

'Cyclone victims did not believe in Met warning'

The Jatiya Sangsad resumed its sitting at 11:15 Thursday morning after four days of recess with the Speaker Mr. Abdul Rahman Biswas in the chair, reports BSS.

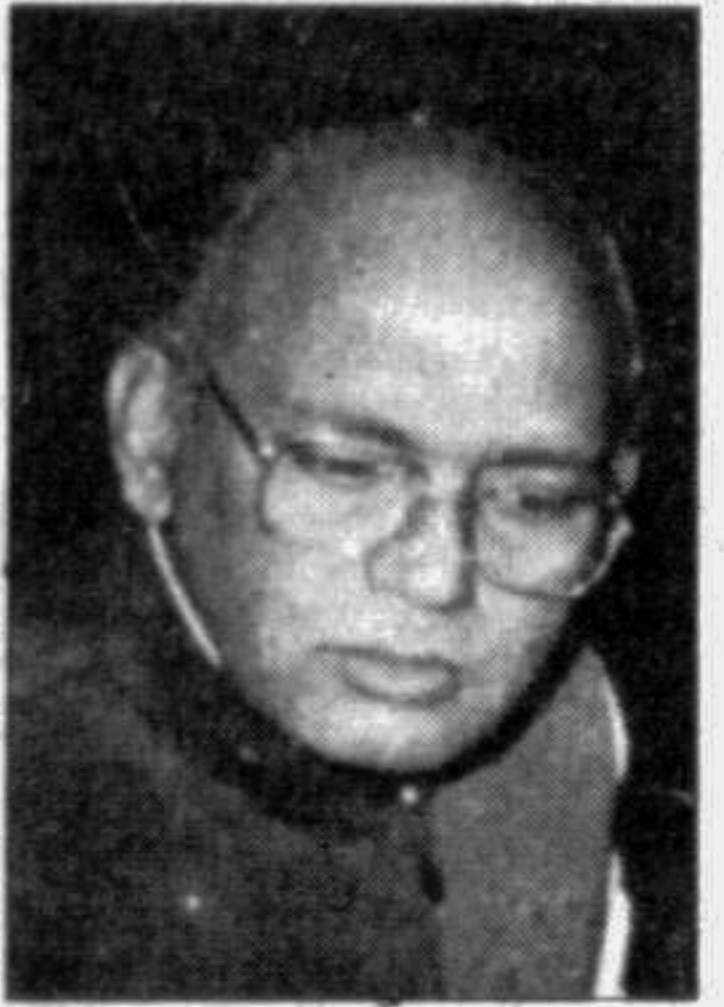
The proceedings of the day began with recitation from the Holy Quran.

As the House was about to take up the business of day, a number of members mostly from the opposition stood up drawing the attention of the chair.

Speaker Abdul Rahman Biswas asked Mr. Shahjahan Siraj (JSD-Tangail) to speak out.

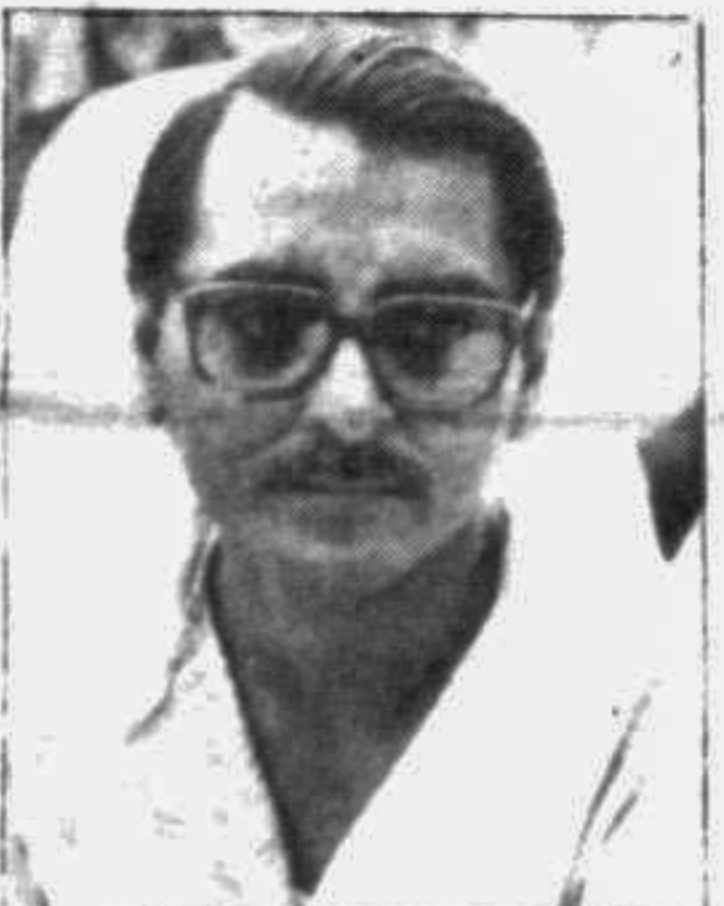
The JSD leader called for postponing the normal business of the day and to devote the time to discuss situation prevailing in the cyclone affected areas.

Mr. Siraj alleged that thousands of bodies were still awaiting burial and there was a great scarcity of water and medicine in the affected areas. He mentioned that 14 opposition MPs have returned from the affected areas and they would like to inform the House of their experience of relief distribution.



Tofael Ahmed

Taking the floor, Awami League member, Mr. Tofael Ahmed, supported the contention of Mr. Siraj and said the parliament was adjourned to enable the members to visit the affected areas. He asked for postponing the normal business and to enable the members to discuss how best relief activities could be carried out.



Rashed Khan Menon

Workers Party MP, Rashed Khan Menon, said though ministers and others had been entrusted with the responsibility to carry out relief work but fact remained that thousands were still lying unattended. He said many people died in cyclone, but if necessary steps were not taken right now, more will die in epidemic.



B Chowdhury

Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury stood up at this stage and said because of their walkout, the opposition could not participate in the discussion and the House was adjourned. His utterance of the word walkout prompted a number of opposition members to stand up and they started speaking at the top of their voice.

Prof. Chowdhury despite opposition's shouting continued his speech and said we also visited the affected areas. He mentioned that measures had been taken for distribution of relief materials so that every affected person could get those. He said Leader of the House and Prime Minister and a number of ministers, state ministers and MPs were now in the affected areas and supervising the relief operation there. Because of that he said the attendance was less from the government side.

The Deputy Leader of the House proposed that the normal business of the House be postponed and applying Rule 316 members be allowed to discuss the situation in the cyclone-affected areas. Prof. Chowdhury said a number of top officials had been despatched to the affected areas to supervise relief activities. He mentioned that there had been appreciable response from the people in aid of the

cyclone victims and that a large amount of foreign relief was also pouring in. He said he was hopeful of tackling the situation.

The Deputy Leader of the House requested the Speaker to fix time for discussions on the matter and after that the House be adjourned to enable the members to go to the affected areas.

Speaker Abdul Rahman Biswas said since it was the opinion of the House to discuss the aftermath of cyclone, he ruled that the questions be deemed to have been tabled.

Mr. Biswas assured the members that the discussion on cyclone would be held as demanded by the members. He said besides the innumerable dead in cyclone, 45 persons had also died in Gazipur which was hit by tornado on May 7.

The Speaker proposed obituary reference for those who died in the tornado. In the obituary reference, the Speaker said the House expresses its profound sorrow at the loss of life of those who were killed in the tornado in Gazipur district on May 7. The House prayed for the peace of those who died in the tornado and conveyed sympathy to the members of the bereaved families.

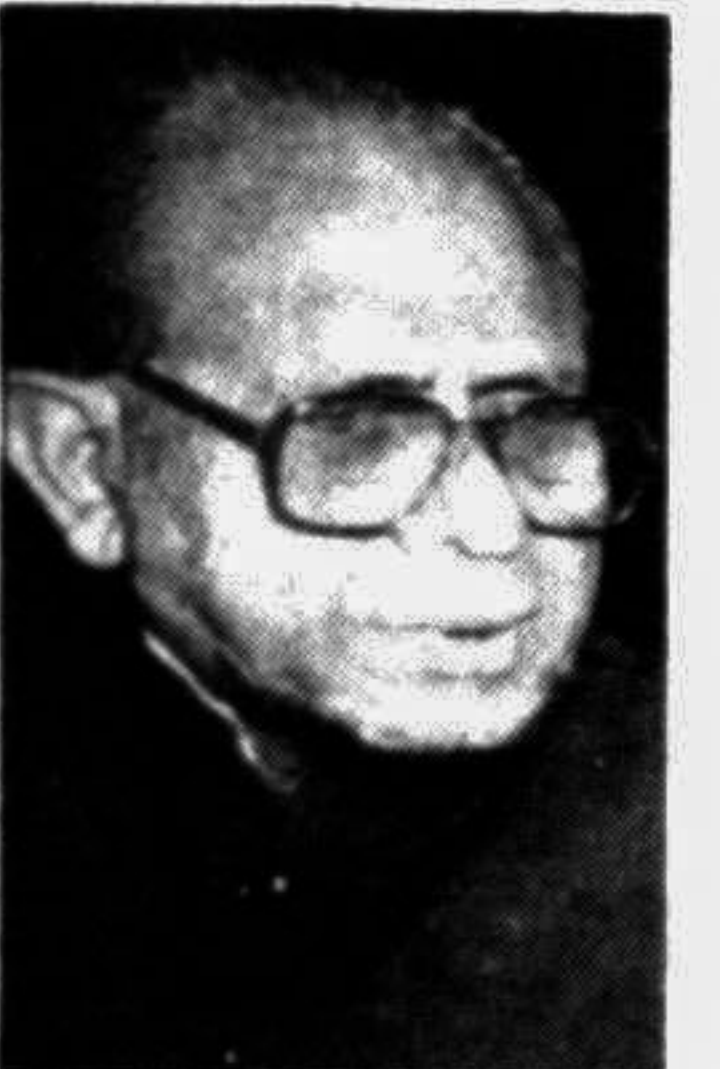
The Speaker said as a mark of respect for the dead a resolution be taken unanimously. He proposed a minute's silence and munajat for the peace of the departed souls. Mr. Biswas asked Jamaat leader Maulana Matru Rahman Nizami to conduct the prayer. The House observed a minute's silence and offered prayers for the peace of the departed souls.

After the munajat, the Speaker took up the revised order of the day and requested the opposition chief whip Mohammad Nasim to submit a list of members intending to participate in the discussion. He requested the Awami League member, Mr. Tofael Ahmed (Bhola), to initiate discussion on the post-cyclone situation in the coastal areas and off-shore islands.

ASM Firoz

But Mr. A. S. M. Firoz (AL-Patuaikhali) took the floor on a point of order. He drew the attention of the chair to the vacant seat of the Leader of the House and other ministers and wanted to know as to who would reply to the opposition members.

The Speaker asked him to resume his seat saying that was the headache of the Treasury Bench.



Adhus Samad Azad

At this stage, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Adhus Samad Azad, took the floor and said the statement made by the Deputy Leader of the House, Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury, that the opposition members did not take the opportunity of discussing the post-cyclone situation on May 4 was not correct. "We kept on sitting in the House for the whole day but we were not allowed to discuss on the situation created in the cyclone affected areas. Though a time was fixed at 7 pm for the discussion on the issue, it was not allowed till 9 pm and at last the opposition staged a walk-out", he added.

Mr. Adhus Samad Azad also pointed out that today was the Private Members' Day and he wanted to know the fate of his notice seeking constitutional amendment.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition also referred to the proposal made by Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury for adjourning the House and said he was opposed to it because "we wanted to take a decision at the national level on the post-cyclone situation without adjourning the House."

The Speaker said the House took a unanimous decision to discuss the post-cyclone situation. The decision on other issues would be taken later today.

Initiating the discussion, Mr. Tofael Ahmed quoted different headlines and captions of reports about the situation in the cyclone and tidal surge affected areas as published in national dailies and said lakhs of people had been killed and many were crying and waiting for food and water there.

Still the decomposed bodies of the cyclone and tidal surge victims were floating in the affected areas, he said.

Mr. Ahmed referred to 1970 cyclone and said lakhs of people were killed at that time. He said though the Pakistani government did not come in aid of the 70 cyclone victims, the people of the country under the leadership of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stood by the side of distressed humanity.

The Awami League member referred to their proposal of tackling the situation caused by the cyclone this year unitedly. In the light of uniting the nation, he said, he had proposed the formation of national relief committee to be headed by Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

But, he said, the Leader of the House and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, rejected his proposal boastfully and reported to frequent attack against the pre-75 rule by the Awami League.

At this stage, Mr. Tofael Ahmed refuted the claims made by the Leader of the House about the construction of cyclone shelters in the coastal areas, and said the BNP government after 1975 stoopt the project for construction of cyclone shelters.

Quoting officials statistics Mr. Tofael Ahmed said 286 cyclone shelters were constructed by the Awami League government while 62 centres were built by the Jatiya Party Government of former President Ershad.

Coming back to the cyclone situation, Mr. Tofael Ahmed charged that the government had saturated the BNP with administrative activities. Referring to this visit to the affected areas of Bhola, he pointed out that there were still many places left without any relief, water and medicines. Whatever relief materials that the government had sent to the affected people were too scanty.

Mr. Tofael said the government had failed to collect any news from the Char Nizam of Manupura island.

Mr. Tofael Ahmed said the way the government was conducting the relief operation would not help protect the affected people from hunger and diseases.

Tofael Ahmed said the Government had totally failed in conducting relief operations in the affected areas. As a result, the foreign diplomats had already expressed their apprehension in this connections.

The Awami League leader referred to the statement of Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed delivered at a press conference and said Moudud had blamed the Acting President.

Tofael Ahmed, however, appreciated the role of the members of armed forces in the affected areas. Though the members of armed forces had joined the relief and rescue operation after two days of the cyclone, they were doing their best, Tofael said.

Turning to the critics of the Awami League, Tofael Ahmed said people today stated making different remarks against the BNP government.

He said he himself could see ominous sign in the country with accidents, cyclones and tornadoes one after another and the outbreak of diarrhoea in an epidemic form is also posing a serious threat, he added.

He concluded his speech with a call to form a national relief committee headed by the Acting President to successfully cope with the situation in the cyclone and tidal surge affected areas. Otherwise, he said the present government would not be able to run the country.

Mahbubul Alam
Taking part in the discussion, Mahbubul Alam (BNP-Feni) said the catastrophe left a trail of devastation which had few parallels.

The Treasury Bench Member said he was in the affected areas immediately after the cyclone but deplored that he did not find there the workers of those parties which were critical of government relief operations.

He said the devastation was colossal but authorities were

trying their best to tackle the situation. There was no dereliction of duties and one should expect that such a massive relief operation could expect that such a massive relief operation could go without any fault, Alam added.

He said he has been many catastrophes in the past and none had control over the happenings of such disasters. One might make attempts to put the government on a slippery ground on relief operations but such criticisms would only be seen as criticisms for the sake of doing so, he said.

Alam said those who were bent upon criticising the government on the rescue work must say what else could have been done under such conditions.

"It is a humanitarian problem which has to be tackled in concert and cooperation of all sections of people," he added.

MD Ishaque

Speaking next, Md. Ishaque (BAKSAL-Cox's Bazar) said 40,000 people had died in Kutubdia alone in the cyclones and complained that true picture of the devastation was not being presented before the nation.

The opposition member said lakhs of people had been rendered homeless by the disaster but their sufferings were going largely unattended.

He said the bodies were not being buried and the affected areas were a rumble of devastations. Places like Moheskhal and Kutubdia were worst affected but the relief materials sent there were very inadequate, said Ishaque.

The opposition member said the government was trying to derive satisfaction over its conduct of relief work but those, who visited the areas would invariably be disappointed over the kind of the rescue operations going on there.

He said he had met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in Chittagong and apprised her of the problems prevailing in the affected areas. Those who survived the onslaught were slowly moving towards death because of scant assistance, Ishaque added.

Fazlur Rahman Patal Taking part in the discussion, Fazlur Rahman Patal (BNP-Noagaon) said a government which took over the reins of the country only less than two months ago had to face a problem of unbelievable magnitude.

Till the other day, he said, today's opposition in the House and the Treasury Bench were involved in the anti-Ershad movement and all had agreed that nine years of autocratic rule had left the country in a shambles.

Patal said the utterances of the opposition members seemed to make them forgetful of that situation and attempts to discredit the new government could only come as a shock for the democratic forces.

The Treasury Bench member referred to the comments made by Awami League member Tofael Ahmed and said the basest criticisms of the relief work by a person who had played an important role in the 1969 mass movement were really regrettable.

He said the Treasury Bench did not want to claim that everything was all right with the relief operations but we must remember the magnitude of the disaster and the massive-ness of the requirement at this juncture.

People like Tofael Ahmed should not forget that Awami League government was installed on the devastations after the Liberation War and this government too came to power when long autocratic rule left the country into dol-drum, he said.

Patal said government would accept even a figure of 30 lakh if the disaster killed so many people because it was not, manmade and was a result of cruel nature. But one had to be accurate and rational, he said adding the situation was being tackled by an elected government which won people's mandate.

Jahangir Hossain
Taking the floor A.K.M. Jahangir Hossain (AL-Patuaikhali) said the government had failed to provide us with any transport to visit the affected areas of his district after the cyclone hit the coastal districts on April 29.

He said, "After getting no means of transport to reach the affected areas of my district on April 30 I turned to the Speaker for a transport which I did not get."

He said the Leader of the

Opposition Sheikh Hasina later provided us with her own car to enable us to go to the affected areas. He said though loss of life was low in his area, the damage and destruction to crops and property was colossal. Crops on vast tract of land were completely destroyed by the cyclone and the tidal wave. He said thousands of people were still passing their days under the open sky.

He said the relief operations were very negligible. He said there were some char areas where not an ounce of relief had yet reached.

He said the little was done by the Relief Ministry to the request to rescue of the country.

Mr. Jahangir Hossain said the government had failed miserably to face the situation wrought by the cyclone. He said even leaves of bananas could not be made available for burial of the bodies.

He proposed the formation of a disaster management committee headed by the Acting President and an All Party Relief Committee under Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia.

Mr. Jahangir also called for exemption of all agricultural loans and providing the peasants with seeds free of cost.

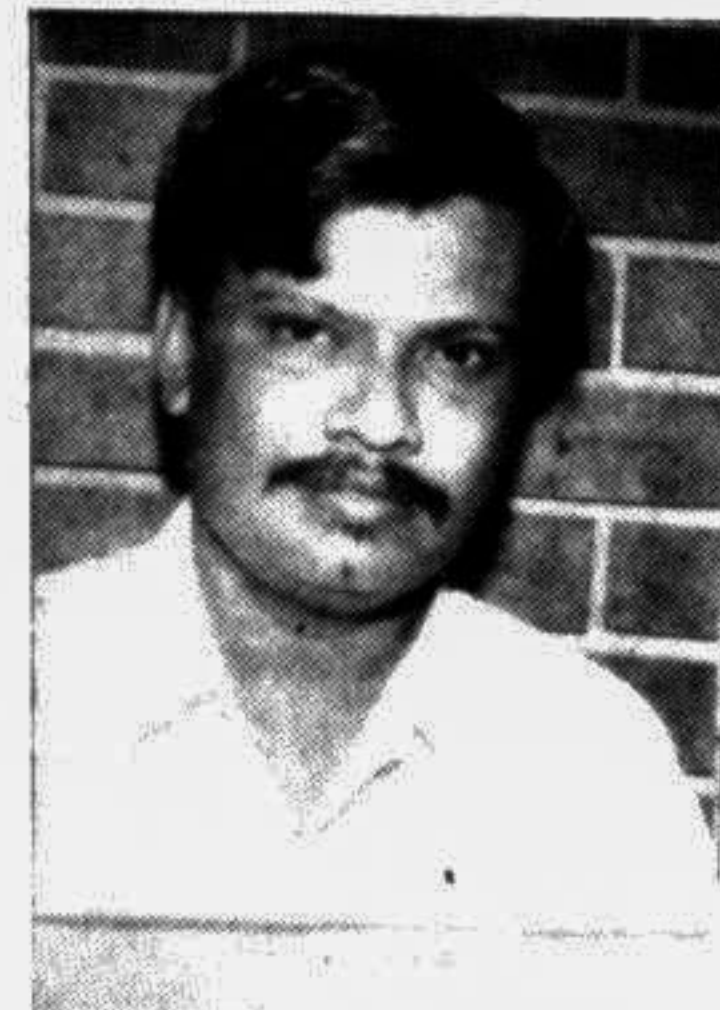
Mr. Amanullah Aman (BNP-Dhaka) called for working together to face the situation in the greater interest of the nation and the country.

Mr. Azizur Rahman (AL-Moulvibazar) drew the attention of the chair to the flash floods that inundated about 40 unions of Moulvibazar district. He said the districts of Sunamganj and Habiganj were also affected by the floods. He called for immediate relief for the areas.

Narrating the experience of his visit to the cyclone affected areas Mr. Aziz said the situation there was very grave. He said corpses and carcasses were begin put side by side after digging mud in the affected areas.

He said the need of the hour was to save the survivors from epidemics. He said water craft must be pressed into service to reach relief goods to the remotest islands.

He said, "We must not spare any effort to arouse world conscience to come forward to help us."



MD. Shahjahan

Md. Shahjahan (BNP-Noakhali) gave a resume of relief activities now being carried out in different cyclone affected areas including Hatiya under Noakhali district. He said foodstuff, relief materials and medicines were rushed to the affected areas just after the cyclone to alleviate the sufferings of the people.

He refuted the allegation of an opposition MP of Hatiya that no relief materials were supplied to Hatiya island and that no official and BNP leader visited the island after the cyclonic storm. Our Prime Minister herself flew to Hatiya and other affected places immediately after the cyclonic storm hit the region and made arrangements to provide succour to the people, he added.

Md. Shahjahan said relief operation was going on in full swing in Noakhali district to save people from hunger and diseases. He called upon the political parties to make all-out efforts to mobilise foodstuff, relief materials and medicines to save the people instead of using the distress of the people as a political weapon. BNP, he said, believed in the politics of serving the peoples in distress and hundreds of leaders and workers of our party have been working tirelessly to mitigate the sufferings of the people. He was confident that lives of the people could be saved if all irrespective of their political affiliations put in sincere and united efforts in this respect.

Md. Shahjahan called upon the government to take immediate steps for the repair of breached embankments, supply of pure drinking water, food and medicines to the affected areas.

Md. Shahjahan's speech over, the Speaker adjourned the House at 1.06 pm until 3 pm Thursday.

The House resumed its sitting at 3.10 pm with Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali in the chair.

Shahjahan Chowdhury
The Deputy Speaker gave the floor to Mr. Shahjahan Chowdhury (Jamaat-Chittagong).

Mr. Shahjahan narrating his experience said Chittagong, the commercial capital of the country, had now turned into a ghost city. The conditions of other coastal upazilas and off-shore islands are more or less the same, he added.

He said there were some locations where you would find that no children and women had survived the cyclone and tidal surge of April 29.

Those who have survived the wreaths of the hurricane and gorki had lost the energy to bury the dead and they were living in the open sky. These people were passing their days without food and shelter and were awaiting the danger of epidemic that may spread in the ravaged areas. He said he had found human bodies and carcasses on the river banks and sea shores even after three days of the calamity.

The Jamaat member suggested that power pumps be sent to the affected areas to pumpout saline water from the ponds to check spread of epidemic.

He alleged that 35 tons of rice allotted for Banskhal could not reach the needy people there even after three days of the catastrophe.

Mr. Shahjahan wanted to know from the government as to why so many helicopters and jet planes were damaged in cyclone.

He also alleged that the Karnaphuli bridge was damaged due to utter negligence of the Chittagong Port authorities.

He called upon the government to form All Party Relief Committee for better coordination of relief operation.

A. Y. M. Khalilur Rahman

Participating in the discussion, Advocate Abu Yusuf Mohammad Khalilur Rahman (BNP-Joypurhat) said we should not make politics out of natural calamities like the recent cyclone and tidal surge in which thousands of people were killed. This was the time, he said, to reach and extend helping hand towards the suffering multitudes.

Mr. Yusuf said though his constituency was hit by hail-storm on May 5, still people there prefer in helping those who had been suffering following the cyclonic storm and tidal surge.

He said the whole nation was united under the leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to face the disaster unitedly.

Mr. Yusuf said all the sangsad members excepting the Awami League were present on the day when the Relief Committee was formed.

Md. Abdus Shahid

Md. Abdus Shahid (AL-Moulvi Bazar) said he had visited the whole of the cyclone and tidal surge battered areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar and found the survivors unattended and their lives had become unbearable due to stench of corpses and carcasses.

In Chokoria, he said, he was told that 11,000 people were buried in a mass grave. In reference to relief goods he said G. O. was issued but there was no stock in the godown.

He called upon the government to take step to bury the dead and dispose of the carcasses to make the calamity areas habitable for human beings. An All-Party endeavour was needed to ameliorate the sufferings of the cyclone-hit people.

Referring to his constituency, Mr. Shahid said, 70,000 people had been marooned due to flush flood. He said all the five upazilas of his constituency had been affected by the flood.

He made an impassioned call for taking steps for rescuing the marooned people and sending immediate relief.

Jainul Abedin Faruk

Jainul Abedin Faruk (BNP-Noakhali) said State Ministers for Textile and the Local Administration were doing their best at this hour of need by reaching relief materials to the cyclone affected people of Noakhali, Senbagh, Sudharam, Begumganj and Hatiya.

He said out of 1200 people of the tiny island dwip thousand people were perished in the cyclone and tidal surge. He told the House that the survivors, overwhelmed by the surge of relief goods, were

heard saying: 'How much more relief was necessary!'

He said that the government was distributing relief goods received from foreign countries. He said the opposition criticism was aimed at reaping political gains only.

Mr. A. S. M. Firoz (AL-Patuaikhali) informed the House that 14 members of parliament, from the opposition visited the cyclone-battered areas. He said the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina also spent five days in the affected areas.

He said in the absence of trawlers, and other means of transport and also due to lack of initiative, the relief goods were not reaching the distressed people. He said the foreign missions in Dhaka, NGOs and the newspapers all pointed out the government failure in this regard. He said the fact was that majority of the parliament members in the affected areas were from the opposition.

Mr. Firoz said the 1974 famine was not created by the Awami League. He said the Awami Leaguers along with others under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited the affected villages and thanas.

He said the corpses and carcasses are being put together without any religious formalities to the bodies.

He said the loss of property would range from Taka 20 to 25 thousand crore and 10 to 15 lakh people lost their lives in the catastrophe in the coastal areas.

Mr. Firoz called for providing the farmers with loans on easy term and nominal interests.

He demanded the formation of a probe body to investigate the damage caused to the Air Force planes and naval ships in the cyclone. He said the government failure in this regard was due to lack of its political farsight.



Jamiruddin Sircar

Taking the floor the State Minister for Land Jamiruddin Sircar said the people were alerted about the impending danger of the cyclone at least 48 hours before.

He said those who believed in the warning took shelter and survived the catastrophe but those did not believe in the warning perished in the cyclone and tidal wave.

Jamiruddin Sircar said emissaries from different governments including those of France, Japan, and USA, visited the country within 12 hours of the appeal made by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. He said the Prime Minister along with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Mother Teresa visited the affected areas by a helicopter in inclement weather risking their lives.

Referring to Tofael Ahmed's speech in the House Mr. Sircar said Awami League was doing opposition for the sake of opposition only. He said the majority members of the Treasury Bench and the Ministers were in the affected areas. He said Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was in the cyclone ravaged areas. He said everything possible was being done to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

He said "some of us are staying back in the House to counter the opposition."

He said our failure was that Awami League was not taken in the Relief Committee because he said they did not have any international credibility. He said there was no trace of relief goods received from abroad during their time.

At this stage the members of the opposition, particularly those belonging to Awami League, protested the remark of the State Minister in a body making a noisy scene in the House.

Mr. Jamiruddin Sircar said emissaries from different governments including those of France, Japan and USA, visited the country within 12 hours of the appeal made by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. He said the Prime Minister alongwith Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and

Mother Teresa visited the affected areas by a helicopter in inclement weather risking their lives.

He made certain remarks about the Awami League members.

At this stage the members of the opposition, particularly those belonging to Awami League, protested the remark of the State Minister in a body making a noisy scene in the House.



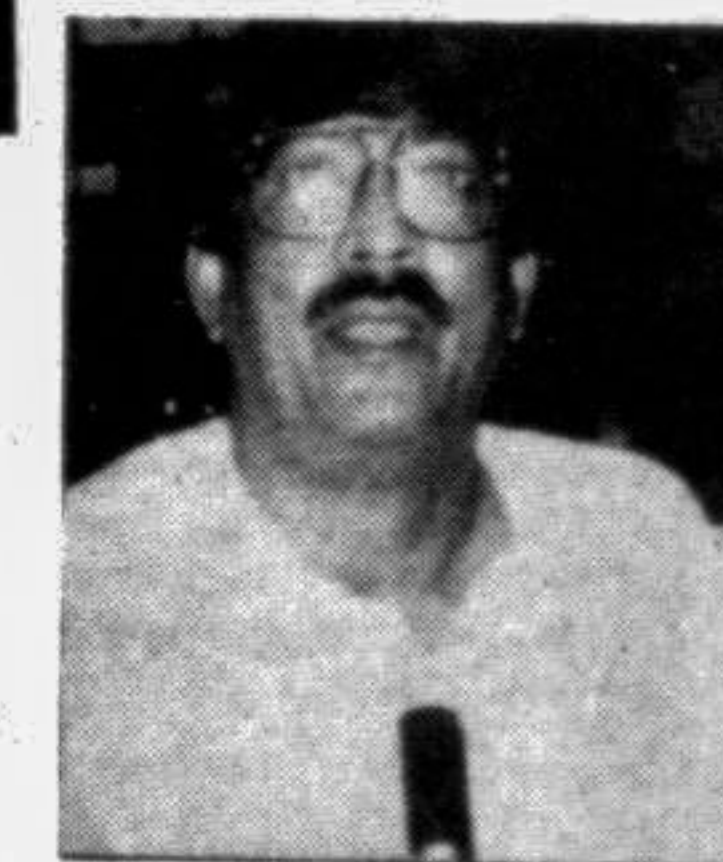
Sheikh Hasina

Though the chair earlier asked Awami League member Sajeda Chowdhury to take part in the discussion on cyclone, the Deputy Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali gave the floor to the opposition Sheikh Hasina when she stood up.

Sheikh Hasina said they were not here just for the sake of criticism. She said it was regrettable that when the leader of the house mentioned that not that many people had died as they had apprehended, Sheikh Hasina said if ten lakh people who died in the catastrophe would be enough, which number would be enough.

The leader of the opposition said she would tell her experience of the visit to the affected areas where people were passing their days in utmost difficulties. She said the state minister Jamiruddin Sircar as a non-member cannot make such comments which he made while participating in the discussion. She said Mr. Sircar mentioned about opposition parties and Awami League, but what about the writings in the guardian about government's running of relief activities?

The leader of the opposition while narrating her experience said she found bodies lying even after 8 days of the catastrophe. She said she saw minister flying over the island and later learnt he landed there, but without any relief. It was further revealed that the minister asked UNO to take loan from upazila chairman for relief work, she added.



Shahjahan Siraj

Mr. Shahjahan Siraj said it was very unfortunate that a non-member could criticise and elected member in a most undignified manner.

Siraj said by his utterance Mr. Sircar not only insulted the members of the House, but also the whole nation. His utterance had to be withdrawn and he must apologise, he said.

Awami League member Asaduzzaman (Al-Magura) said Mr. Sircar who was afraid of facing people and did not receive nomination, had made aspersions on elected members which he said was an unpardonable act. He said the House should seriously ponder whether Mr. Sircar reserves any right to remain in the House.



Moudud Ahmed

Mr. Moudud Ahmed said the rules of procedure of the House was prepared for a parliamentary form of government. It was not amended adequately suiting the need of the House under presidential form of government.

Incomplete