The Daily Star

DHAKA FRIDAY MAY 17, 1991

DOWN TO EARTH

SOS for ORS

By Khalilur Rahman

Perfectly in keeping pace with on-going emergency preparations by the concerned authorities to face impending cyclone, a section of the dishonest traders was ready to take full advantage of the situation. Particularly, in the field of drug trade the gang of unscrupulous dealers found the calamity to be yet another grand opportunity to mint money.

The catastrophic cyclone and tidal bore lashed the coastal belt on April 29. On the following morning the price of oral rehydration salt (ORS) soared to Taka 6 per packet in Dhaka city. In Chittagong district which has been ravaged by the century's worst cyclone and tidal bore, the price of ORS shot up to Taka 12 per packet immediately after the disaster struck. The retail price of the item is Taka 2.50 each packet.

Informed sources told The Daily Star that like previous occasions this time also the profiteers are fully organised to trade on human misery. ORS is one of the items which have high demand in the event of epidemic of diarrhoeal diseases. Already the disease has broken out in the cyclone affected areas. So the producers of ORS have good prospect, some drug dealers said.

Five local pharmaceutical firms, four in the private sector and one in the public sector, produce ORS in the country for sale. The main ingredients of ORS are — glucose and salt. This is very much effective in the treatment of diarrhoea. The child mortality in Bangladesh due to diarrhoeal diseases has considerably decreased since the introduction of ORS, a senior health official said.

Each packet of powdered ORS in plastic or aluminium foil, now produced in the country, is mixed with half litre of pure water to make the saline. The saline is then administered to a diarrhoea patient of any age group till the ailment subsidies. In most cases, a patient recovers within 24 hours, a physician said.

During the first few days after the calamity befell, the need for ORS and also the water purifying tablets (WPT) was keenly felt as the cyclone survivors were exposed to diarrhoeal diseases.

Several voluntary and social organisations, which were collecting relief materials in the metropolis for the cyclone victims immediately after the disaster alleged that drug shop owners charged exorbitant price for ORS and WPT. This led to the poor collection of those items. Many diarrhoea patients could have been saved in the cyclone-hit areas, had there been sufficient number of ORS packets, some representatives of voluntary organisations told me. They also complained that even the traders realised higher price for match boxes and candles. In Chittagong, kerosene was sold at Taka 60 per kg instead of its usual price of Taka 18.

With regard to ORS, a Health Ministry source said, the private firms sell their produce directly in the local market while the government-run pharmaceutical firm, the Essential Drugs Limited (EDCL), supplies part of the product to the Central Medical Stores (CMS) and some quantity to UNICEF. The UNICEF distributes ORS in case of need among the affected people under its own arrangements, the source added. The EDCL produces 36 items of medicine, in addition to ORS and WPT. The EDCL cannot sell any of its products to the market except supplying those to CMS for use in government hospitals, dispensaries and health complexes. Even an ounce of all EDCL medicines, ORS and WPT is supposed to be available in the market.

During my visit to different drug shops in the city on Thursday I found plenty of ORS on sale. The price, however, is Taka 5 to 5.50 per packet. The price of EDCL-produced ORS rose to Taka 7 per packet a few days after the cyclone, shopkeepers said. All of them informed that they had purchased the item from the whole-sale drug market at Mitford. The Mitford market sources say that they have received EDCL products including ORS and WPT through agents at higher prices.

The EDCL source said, they directly supply all their products to CMS as per rule. An official of the CMS, when contacted, asserted that they only dispatch medicines and all other items at their disposal to government hospitals and other state-run health establishments on demand. A thorough probe into the matter will reveal the mystery behind the availability of the CMS Drugs in the market, another Health Department official suggested.

The other private firms producing ORS also claimed that they sell the item at the price fixed by the government to the distributors. This was conte-sted by some of the druggists. They claimed that higher price is charged by the manufacturers for ORS as these have high demand now in view of the calamity. They also said that the price of WPT produced by the local firms has also registered a sharp rise. One WPT is now selling between 80 paisa and Taka one in the city. The price fixed by the government is only 25 paisa per tablet.

Such price hike of essential remedies has caused utmost sufferings to the commonman, which calls for stern action by the law enforcing agency, a health official said.

A microbus set on fire at Plassey in the city by a group of violent students on Thursday. —Star photo

The Midnight File

Mandela threatens to halt talks

JOHANNESBURG, May 16: African National Congress threatened Thursday to stop talks with the government unless it bans the carrying of spears, which he called "weapons of death." Mandela was speaking at a memorial service for 27 people killed Sunday in an attack by Zulus, who form the bulk of support for the ANC's bitter rival, the Inkatha Freedom Party, reports AP.

Hostilities cease in Angola

LISBON, May 16: As Angola's government and US-backed UNITA rebels resumed peace talks Thursday, reports from Angola said troops on both sides had ceased hostilities after a provisional truce took effect. Rebel leader Jonas Savimbi told reporters in Brussels, Belgium, that the cease-fire was holding around the country and soldiers from the two sides were fraterning with their enemies in the 16-year civil war, reports AP.

Gorbachev's nominee rejected

MOSCOW, May 16: The Soviet Parliament snubbed President Mikhail Gorbachev today, rejecting his nominee for an important economic post. The proposal to appoint Stepan Sitaryan as Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for economic activity was defeated outright by 167 votes to 151, with 57 abstentions, reports Reuter.

Flood kills 13 in Turkey

ISTANBUL, May 16: Flash floods in eastern Turkey killed at least 13 people and caused widespread property and agricultural damage. Twenty people were reported missing after torrential rain lashed the provinces of Elazing, Malatya and Bingol, the semi-official Antolia news agency and state radio reported Thursday.

Rare tremor in Germany

IBBENBUEREN(Germany), May 16: An earth tremor woke up residents of this northern German town Thursday and caused slight damage but no injuries. Cologne University observatory said the tremor had a magnitude of between 4 and 4.5 on the Richter Scale. The rare tremor was felt at 4:06 am (0206 GMT) in a 20-kilometer(120-mile) area around Ibbenbueren, reports AP.

11000 US troops

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On the number of troops the sources said, they were necessary for the security of the whole Task Force.

The agreement was necessary to provide customs facilities and to ascertain the areas of relief activities, the sources added.

The sources said that in the meantime the US assessment team is continuing its work on estimating the damages caused by the cyclone on April 29 and making a list of necessary assistance required for the reconstruction of the cyclone ravaged areas.

The sources said that the US joint relief team will work in medical, communications, relief distribution and immediate reconstruction areas in coordination with the Bangladesh Army.

In the long run Bangladesh may also seek further help from the US to carry out a hydrographic survey of our Bay. The source said that at present there was no hydrographic survey of Bangladesh territorial waters and the country is lacking in manpower and expertise in making any survey of that kind.

The sources said that if necessary the United States would also send Peace Corps for the development of the country.

During the BNP regime in the late 70's the government wanted to seek help of American Peace Corps for construction purposes.

Now the government is again actively considering bringing the US Peace Corps, which include experts in different technical disciplines.

Meanwhile the joint relief Task Force sent by President Bush to assist the relief effort in the wake of the recent cyclone arrived at its assigned operational area on Wednesday, according to US State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher.

The Task Force of seven amphibious ships and an oiler is equipped with 28 helicopters and a number of landing craft, including aircushion Hovercraft, the deputy spokesman said.

The Hovercraft will be used to distribute relief supplies to areas covered by shallow water, he noted.

"The focus of the US military relief effort is on supplementing the distribution of supplies which are already in the country," Boucher explained.

On May 12 advance elements of the Task Force arrived in Dhaka and on May 13 an airforce C-5 transport arrived with five Blackhawk helicopters, crews, air traffic control teams, Sea Bees, and environmental preventive medicine specialists.

Asked if US officials were contemplating sending additional aid Boucher replied, "We are continuing to consider the needs of Bangladesh and I am sure we will respond as appropriate."

The deputy spokesman pointed out that the US has already provided over 7 million dollars in funds and supplies for disaster relief.

Recalling that President Bush has said that "We want to help out where we can where there are people suffering," the deputy spokesman explained that "We are finding ways to do that very expeditiously by using the military". "They can be proud of what they are doing," Boucher said.

However, he told questioners he could not conclude that the US military forces will be called on regularly in the future to deal with disasters and to undertake humanitarian relief missions.

Relief

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the cyclone victims would be over soon and mid-term programme for rehabilitation and reconstruction should start without any loss of time.

The meeting considered at length the latest situation obtaining in the cyclone and flood affected areas and gave general guidelines to the high-powered Emergency Relief Coordination Committee.

Aid consortium

The Council of Ministers was informed in detail of the issues expected to be considered in the Bangladesh Aid Consortium meeting to be held in Paris at the end of the month. The consortium aid would be in addition to aid given for relief and rehabilitation for the cyclone-affected people.

ADB

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forts at reconstruction and rehabilitation of cyclone-battered areas.

Begum Zia also made special reference to the 55 million dollars assistance provided earlier by ADB to Bangladesh to mitigate the impact of Gulf war.

Power supply

A review team of World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and overseas Development Administration (ODA), also called on Prime Minister Begum Zia at her Secretariat office.

The meeting discussed the improvement of power supply in the country.

Insurance claims

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coming from the cyclone-hit areas have posed a challenging task for the insurance companies in sorting out the cases and follow-up examination, verification and assessment of each of them.

Some circles have suggested that the office of the Controller of Insurance could prove itself more effective in facilitating early settlement of claims. Some fraudulent practices including forgery of documents and backdated covers cannot be ruled out and such practices may procrastinate claim settlements even for genuine cases, knowledgeable circles feared.

The insurance circles said, most affected units or parties particularly belonging to industrial sector along the eastern seaboard, were covered under fire or other insurance policies. There were only a few cases with policies covering comprehensive risks.

Higher premiums are involved for comprehensive risk coverage. Many parties or units, affected by the cyclone, did not opt for such comprehensive insurance policies covering "extraneous risks".

Whatever the final assessment about real claims, there will be, of course, some jolts to the industry as a whole, the sources observed.

This will largely depend on the proportion of risks retained by each individual company.

The century's worst cyclone and tidal surge of April 29, the knowledgeable circles noted, may open up opportunities for new business by the insurance companies.

There will be a greater insurance awareness for covering diverse risks against the backdrop of the recent experiences, the same circles observed.

With this awareness, premium earnings or incomes will rise for the companies as it happened after the devastating floods of 1988.

Available statistics showed the gross premium earnings of the SBC and private sector general insurance companies at Taka 190.72 crore in 1990 against Taka 178.56 crore in 1989 and Taka 154.98 crore in 1988.

The growth in premium earnings in general insurance has been an encouraging one since the mid-eighties. Such earnings totalled only Taka 99.05 crore in 1985.

This growth has coincided with the opening of the insurance business to the private sector. And also, depreciation of Taka partly inflated the value of marine trade operations, leading to higher premium earnings in local currency.

In the overall premium earnings, the share of the SBC has recorded a decline th recent years while that of private insurance companies has risen.

In 1989, a total of 16 general insurance companies in the private sector had their gross premium earnings at Taka 99.15 crore against the SBC's Taka 79.41.

The figures were Taka 110.79 crore for the same insurance companies and Taka 79.93 crore for the SBC in 1990.

US Task Force

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Monitoring and Coordination Cell, said on Thursday, reports BSS.

Briefing newsmen on the activities of the main coordination cell and the four cells set up under it, he said relief operations were in full swing with the supply of relief materials through air, rail and road to provide succour to the cyclone-affected people in the country's coastal belt.

He said the four cells set up at Zia International Airport, Kurmitola, Old Airport and Relief Godown had been working round the clock to help intensify relief operations in the affected places.

Brig. Bhuyian said the President's relief godowns, placed at the disposal of the Prime Minister, started functioning on May 6.

Detailing the relief activities, Brig. Safat Ahmed, Director, Operation and Planning, Supreme Command Headquarters, said the U.S. Task Force which brought 24 helicopters made three sorties in the cyclone-hit areas of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar till 2p.m. Tuesday

He said the 24 U.S. helicopters in one lift together could carry relief materials weighing 500 tons. If the weather remains older they could carry a total 2500 to 3000 tons in their whole days sorties.

Brig. Safat said the self-contained mother ship of the Task Force has anchored in the deep sea and it is expected to stay for a period of two weeks.

He said the U.S. relief team would set up 36 water purifying plants in the cyclone hit areas. Each plant has a capacity to produce 12,000 gallons pure drinking water.

Brig. Safat said eight U.S. helicopters, including five black Hawkk might be kept for two weeks more than the schedule to help relief operation.

Replying to a question, he said besides 10 helicopters of Bangladesh Air Force 34 helicopters-24 from USA, six form India, two from Pakistan and two from China — have been pressed into service to conduct relief operation.

He said Bangladesh was paying the fuel cost for the sorties of Indian and Pakistani helicopters while the U.S. relief team itself was paying for its own helicopters.

Brig. Safat said Bangladesh Army had been deployed in 62 locations in the cyclone hit areas and Naval Force in six locations. Besides Army and Navy medical teams have been working in 60 places, he added.

He said on an average 50 tons of cooked food was supplied daily to the cyclone victims.

Brig. Safat, however, said that from now on rice and wheat would be supplied to the victims instead of cooked food.

Sylhet flood

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were working and some were kept stand by, a health official said.

Fourteen medical teams are working in the areas and another 68 teams are ready, the official said.

UNB reports : Intermittent rainfall deteriorated the flood situation in Habiganj and Netrokona districts.

Fresh areas of Habiganj municipal areas, which include Chowdhury Bazar, went under water while entire haor areas in Kaliajuri, Mohanganj and Madan upazilas of Netrokona district were totally inundated.

The river Manu at Moulvibazar was receding but flowing 18 cm above the danger level.

The situation in all the six affected upazilas remained unchanged. Six lakh 72 thousand people of the district have been affected but the relief operations are allegedly inadequate.

Waterborne diseases have also been reported from different upazilas. Only 1194 water purifying tablets have been distributed among the victims.

The Flood Forecast and Warning Division in Dhaka told The Daily Star that the Surma at Sylhet and Sunamganj, the Kushiara at Sheola point, the Monu at Moulvibazar and Khowai at Habiganj may record further fall during the next 24 hours. As a result, the overall flood situation is likely to start improving in next 24 hours.

Disaster management

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prone country of ours."

The Prime Minister said the cyclone shelters could be used for multiple purposes. Those could be used as schools or hospitals during the calamity free period, she said.

Begum Zia said the recent cyclone was severest in the living memory and to overcome the crisis was impossible for the country alone with its limited resources. The government had appealed to the international community to help the country to rebuild its devastated areas.

She said "We must properly utilise the foreign aid which is coming in the country for relief and rehabilitation of the cyclone survivors."

Referring to the situation of the flood affected greater Sylhet district Begum Zia said the government had mobilised its resources to give succour to the affected people and relief operation was in full swing in the areas.

Later the Prime Minister went round the relief cell of the clubs and saw relief materials stored there.

Nepal Congress

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officials said.

The results so far gave the Congress' main rival, the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist and Leninist NCP-UML), 66 seats.

Army personnel deployed in Sylhet

Army personnel were deployed in Sylhet and Moulvibazar to provide assistance to the flood affected people, an ISPR press release said Thursday, report BSS.

They were engaged in evacuating the stranded people, providing medical assistance and distributing relief materials among them in close cooperation with the local administration and other concerned agencies.

Shahabuddin

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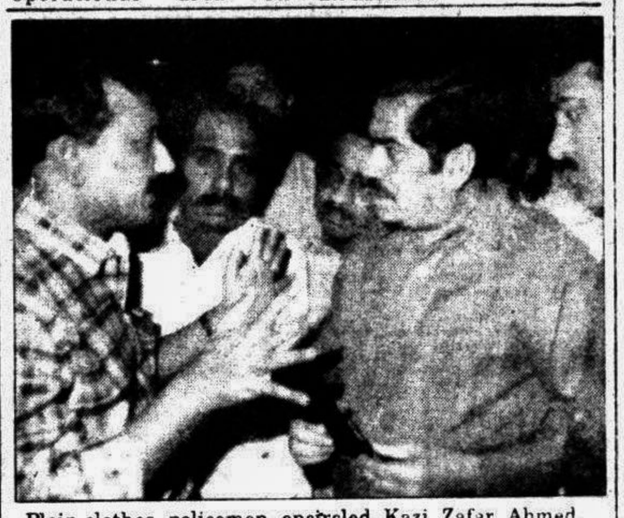
godowns. He was further informed how records of daily receipt and distribution of relief materials are maintained and entered into the computer at the godowns.

Justice Shahabuddin expressed satisfaction at the handling of the relief materials in the President's Relief Godowns.

Following the recent natural calamity in the coastal belt, the President's Relief Godowns have been placed under the disposal of the high-Powered Relief Coordination Committee, headed by prime Minister Khaleda Zia for better coordination and quick relief work.

The Acting PSO to the Supreme Commander and Chief Coordinator of the Relief Cell, Brigadier MSA Bhuiyan, explained to the Acting President the mode of functioning of the President's Relief Godowns.



Plain-clothes policemen encircled Kazi Zafar Ahmed, former prime minister of deposed president Ershad's government, when he tried to enter Sangsad Bhaban on Thursday. —Star photo

Ershad's arms case

From Page 1 Col. 8

Habibur Rahman Khan.

After consideration of the defence submission the Division Bench fixed the date for hearing on the petition next Sunday and issued a Rule on the Attorney General as to why the case will not be transferred.

However the Judges did not issue any stay order on the proceedings of the case at the Special Tribunal.

Special Tribunal Judge Mohammad Habibullah, adjourned the court again yesterday for the sake of fair justice and to hear the verdict of the High Court Division Bench.

The petitioner said that he might not get fair justice in the Special Tribunal because he found earlier that the Judge of the Special Tribunal had become completely inclined towards Prosecution and had lost all ability to do impartial justice.

The Attorney General Aminul Haque contradicting the allegation said that all of the submissions in the prayer were not true and that the Defence Lawyer had once expressed his full confidence in the Judge of the Tribunal and that was on record.

Meanwhile the proceedings of the arms case scheduled to start again on May 19 may not begin because of the hearing of the petition made by the Defence Counsel of the accused Ershad.

The Defence Lawyer Sirajul Haque was mysteriously absent yesterday.

Campus violence

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unfinished rally at the Aparajeo Bangla premises.

The rally was addressed by Khairul Kabir Khokon, Fazlul Huq Milon, Nazimuddin Alam, Ilias Ali, Quamruzzaman Ratan, Habibunnabi Sohel and others.

Speakers at the rally vowed to resist any terrorist activities on the campus for the sake of a congenial academic atmosphere.

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal also held a press conference Thursday evening at the Jatiya Press Club and accused the Awami League-backed Chhatra League for the anarchy in the Dhaka University campus.

Different student organisations including Jatiya Chhatra League and Chhatra Union brought out processions on the campus to protest the incident.

Meanwhile police arrested seven persons from the Sir Salimullah Hall late night Wednesday in a raid on that hall.

The arrested persons are Khabiruzzaman, Shafiqul Islam, Mozammel Huq, Masud, Zakir Hossain Khorshed and Iqbal. All were reportedly outsiders.

Syndicate appeal

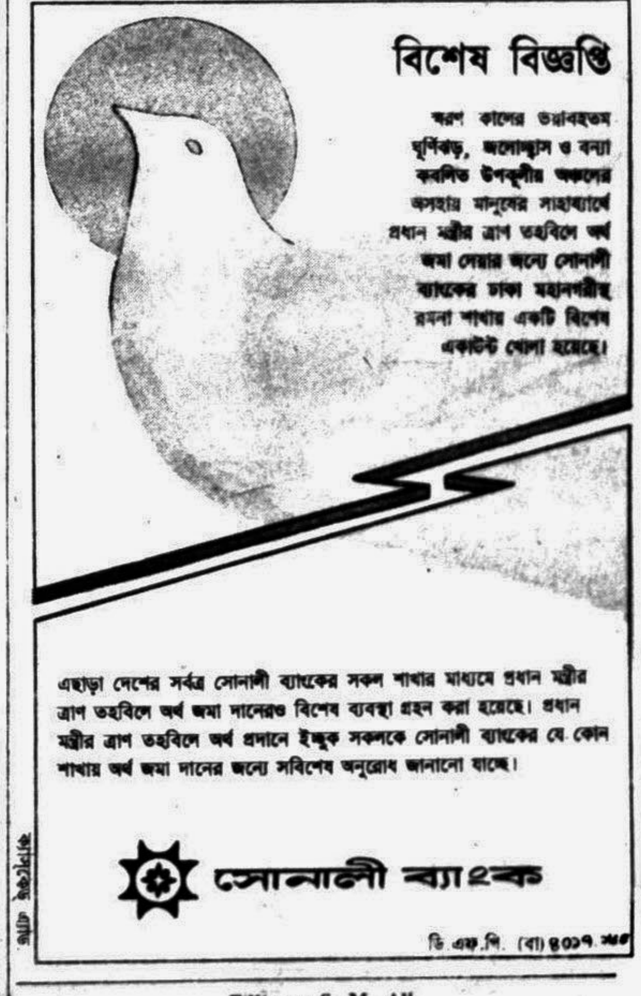
Dhaka University Syndicate has appealed to the rival student organisations to show restraint and urged the concerned political parties to control their followers.

The Syndicate also requested the law enforcing agencies to take any necessary steps to recover illegal arms and arrest their possessors from the campus.

The appeal was made at an emergency meeting of the Syndicate held Thursday afternoon.

Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammad Maniruzzaman Meah, who presided over the meeting, apprised the Syndicate members of the unhappy incidents which took place on the campus Wednesday and Thursday.

The Syndicate members requested the Vice Chancellor to arrange their meeting with leaders of political parties to discuss the campus situation.



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