

Southern US states mourn for tornado victims

AFP, Tennessee

Southern US states mourned yesterday after tornadoes wrought havoc across the region, killing 55 people and injuring hundreds, smashing buildings and flinging trees like matchsticks.

Dozens of tornadoes sliced across the region late Tuesday and early Wednesday, leaving a trail of destruction in five states and deaths in four, in what US media called the deadliest US tornado outbreak in two decades.

In hardest hit Tennessee, the death toll rose late Wednesday to 31, with one other person presumed missing, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency said.

Thirteen people were killed in Arkansas, seven in Kentucky and four in Alabama, and hundreds of people were injured in those states and in Mississippi, officials said.

"We've never seen anything like this. It will take 15 years to clean everything up. But the people here will never be the same," said Barry Newberry, a town constable in Lafayette, Tennessee who arrived to help neighbors along a road where every house was destroyed.

"Everybody was running around like they were drunk. They were just dazed and devastated. It was dark and everybody was howling," he said.

"I've seen tornadoes on the ground and I've seen them in the air, but this was different. This one was wide, a massive funnel," Jean Byrd of Mason, Tennessee, a town of just over 1,000 residents, told AFP.

With a sigh of relief, Byrd added: "It touched down just after it passed our house. We were lucky."

It took only two minutes for one twister to turn a commercial center southeast of Memphis into a horrific wreck and leave behind three dead.

It looked like a bomb hit the main building; the front was torn away and the roof collapsed, with glass and tiles spilled across the ground.

"It swept through in a matter of one and a half, two minutes. Boom, boom, over," said Memphis police officer Roderic Cunningham, who said looters had quickly followed the storm's destruction.

The worst barrage of tornadoes in recent memory in the region left up to 35,000 people around Memphis powerless early Wednesday and facing up to a week for power to be restored.

Rescue teams were going from door to door across the countryside to check for injured and survivors, as thousands of people picked through the debris of flattened homes, hoping to recover some valuables and mementos.

President George W Bush offered prayers and disaster relief for the victims.

"Prayers can help, and so can the government," Bush said Wednesday. "I do want the people in those states that the American people are standing with them."

In northern Alabama, where a mother, father and their teenage son died together in Lawrence county, Elderly Gibson Hill resident Mary Filer said she was sound asleep when the storm hit, tearing out the walls and roof of her home.

"It woke me up when the stuff in the house went to falling in. I got my daughter up and we went to the end of the hall by the heater and that's where we stayed."

Students at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, heroically rescued classmates trapped in the dead of night after two campus dormitories collapsed, university president David Dockery said.

Fifty-one students were treated in hospital, including some with extensive injuries. But no one was killed, even though 1,200 students were on campus at the time.

"It's an amazing thing," Dockery told reporters.

The campus has already been rebuilt once after a 2002 tornado caused 2.6 million dollars in damage. Now, "we are estimating that the damage is at least 15 times what that was at that time," he said.

In neighboring Kentucky, three people were killed in a trailer park in Muhlenberg County, and four others died in Allen County, Buddy Rogers of the Kentucky Division of Emergency

Sylhet mayor

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beyond his known sources of income. His illegal wealth includes a plot in the capital's Mohammadpur, Tk 1.25 crore in 10 bank accounts, and several plots in Sylhet.

He was first arrested on April 5 last year after a court issued an arrest warrant against him in a case filed by the ACC in 2003. But, he was released on bail.

The joint forces arrested him again at a hotel in the city on May 28 last year.

Many Titas staff

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The task force investigation found that former Titas sales assistant Abdul Kadir Mollah, whose salary was only Tk 4,000 a month when he voluntarily retired, owns wealth worth about Tk 2,100 crore.

According to the task force investigation, at least 80 percent of 2,800 Titas staff accumulated crores of taka through corruption.

Hasina wants

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High Court ruling that also adjudged illegal the government's having the extortion case under the emergency power rules, she said it has in fact upheld the constitution.

"The constitution comes before everything else. What is there in the constitution must be obeyed and laws contradicting those are bound to be [declared] void," Hasina said, citing constitutional articles enshrining different rights of the people.

"The emergency law must be in line with the constitution," she noted.

"We have brought this government to power through movement. And now it is bypassing the constitution at will and harassing people by filing false cases," she continued.

"If there is no extraneous pressure and bias, I will win in every case," the AL chief said, maintaining her innocence.

She said it was during her rule when for the first time the country had electricity generated in private sector.

"There is no question of corruption. Being involved in corruption, one cannot take such a good decision so fast to solve the problems confronting the people," she continued.

"And now cases are being filed on the basis of lies. Sometimes those in power forget that Allah is omnipresent."

Mentioning rice selling at Tk 40 a kg, she said, "When the price stays at Tk 40, the government cannot say it is stable. The thing is, it has gone out of people's reach."

"There seems no end to people's sufferings. They are hungry and facing acute hardship. The children will suffer from malnutrition in the coming days," said Hasina.

She said she wonders how voter listing takes so long when it did not take more than nine months even to liberate the country.

Tk 6,000cr

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The budget has already allocated Tk 1,200 crore as bonds to pay the previous dues of the BPC.

Sources said the government may go for price increase of petroleum products at the end of current Boro season to reduce losses of the BPC. "Besides, the BPC will try to borrow money from its sources," one source said, adding, the BPC will get about Tk 3,000 crore from the government.

The budgetary allocation for diesel and fertiliser under the agriculture sector was Tk 2,250 crore. But the revised import target of urea and non-urea fertiliser in the current fiscal by the agriculture ministry will need another Tk 1,765 crore subsidy.

The government allocated Tk 300 crore subsidy in food items for the current fiscal year. But finance ministry estimated that Tk 346 crore more subsidy is required for food as a result of price spiral food and loss of food production due to devastating floods last year.

The food subsidy will increase more as the country witnessed losses of food production in cyclone Sidr and there was a crisis of food in the local market.

"The government has failed to procure rice from local sources that means it will have to depend on international market and prices of rice in the international market is increasing," said a finance ministry official.

The power sector got allocation of Tk 600 crore subsidy in the budget, but it needs an additional Tk 586 crore subsidy as the government did not adjust the power prices.

In the budget there was no subsidy for natural gas, but it is now required Tk 700 crore as subsidy due to underpricing of gas.

"We are selling gas to the people at a lower price than the price we buy it from the international oil companies in Bangladesh," said a source.

Poultry birds

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said the chickens died of bird flu. Sources said 19,903 fowls were culled at Mizanur's farm and other farms of the town after receiving the reports. At least 677 free-range chickens within a square kilometre area have also been culled.

Meanwhile, Dinajpur livestock officials received Tk 3.37 lakh as fund for compensating owners of 43,978 fowls that were culled since March last year. However, the department had culled at least 64,558 fowls since March last year.

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday said his ministry was working closely with ministries concerned and foreign partners to assist the government and the poultry industry address the avian flu issue, UNB reports.

He said this when a delegation of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association met him and apprised him of various problems the country's booming poultry industry is facing.

The association's President Mohammad Kaiser Rahman, Technical Adviser to Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association MM Khan, Director of Aftab Bahumukhi Farms Shah Habibul Haque were present at the meeting.

Gatco case

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court day (monthly court day during a case investigation) of the case. However, the court asked the investigation officer (IO) of the case to submit the probe report by March 9.

In the petition submitted Wednesday, defence lawyers said Khaleda was arrested on September 3 last year and since then she was not produced before the court. There is no provision in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to detain any person in jail custody for a long time. They said it was illegal and inhuman to detain their client for so long.

The prosecution argued that investigation of the case is going on and it is not a mandatory provision to produce any detained person before the court on scheduled court dates. Moreover, there is a security matter to be considered when producing a VIP before the court.

On September 5 last year, the ACC filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station against Khaleda, her youngest son Arafat Rahman Koko and 11 others.

They were charged with breaching tender conditions in appointing Global Agro Trade (Private) Company Ltd (Gatco), an indenting house, for container handling at the Dhaka Inland Container Depot (ICD) and at the restricted area of Chittagong Port ICD yard despite its inexperience and lack of skill.

The co-accused in the case are ex-chairmen of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) commodore

(ret'd) Zulfikar Ali and AMM Shahadat Hossain, ex-director (transport) of CPA AM Sanwar Hossain, former chief finance and accounts officer of CPA Ahmed Abul Qasem, former CPA director Luthful Kabir, son of former shipping minister and BNP leader Col (ret'd) Akbar Hossain, Ismail Hossain Saimon, Gatco directors Syed Galib Ahmed, Syed Tanveer Ahmed and AKM Musa Kajol and Akbar's wife Jahana Ansar and one Ehsan Yusuf.

CASE AGAINST ZAHID ACC Assistant Director Helal Uddin Shahri, the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet against the three before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka showing 23 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO prayed for issuance of arrest warrants against them and the order to attach their properties as they have been absconding since the case was filed against them.

On October 3 last year, ACC Assistant Director Nasriddin lodged the case with Ramna Police Station against the couple and their accomplice lawyer in connection with hiding information worth over Tk 2.12 crore.

Zahid's wife and Mujahid were accused of assisting him conceal the wealth.

UK foreign

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with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The British foreign minister will hold a seminar at the British Council today on the future of Bangladesh, with a particular focus on democracy, climate change and militancy.

One of the most prominent voices on actions to mitigate the ill-effect and adapt to climate change, Miliband will also visit Sirajganj tomorrow to review climate change adaptation projects.

Britain has been one of the strongest backers of the present government and is deeply involved in mediating between the government and political parties.

British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury has been very vocal about Britain's support for the government's reform measures and actions.

Recently, British Deputy High Commissioner Duncan Norman shuttled between Awami League and BNP leaders urging them to participate in the planned elections later this year.

7 DU students

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Hassan have been absconding since the case was filed. The court has already issued arrest warrants against them.

Charges were earlier dropped against Muhammad Ibrahim, KM Mahub Alam Shyamol, Enamul Haque, Golam Azam Khomeni, DU correspondent of Banglabazar Patrika Kased Ali, Chanchal Karmakar, ABM Shamsuddoha, Siddique Nazmul Alam, Kamruzzaman, Sohail Rana Tipu, Abdul Karim, Manabendra Dev, Liton Mahmud, Arifuzzaman, Delwar Rahman Dipu, Mizanur Rahman, Rashedul Mahmud and Sarwar Alam.

On January 7, Sub-Inspector Asgar Ali Khan of Shahbagh Police Station, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka.

An army man has filed a similar case separately against the same students with Shahbagh police on August 26 for torching of his vehicle and assaulting him at Shahbagh area.

On January 22 last the same IO submitted the final report in the case filed by the army man.

Minu and seven others will be charged with misappropriation of CSI and rice meant for relief.

Kamran and his wife Asma Kamran will be charged with accumulating wealth worth Tk 2,16,17,822 illegally beyond their known sources of income.

Azad and his wife Kohinoor Sultana will be charged with amassing illegal wealth worth Tk 17,09,000 and Tk 1,65,23,287 beyond known sources of income. Azad will also be charged with concealing information about Tk 23,92,287 in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC. The commission approved filing of the case under the EPR besides the sections of the ACC Act and the Penal Code.

The anti-graft body also approved pressing charges against former housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas, former lawmaker Mosaddek Ali Fala, former lawmaker Mokbul Hossain, former jute minister Shajahan Siraj, and Bangladesh Medical Association leader Dr AZM Zahid Hossain and some of their family members in five cases filed for abusing power, concealing wealth information and amassing wealth illegally.

The ACC yesterday also decided to issue a notice on former BNP parliamentarian Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul and former adviser to prime minister (Khaleda Zia) Prof Jahana Begum. Both are on the fourth list of 35 graft suspects published by the commission on October 4 last year.

The commission also approved filing of separate cases against Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran and former CBA leader Molla Abul Kalam Azad on charges of misappropriating relief items including rice, corrugated sheet iron (CSI) and amassing illegal wealth beyond known sources of income.

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Democratic

FROM PAGE 20

to vote for whomever they chose. Many have already promised to back one candidate or another, "and most of the others will at some point before the convention," said Michael Tanner, a political analyst with the Cato Institute.

"The chances of them changing their mind at the last minute is not likely," he said.

The power given to the party bosses, not earned through the ballot box, strikes some observers as undemocratic.

For years, the Democratic nominee was chosen through deals and bargains made by party bosses. In 1960 John Kennedy emerged as the party nominee with the help of "patron" mayors Richard Daley of Chicago and Charles Buckley of New York.

After support from more radical wings of the party led to the disastrous nomination of George McGovern in 1972, who lost every state but Massachusetts and the capital Washington to Richard Nixon, the Democrats put in rules to avoid such contention.

"There was a belief that they would not want candidates who were dramatically out of sync with the rest of the party," explained William Mayer, a political scientist at Northeastern University.

The superdelegates were designed to be "sort of a safety valve," said Democratic party leader Elaine Kamarck who teaches at Harvard University.

Most US media reports that Hillary will be the biggest beneficiary of the superdelegate system, but Obama is not so sure.

"The superdelegates, they're flexible... If we come into the convention with more pledged delegates, I know we can make a very strong argument that our constituencies have spoken," he has said.

Mayer agreed that the party leadership would be likely to support whoever earned the most votes.

"Do the superdelegates have the capacity to resist the choice of the overwhelming majority of primary voters and caucus participants? The answer, I think, is a clear No."

8 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 20

The relatives of the convicts said the Bangladeshis workers challenged the Egyptian worker on April 28 last year when he tried to escape stealing electric wires from the hostel where they lived.

When they were quizzing the Egyptian youth, other Egyptian workers of a factory near the hostel swooped on the Bangladeshis workers prompting them to retaliate.

The Egyptian man was killed in the clash. Saudi police filed a case against 14 Bangladeshis for killing him.

Of them two fled to Bangladesh while one remains on the run.

Death of the Egyptian man is totally unexpected, said Shihane, brother of one of the convicts, Shafiqul. He also urged Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury to take necessary steps for seeking amnesty of the eight Bangladeshis workers from the Saudi government.

Mamun's mother Hazera Khatun, Shafiqul's father Khaozuddin, Faruk's father Jamal Uddin, and Matiar's brother Din Islam, among others, were present.

SC hears

FROM PAGE 1

Advocate on record of Hasina's writ petition Mouli Wahidullah told the court he could not inform Hasina's senior counsel Barrister Rafique-ul Huq to take part in the hearing for lack of time.

On this ground he prayed for time and the court fixed Sunday for hearing the government appeal.

The HC division bench of Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Shahidul Islam on Wednesday declared illegal the government approval of bringing the Tk 2.99 crore extortion case against