chittagong is now a city without a shade or even shadow — kind of a spirit that doesn't have one.

Lights started coming back on Wednesday night. Naturally it came first to the important ones' living quarters and to the Circuit House. That lent an extra eeriness to the Chittagong night.

But this is all about the shock generated by elements windwhipping man and his

surrounds. There is another part to this city's picture of unreality — a part going through countess crueler bannings.

The sea got into the town to depths never before reached by it in any known disaster of this nature, and may have killed and washed away anything 20,000 to 50,000 of people residing within the municipal limits.

From Patharghata to Patenga — it could have been miles of shorelines littered with thousands of bodies.

Instead it is a scene of untiring frenzy — of people roaming in banks looking for food and

other help, people looking for people. The more heartbreaking and the more widespread search is for one's children. The jaladasa or the fishermen's community has been the hardest hit. They live on both sides of the Karnaphuli — sizeably on the town side but mostly in the Anwara port. It has been fighting an ever losing battle with a river everyday becoming more unliveable for fishes. It seems that the elements this time have dealt them the coup de grace.

The jaladasa's reality has to be lived to know even a pinch of it. And that is not possible. As is not possible to gauge this

anguish of the sowdagars or big merchant houses that their merchandise of unknown hundreds of crores — all gone away or turned into literal mud. Khatunganj and Chaktai is in material terms what Patenga is in human terms. Everything lost. As is lost the customs sheds housing again the country's costlier imports. As is lost the total stock of production by the EPZ companies and parts of their plants. Avoidable loss that occurred in the airport area could go up to millions of dollars — to refrain from touching upon information of military volume.

See Page 12 Col. 2

Mourning Day tomorrow

National Mourning Day will be observed tomorrow (Saturday) throughout the country in memory of the victims of the cyclone. This was decided at the second meeting of the high-powered National Relief Coordination Committee on Thursday night, reports BSS.

The meeting, held with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair, also decided that national flags would fly at half mast along all public and private buildings as a mark of respect to the victims.

It was decided that special

See Page 12 Col. 4

Envoys term situation 'tragic'

The heads of foreign missions in Dhaka flew over the country's coastal regions to have a bird's eye view of the trials of ravages left by Tuesday's devastating hurricane.

The envoys' five-hour flight in a Bangladesh Air Force helicopter was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to enable them to assess the extent of damages wrought by the calamity — the worst since the 1985 cyclone.

"It is a very tragic and terrible situation", said Carl Olof Cederblad, the Ambassador of Sweden while talking to UNB at the heliport at Chittagong during a brief stopover during

See Page 12 Col. 8

Austerity announced

The government has announced, in an official handout that all kinds of official feasts and illumination will be stopped until further orders. Besides, the government also called upon the people to maintain austerity by stopping luxurious feasts and illumination.