

Cyclone victims given early warning for 3 days: Khaleda

Death toll in affected areas enormous: Hasina

The Jatiya Sangsad resumed its session Friday afternoon at 3-24 after a break of three days due to the cyclonic storm with the Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas in the Chair, reports BSS.

The proceedings of the House began with the recitation from the holy Quran.



Khaleda Zia

Just after the recitation the Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia quickly stood up and sought permission from the Chair to move a resolution condoling the deaths of thousands of people in the catastrophic cyclonic storm that hit the coastal areas of the country.

After having received the nod from the Chair Begum Khaleda Zia said the loss of life and damage and destruction to property was extensive and colossal in the cyclonic storm.

She said the government took adequate measures to alert the people in the affected areas. She said the people were given early warning about the impending danger of the cyclone for three days through radio and television.

Begum Khaleda Zia said although the number of deaths was low because of the early warning, still thousands of people died in the disaster and the loss to property including homesteads, crops and other things was widespread.

She said the Chittagong Port became inoperative and the Chittagong Airport started functioning after remaining inoperative for two days.

She said food, water and other necessary things were being sent to the distressed and marooned people. She said people were also being evacuated.

The Leader of the House said the communication system in the cyclone-hit areas including the Chittagong city area became completely shattered. She said efforts were being made to fix the communication network.

She said the damage and destruction was so colossal that it was not possible on the part of the government to face the situation alone.

She said army, navy and Air Force, BDR, police and other voluntary organisations were carrying out relief and rescue operation in the affected areas.

She said bodies were now being washed back from the sea. She said it was not possible to face a situation of this magnitude alone.

She said "I have already given a call to the people." She called upon all to work together to face this calamitous situation in the country.

She said the government had declared Saturday as the National Mourning Day. She said the national flag will fly at half-mast on Saturday. She said special prayer was offered in all mosques of country seeking divine blessings to face the situation and for salvation of those who lost their lives in the cyclonic storm. Prayers were also offered in pagodas and churches.

She then urged the chair for the acceptance of the condolence resolution and proposed for offering prayers (do'a) by standing to seek salvation for the departed souls.

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by the disaster unfortunately, she said, the government had not come out with any clear picture about the number of deaths.

The Leader of the Opposition said relief had not reached many places and consequently, those who had survived the onslaught, were slowly reaching towards death. She said it was true that radio and television had given warnings about the impending danger but no substantial preparations were made for their safety.

Sheikh Hasina said the death toll in the calamity was enormous and added that this could have been minimised had there been more precautionary measures.

The Leader of the Opposition proposed a full-dress discussions on the various aspects of the disaster after the condolence resolution was adopted and prayers offered for the dead. She proposed adjournment of all scheduled order of the day to enable discussions on the cyclone.

After the statement of the Leader of the Opposition, several other members from the opposition bench wanted to take the floor.

The Leader of House Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia again took the floor and said that it was not true that relief had not reached the affected people.

She said none died due to starvation after the disaster although relief operations were handicapped by manifold problems. Helicopters were essential for relief works under this situation and shortage of choppers was being terribly felt in carrying out rescue operations, the Prime Minister said.

Begum Zia said the severity of the catastrophic cyclone was wellknown to all and government did whatever possible under these conditions. The severity of this disaster surpassed previous catastrophes, she added.

The Leader of the House said the government sought to tackle the situation to the best of its ability and none should be under illusion that the cyclone could have been faced in a better manner and added that this government tackled the onslaught much better than previous authorities.

Begum Zia said one must talk rationally — one must not talk just for the sake of talking. It was not possible to have an idea of the real condition only by reading some newspapers and an overview from the helicopters. "We have gone to the sites and seen the situation ourselves and are taking all possible measures to face a calamity of such magnitude", the Prime Minister said.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina sought permission of the chair and said that it had been observed from the speech of the Leader of the House that it was impossible to go to the affected areas without helicopters.

Sheikh Hasina said, she herself along with the Speaker and some ministers had visited the cyclone-hit areas and saw the extent of damage. "We are ready to work to mitigate the sufferings of the distressed people", she said, adding, "but we did not get any cooperation from the government."

She said the extent of damage could not be ascertained till now. She said, since the Leader of the House had given a statement the members should be allowed to take part in the discussion.

Sheikh Hasina wanted to know how many countries had come forward with help for the distressed people of Bangladesh. "Is there not a single country who had supported us with helicopters so that we could carry on relief operations", she asked.

She asked whether Bangladesh had lost credibility as none was coming with any help.

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could be benefitted if the suggestions of the opposition members were accepted.

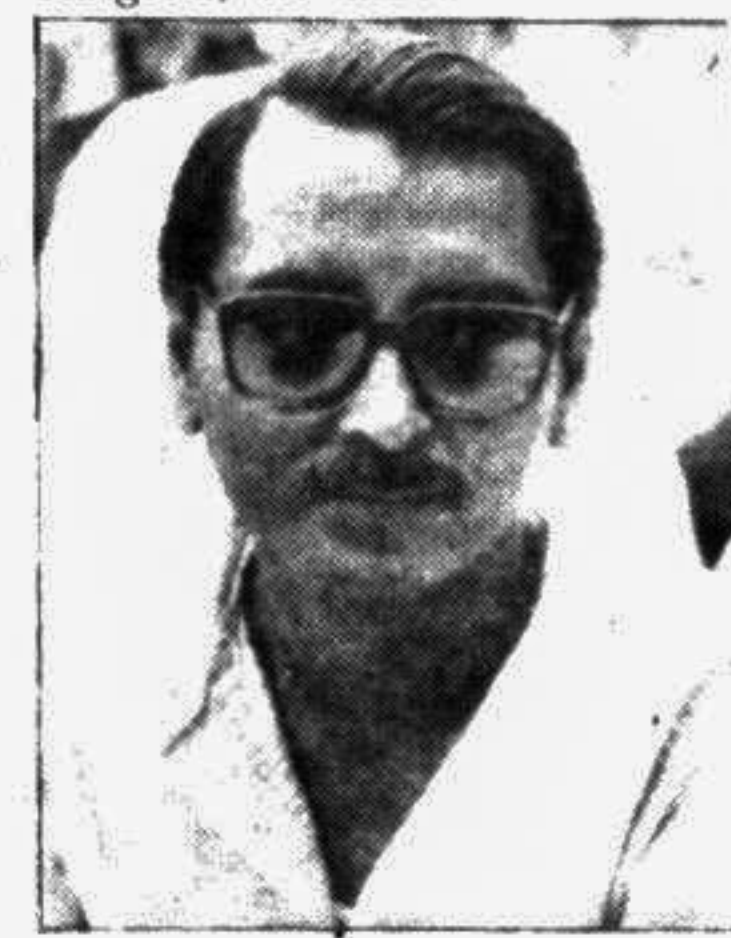
Mr Salauddin Qader Chowdhury (NDP-Chittagong) expressed his firm belief that if the members in the Opposition and Treasury Bench worked untidely the challenge could be overcome.



Tofael Ahmed

Participating next, Mr Tofael Ahmed (AI-Bhola) suggested that the House today should discuss only the statement given by the Prime Minister.

He said he was present in the affected areas and saw the distressed people there. "They did not allow me to leave but I assured them that I would discuss their plight in the Jatiya Sangsad," he added.



Mohiuddin Ahmed

Mr Mohiuddin Ahmed said it was not possible on the part of the government to face such a catastrophic situation single-handedly and appreciated the call of the Leader of the House asking cooperation from all. But he asked how, when and where the modus of cooperation will be outlined and relief measures extended. Mr Ahmed called for forming an all-party committee to enable everybody to contribute their mite in the national effort.

As asked by the chair, Awami League member Mohiuddin (Bakerganj-4), alleged that opposition members were not provided with necessary facilities to visit the affected areas. He said, thousands of people who lost everything were awaiting relief. He further alleged that detailed news was not being circulated by the government.



Rashed Khan Menon

Mr Rashed Khan Menon (WP-Bakerganj) said the matter was a serious one referring to the Prime Minister's address to the nation on Thursday, he said it was a national crisis.

He said a decision in the House through discussion could benefit the distressed people.

Mr Moudud Ahmed said that the condolence resolution on the cyclone victims moved by the Prime Minister should be recorded in the proceedings separately.

He stressed the need for intensifying relief operations in the extensive coastal belt and off shore islands like Char Jabbar and Hatiya where relief materials were yet to reach. He said, it has not been possible for anybody to reach many of the cyclone battered places in Noakhali district "I don't blame anybody for it because it is a reality," he added.

Mr Moudud Ahmed said Bangladesh is victim of the international environmental deterioration. All-out steps should be taken right now to save our country from this situation with the assistance and cooperation of rich countries of the world. He said, adding, that the summit of G-7 held in Paris and the World Bank sponsored conference of the donor countries held in London elaborately discussed the environmental hazards in Bangladesh.

He called for taking concrete steps for improving the environmental situation in Bangladesh and assured all-out cooperation of his party in this respect in national interest. He also suggested formation of a permanent all-party co-ordination committee at the national level to face any eventuality caused by natural calamities from time to time.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami urged the government to identify the factors responsible for the deterioration of environment in Bangladesh.

He made a passionate plea for rushing relief materials,

other business and thoroughly discuss the cyclone, it being a national catastrophe. He said all concerned be given a chance to participate in the discussion.

Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas reminded the members of the consensus reached on how to conduct the business of the house.

At this stage, Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia stood up and said since all of us had agreed on the passage of bills, "I would propose to allot one hour for discussion on the cyclone and its after effects."

The Speaker announced that there would be a discussion on the issue for an hour and asked opposition chief whip Mr Mohammad Nasim to ensure that the concerned members got chance to speak.

Speaker Abdur Rahman Biswas then invited Baksal President Mr Mohiuddin Ahmed to take the floor and allocated him five minutes.



M A Mannan

Taking the floor, State Minister for Textiles Major (Retd) M A Mannan, said he had gone to the affected areas of Noakhali, Feni and Luximpur districts with other members of Parliament and saw to it that relief reached the needy.

He said 450 tonnes of wheat, 450 tonnes of rice and Tk 30 lakh in cash had been sent to each of these districts. The Minister said there should not be any alarm about relief operations in Hatiya because 30 tonnes of "chira" and "gur" had been despatched and the Deputy Commissioner, Noakhali was still there to co-ordinate relief activities.

However, Mannan said relief goods might not be adequate considering the needs but added that the authorities were making every possible effort to meet the situation.

Speaking next, Mr Tofael Ahmed (AI-Bhola) said a great national calamity had befallen the country and it was time that all worked in concert to face the situation.

He said he had witnessed the 1970 cyclone but the severity of the current disaster surpassed everything.

Quoting newspapers, the opposition member said, woes of the affected people knew no bounds and all should devote themselves to mitigate their sufferings.

Mr Ahmed said he would have been happy if a National Relief Committee could be formed to coordinate the relief operations. He criticised the Relief Minister for saying that the government would seek international assistance only after assessing the magnitude of the disaster.

The opposition member welcomed Prime Minister Begum Zia's appeal for international assistance because the situation warranted such aid. However, he found no efforts to involve all-warring political lines — in relief efforts.

Mr Ahmed recalled that the President of the erstwhile Pakistan had come to cyclone affected areas in 1970 14 days after the occurrence.

Continuing Mr. Tofael Ahmed suggested that an All-Party Relief Committee headed by the Acting President be set up to coordinate relief operations since that would involve all in the massive task.

The opposition member wondered why the Acting President had not gone to the affected areas.

He said a high-powered committee headed by the Acting President would be a step in the right direction at this hour and would also carry greater weightage to international world.

Mr Ahmed demanded that the affected areas be declared as "distressed area" and called for extending immediately Agricultural and House Building loans to the people there.

He said adequate relief be rushed to the affected areas because his experience said the relief handed out so far was too scanty.

Mr. Ahmed suggested that the House be adjourned so that the Members of Parliament could go back to the affected areas and carry out relief activities. He said it was not the wish of the opposition that the government should fail in such a situation because it was an elected government that had come through a mass movement. "We want everything to go in right direction in such a national calamity", he said.

Prof Mohammad Waliullah (AL-Noakhali-6) taking the floor, gave a pathetic picture of the cyclone affected areas of Hatiya and said no relief material excepting some bread was reached to the islanders. He said if relief materials were not rushed immediately, hundreds of people would die out of starvation.

Zainul Abedeen Faruq (BNP-Noakhali-1) said the disaster should be faced untidely. Regarding the statement of Waliullah, he said the district officials of Noakhali went to the Hatiya with succour. He hoped that the government would be able to overcome the situation.

Taking the floor, Rashed Khan Menon expressed sympathy to the members of the bereaved families. Welcoming the call of the Prime Minister, he said, "we are ready to cooperate with the government in facing the disaster".

Menon called for forming a national committee comprising members of the political parties, army forces and national NGOs headed by the Acting President or the Prime Minister. He also stressed the need for taking an emergency agricultural rehabilitation programme.

Menon said endeavours should be made at the international level for scientific and technological cooperation for a permanent solution to cyclone

foodstuff, medicines and potable water to the cyclone affected areas. Narrating personal experience from his visit to some of the affected areas in Chittagong, Mohekhali, Chakaria and Banskhali, he said hundreds of people there were living under the open sky. Steps should be taken on an emergency basis for the procurement of sea trucks, speed boats and helicopters for gearing up relief operation in the cyclone-hit areas.

Special arrangement should also be made for the supply of tents to the people now living under the open sky, he said.

Maulana Nizami warned that cholera and diarrhoea would break out in an epidemic form if the decomposed bodies and carcasses were not removed and disposed of immediately. The urgent need for the hour is dry food, medicines and drinking water, he stressed.

He suggested the formation of an all-party relief committee at the national level to conduct relief operation on a sound footing. Untied efforts were needed by all irrespective of party affiliations to face the grave situation caused by the natural calamity.

Mr Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury (NDP-Chittagong) said hundreds of affected people were suffering in the cyclone-hit areas from the want of food, medicines and water.

He referred to a report appearing in an English weekly news magazine which quoted a senior military officer as saying that the supply of relief materials and foodstuff to the affected areas was too inadequate.

Mr Chowdhury said, the people of Chittagong very much expected that the Prime Minister would shift her government there to conduct relief operations. In this connection he pointed out that the people of Chittagong district elected Begum Zia as a member of the Jatiya Sangsad from one of the constituencies of this district.

Expressing his concern over inadequacy of relief in the affected areas, he said people in many parts of Chakaria, Kutubdia, Anwara and many nearby regions have been suffering from the lack of drinking water. Even the inhabitants of Chittagong city were out of potable water and electricity, he said.

He urged the government to seek helicopters, speed boats and sea trucks from the neighbouring countries to expedite relief operations. He suggested instituting a parliamentary committee and activating the disaster management committee to cope with the situation created by the natural calamity.

M A Jinnah

Taking the floor, M A Jinnah (BNP-Chittagong) said the allegation made by the Leader of the Opposition that the government measures were not adequate was not true. Communications Minister Oli Ahmed and State Minister for Environment and Forest and Fisheries Abdullah Al Noman along with local MPs and political leaders were working relentlessly in Chittagong to mitigate the sufferings of the affected people, he stated.

Jinnah called upon all to work untidely for the cyclone affected people.

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