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The Daily Star

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Death toll may rise to 2 lakh: Diarrhoeal diseases break out : Sunken vessels and objects block waterways

Relief operation faces obstacles

Star Report

Survival of the victims of the cyclone and tidal bore that hit the coastal belt of Bangladesh on Monday night is how at stake as relief operation faces serious obstacles in the absence of helicopters and adequate number of river-craft. Big vessels carrying relief goods could not reach offshore islands due to innumerable sunken river-craft and other objects in waters.

A relief ship carrying sizeable quantity of food and other relief materials set sail for Sandwip on Friday from Chittagong but could not proceed due to underwater obstructions.

Sporadic cases of diarrhoeal diseases have been reported from different parts of the cyclone affected offshore islands. Oral saline and other life-saving drugs were hardly available till Saturday. Non-availability of pure drinking water has created an alarming situation and if emergency steps are not taken immediately, an epidemic may break out any time.

The government has stepped up relief operation. Various voluntary agencies have also come forward to participate in the relief activities, but those are quite inadequate to face the situation.

The death toll in Monday's cyclone and tidal bore may rise to two lakh as reports of more deaths from the battered zones are still reaching our office. Death of one lakh 20 thousand people was officially confirmed. Red Crescent Society sources put the death toll at one lakh 20 thousand 853. They said the figure is increasing every hour.

Our Barisal correspondent Arup Talukdar reported that mass burials are being arranged due to shortage of dry places and cloths in the battered areas.

A ship carrying passengers and relief materials left for Sandwip on Friday midnight but could not reach the destination.



LOOKING AT THE DISTRESSED HUMANITY: Mother Teresa (right), an apostle of love and affection, arrived on Saturday to share the agonies of the cyclone survivors like the two kids (left) of worst hit Sonadia, looking helplessly for parental care. — Photo: Mohsin



Face crisis with courage, PM urges people

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Saturday called upon the cyclone affected people to face the crisis with courage and moral strength, reports BSS.

While addressing a spontaneous gathering at Ramgati in Laxmipur district she assured the people that the government would always remain by the side of the affected people.

The Prime Minister Saturday visited the cyclone affected areas of Sonagazi, Charbata, Burirchar, Jahajmara

of Armed Forces along with the teams of non-government and voluntary organisations have been working round-the-clock to bring succour to the distressed. The affected areas of Sonagazi will need more cash money, house building materials for redressing the sufferings of the people most of whom are living in open.

Local members of Parliament Mohammad Shahjahan and Barkatullah Buhu apprised the Prime Minister of the latest situation in Charbata. They told her a number of

An Appeal

The Daily Star appeals to all its readers, advertisers and patrons to contribute generously to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, to offer the fullest co-operation to all relief agencies and to help the victims of the natural calamity which has hit Bangladesh.

and Ramgati to see the extent of damage and the relief and rehabilitation activities going on there.

The local administration in Sonagazi told the Prime Minister 80 per cent of kutcha and semi-pucca houses and 50 to 60 per cent of crops were totally damaged by the devastating cyclone of April 29. The embankment of Muhuri Irrigation Project has collapsed at several places.

The Prime Minister was informed relief materials including chapatti, rice and medicine have reached the affected places. The relief teams

cluster villages had been extensively damaged there. The worst-affected places of the area are Char Clark and Torabali Char. The leaders further told the Prime Minister the rescue teams of Ansar were working for rebuilding the dwelling house which were razed to the ground. The relief teams of Armed Forces are distributing bread, water purifying tablets and medicines among the affected people. Charbata also experienced heavy rainfall Friday.

The Prime Minister, who flew in a helicopter, made an appeal to the people to

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Industrial damage colossal

By Moinuddin Naser

The cyclonic havoc has plunged whole of Chittagong district into a completely dark zone.

The administration and local leaders have been overwhelmed in the task of assessing the extent of loss of lives and property and mounting relief operation in the affected areas.

During a visit by this correspondent from Feni to Chakaria not a single tin shed or thatched house was found unaffected by the cyclone on either side of the highways.

The Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong in a high level meeting at the Circuit House Thursday last estimated apart from the loss of lives total

damage to property, industries, infrastructures and standing crop would not be less than US dollars two billion in Chittagong district alone.

Industrial damage was colossal, said an administrative source.

This correspondent also talked to the local administration and was disappointed at the lack of a comprehensive disaster management programme. District administration sources said that during the last few years all instructions in such cases used to come from the President's Secretariat. As a result of such centralization the traditional disaster management system had collapsed.

Commenting on the present relief operation, one magistrate of Chittagong district said: "The relief operation so far has also been disastrous."

During a visit to the industrial area of Chittagong this correspondent found that all the industrial units except the Progati, Hashmi Can Company and Gazi Wires were completely damaged. The Progati, Hashmi Can Company and Gazi Wires were also partially damaged. Almost all the units of export processing zone were affected badly. The fish processing plants in Patenga were also damaged while sources of raw materials of these plants, i.e. shrimp culture area at

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Ershad asked his PA not to bother about unlicensed arms

By Staff Correspondent

Subedar Shah Mohammed Shahjahan Shiekh, a defence witness in deposed president Ershad's arms case, testified that during his about a year's service as PA to the Supreme Commander he used to maintain the licenses of eight weapons belonging to Ershad.

Deposing before the special tribunal on Saturday, Subedar Shahjahan said that during his service as PA to Ershad he had advised Ershad to obtain licenses for all the weapons in his possession. But Ershad had asked him not to bother about all the other unlicensed arms which he claimed were gifts.

The Defence produced a document relating to a weapon, which was claimed to have been deposited to the Army Museum by Ershad. The document purports to show that Ershad had applied for a license for that particular weapon. But the Defence could not produce the particular license as such, which the Attorney General was quick to point out.

Officer in charge of the Army Museum Major Wahed, who was named a Defence witness, on Saturday sent a letter to the tribunal regretting that due to certain exigencies he

would not be able to appear before the court to make any statement.

Another defence witness Col Saif may not appear to testify either, it is reliably learnt.

The presiding judge of the tribunal Mohammad Habibullah rejected another Defence petition to bring the weapon which was deposited to the Army Museum because the Defence could not produce the exact number of the weapon.

On the other hand, Judge Mohammad Habibullah accepted a Prosecution to summon Military Secretary of the

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Special Powers (Amendment) Bill passed

The Special Powers (Amendment) Bill 1991 was passed in Parliament Saturday night in few minutes in the absence of opposition which staged a walkout failing to raise discussion on the situation in cyclone devastated areas, reports UNB.

The bill inter alia incorporated certain offences punishable under sections of the penal code.

Earlier the House adopted two more bills - The Penal Code (Amendment) Bill and the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill 1991 - while consideration of the Press Council

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Shahabuddin visits affected areas, orders gearing up relief work

CHITTAGONG, May 4: Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Saturday directed the officials and agencies to gear up relief work to provide immediate succour to the affected people of coastal areas devastated by cyclone and tidal surge, reports BSS.

The Acting President was

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Khaleda to visit Saudi Arabia, Kuwait

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to visit Saudi Arabia and Kuwait at the invitation of the Saudi King and the Kuwaiti Emir from May 12 to 14.

During her stay in Saudi Arabia Begum Zia will perform Umrah and visit holy Madinah besides having a meeting with the Saudi King, Foreign Secretary Abul Ahsan told newsmen on Saturday.

Mourning Day observed

By Staff Correspondent

National Mourning Day was observed Saturday throughout the country in memory of the victims of cyclone.

National flags flew half-mast atop public and private buildings. Special prayers were offered for the salvation of the departed souls of the cyclone victims. Radio and television put up special programmes. Recitation from the holy Quran, Hamd and Naat featured the mourning day programme.

AL wants Shahabuddin's initiative

By Staff Correspondent

The scheduled meeting of the Government with the Opposition offered by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was not held on Saturday.

A BNP source told The Daily Star that Opposition Awami League preferred such a meeting at the initiative of Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed to form an all-party relief committee.

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Tk 555cr aid committed so far

By Staff Correspondent

About Taka 555 crore (about US 150 million dollars) worth of assistance for the cyclone affected people has so far been committed by different countries and agencies in response to Prime Minister's appeal.

Terming the response as 'extraordinary and spontaneous' Foreign Secretary Abul Ahsan told a press briefing on

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Relief steps reviewed

A meeting of the high-powered National Emergency Relief Coordination Committee with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair Saturday night reviewed the relief measures taken so far in cyclone affected areas, reports BSS.

The meeting decided to gear up relief operations further to mitigate the sufferings of the affected people speedily. The Cabinet Secretary gave

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Noakhali coastal area people passing days in agony

By Chapal Bashar

They fought the catastrophic storm and high tidal bore Monday night and finally survived. The survivors are still struggling, and now it is against hunger and thirst. But their struggle for existence seems yet harder since help and succour are yet to reach the coastal belt of Noakhali where hundreds of thousands fell victim to the worst natural calamity.

The distressed people of

the coastal areas are passing their days in agony even after five days of the disaster. They need food, drinking water, cloths and shelter.

About 200 square-mile coastal area of Noakhali including a part of Lakshampur district was battered by the cyclone coupled with 10 to 12 feet high surges. About five lakh inhabitants of the area were badly affected. The death toll in the area is not that high

if compared with the casualties of those remote areas is yet to be known. True, it is difficult to approach those places, but little efforts have been made by the concerned authorities to enquire about those ill-fated people. May be, move bodies will be recovered if rescue operation is conducted properly though it is already late.

Those inaccessible 'mouzas' are known as Char Akramuddin, Char Alauddin,

Char Lakshmi, South Char Clark, North Char Clark, Char Keramatpur, Char Baishakhi, Char Gangchil, Char Dhaner Shish, Char Nabagram and Char Batirtek.

Char Clark is the worst affected union of Noakhali's sadar upazila which was struck by the tidal bore. Almost all the thatched houses of the affected area have been washed away or badly damaged. Those who survived the onslaught saved

themselves taking shelter on the embankments. A few cyclone shelters of the area have helped many, but those were too far for many others to reach in time.

"The wind speed was terrible - I was about to be blown away", said Zamahuddin, a poor peasant who managed to take shelter on Char Torab Ali embankment with his family. He is still living there under the

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Li, Akihito, Kohl, others shocked

Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng in a message to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had expressed his deep shock at the loss of life and property by the most severe cyclone and tidal surge that hit the country on April 29, reports BSS.

Akihito Japanese Emperor Akihito has expressed his deep sympathy and condolence.

In a message to Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmad Saturday, the Emperor

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Nawaz Sharif arrives today

Pakistan Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif comes in Dhaka today (Sunday) in his first-ever trip to Dhaka to share the nation's sorrows over century's gravest tragedy in coastal Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Two aircraft carrying relief goods as well as three helicopters which will be pressed into relief and rescue operation will accompany Sharif's plane, officials said Saturday. Prime Minister Begum

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