

Myanmar junta

FROM PAGE 16 towns in the hard-hit river delta in Myanmar's south, still had not received food or water.

"Assistance hasn't reached them yet and they are dying," said Kirkwood, adding that most of the 41,000 people listed as missing were assumed to have perished along with more than 22,000 the government said had been killed.

"And clearly there are millions of homeless," he said. "But how many millions, we don't know."

The extent of the suffering wrought by Cyclone Nargis has put pressure on the army, which seized power in 1962 and has largely turned its back on the rest of the world ever since, to allow in foreign disaster teams.

But the regime spurned offers of help after the 2004 Asian tsunami, and international agencies said they had no word when staff -- including experts at delivering food and medicine in disaster zones -- would be let in this time.

The UN's disaster relief branch, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said the regime had named Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint to oversee visa applications but that none had yet been granted.

"The appointment of someone at ministerial cabinet level on these things, we hope, will start to move things quickly," OCHA spokesman Richard Horsfield said.

Some relief supplies have been trickling in. The second transport plane from Thailand in two days landed on Wednesday, and aid groups have been distributing supplies they already had in the country.

But Horsfield said it was essential for staff experienced in large-scale disasters -- who know how to prevent food from rotting at ports while awaiting delivery, for example -- to get in immediately.

The United States, which has for years pushed to tighten the sanctions that critics say have worsened the situation for Myanmar's people, said it had ships nearby loaded with supplies.

"Let the United States come to help you," US President George W. Bush said.

But the military is wary of the outside world -- especially the United States, which has taken a hard line on the military regime.

Instead, people were taking to the streets themselves, assisted by Buddhist monks as they chopped away with knives and axes at uprooted trees that have blocked roads, and worked to move chunks of rooftops torn off buildings.

"We were hoping the authorities would come, but they haven't shown up yet," said one woman in Yangon, speaking on condition of anonymity because she feared reprisal from the government.

A state newspaper said the government had turned back a BBC reporter who tried to enter without a journalist visa, and the junta said Tuesday that all aid experts would have to "negotiate" with the government to be allowed in.

It also said that despite the tragedy, it would go ahead in most parts of the country with a constitutional referendum set for this coming weekend.

The opposition party of democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained by the junta for most of the past two decades, called that decision unacceptable.

Report from Geneva add: Myanmar's military rulers have approved a UN aid flight to take emer-

Rangs Bhaban

FROM PAGE 1 Gomostapur in Chapainawabganj district.

He was an employee of Shield Security Guard Company and died trapped under the debris when several floors of the building collapsed during the building's demolition on December 8 last year.

Earlier, Rang's authority gave the missing security guard's family Tk two lakh and four cattle in compensation.

The government, who awarded Tk one lakh to each victim of the building collapse, however has not paid Shahidul's family any money so far as he remained missing since the collapse.

The 22-storey building was being demolished under the supervision of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

Lalbagh Seven-murder

FROM PAGE 1 verdict and demonstrated on the court premises demanding capital punishment for the ex-DCC ward commissioner Aziz, the prime accused in the case.

The two condemned to death are Abdus Salam alias Moti and Zahid Hossain alias Natka Babu. Meanwhile, Abdul Alim alias Shaheen, Monir Patwary, Munna, Kalu alias Kallia, Delwar Hossain alias Aunda, Deel Mohammad alias Moti, Mahatab Hossain, Mozammel Hossain and Amir Hossain were given 43 years' each jail.

Commissioner Aziz was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment.

Of the convicts, Abdus Salam, Zahid Hossain, Deel Mohammad, Monir, Mahatab and Mozammel are on the run and were tried in absentia.

Their punishment will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, the judge said.

Swapna, Faruk, Abul Hossain, Javed, Selim, Sattar, Joyal and Afzar Hossain were acquitted of the charge, as their involvement was not proved.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 37 prosecution witnesses.

According to the prosecution, a

agency supplies to the cyclone-hit country, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said yesterday.

"The flight should leave Brindisi (in Italy) today with 25 tonnes of aid and some OCHA personnel on board," spokeswoman Elisabeth Byrs told AFP.

"We hope that this spirit of openness will continue," she added.

It is not yet known where the aircraft will touch down in Myanmar. Aid being transported from the UN's emergency depot in Brindisi, southern Italy, includes water purification tablets, electricity generators, tents, tarpaulins, food, covers and mosquito nets, Byrs said.

According to AFP hungry crowds of survivors stormed the few shops that opened in Myanmar's stricken Irrawaddy delta yesterday, the UN said yesterday.

Corpses floated in salty flood waters and witnesses said survivors tried desperately to reach dry ground on boats using blankets as sails. The UN said some 1 million people were homeless in the Southeast Asian country.

FBCCI

FROM PAGE 16 Business leaders questioned whether it is logical for the authorities to fix the price of any food item.

Members of the FBCCI said the price hike of essentials could be contained if the government acts on their suggestions.

They said because of their measures prices would not rise further before or during the month of Ramadan.

BDR DG in his speech said stocking and hoarding are not the same thing. Hoarding is a crime, but it should be handled carefully.

He noted that the present market system is not effective, and things would not improve unless the supply side is strengthened.

Annissul Huq said the country at this moment is passing a difficult time, especially people from the lower- and middle-income brackets are the worst hit by the unabated price hike.

He said that business people are often misunderstood and labelled profiteers. But if they stop operating, the country's economy will grind to a halt.

The newly elected FBCCI boss said he hopes the price monitoring task force would bridge the gap between business community and the people.

He said result of the task force would be visible within the next four or five weeks.

The market price monitoring body will meet once in every 15 days and three major chambers -- Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore -- will provide daily information for its cell.

Kamalluddin Ahmed, an FBCCI director, heads the 28-member task force while Shaquaf Haider, another director, is the co-chairman. One each from food, finance, and commerce ministries, BDR, police and Consumers' Association of Bangladesh are in the committee.

At the end of the programme, the business leaders held a meeting with BDR DG and high officials behind closed doors.

Boucher arrives

FROM PAGE 1 election due to be held by the end of this year, sources said.

The government is considering the visit of Boucher as very crucial, since the US government will finalise its strategy and policy towards Bangladesh on the basis of his report, foreign ministry officials said.

US embassy officials said Richard Boucher would visit Bangladesh again to communicate with the people about their problems and the role the United States can play in helping them.

He will express US support for a free, fair, peaceful and credible parliamentary election as per the roadmap as well enhancing and encouraging cooperation against terrorism and encouraging economic growth.

Boucher heads the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, which deals with US foreign policy and US relations with the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

This will be Boucher's second trip to Bangladesh. Previously, he visited Bangladesh in August, 2006.

Sector commanders

FROM PAGE 16 Air-Vice Marshall (ret'd) A K Khandhkar said that militancy, corruption and unrest in the country would prevail as long as the state fails to punish such criminals.

The sector commanders called on the young generation to continue their campaign against war criminals in every village and town of the country.

L. Gen (Ret'd) M Harun-ur Rashid Bir Pratik, Maj Gen (Ret'd) Zamil D Ahsan Bir Pratik, Maj Gen (Ret'd) M Masudur Rahman Bir Pratik, freedom fighter M Hamid, commander of Mukti Joddha Sangstha of Kurigram Aminul Islam, commander of Rangpur Mukti Joddha Sangstha of Nilpurul Islam and commander of Monjhamari Mukti Joddha Sangstha Joyal Abdeen also spoke during the four-hour long meeting.

Says Zillur

FROM PAGE 1 Foundation organised the programme at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel chaired by Sayed Khokon, Hamif's only son.

Addressing the programme as chief guest, Zillur paid rich tribute to Hanif, also a former president of Dhaka city unit AL, and prayed for the salvation of his departed soul.

AL Presidium Member Amir Hossain Amu said that Sheikh Hasina could survive the grenade attack due to Hanif's sacrifice. The former mayor had a lot of contributions in bringing the party to power in 1996 as well, he added.

Another Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta asked the government to announce the specific date for parliamentary election through concluding the official dialogue with the political parties by this month.

Suranjit also demanded that the government allow resuming the political activities across the country.

Presiding over the programme, Sayed Khokon, one of the organising secretaries of city unit AL, demanded that the government form 'Metropolitan Government' for Dhaka before the next mayor election to ensure facilities to the city-dwellers.

Demanding release of Sheikh Hasina, he also asked the government to restore all fundamental rights of the people.

Acting AL General Secretary Syed Ahsanul Islam, Organising Secretary Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, Dhaka city unit acting President MA Aziz and Mostak Hossain also spoke at the programme.

Armed forces

FROM PAGE 1 Ambassador to Bangladesh U Nyan Lynn, Quarter Master General of Bangladesh Army Lt Gen Jahangir Alam Choudhury and senior military officials were also present.

The delegation will hand over relief items to the Myanmar authorities on behalf of the Bangladesh government as a gesture of friendship and sympathy for the neighbouring country.

The relief items include potato, medicine, oral saline, and water-purification tablets.

Gas reserve

FROM PAGE 1 The FBCCI leaders criticised the recent remarks made by chief adviser's Special Assistant for the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Dr M Tamim that no new gas connections would be given in Chittagong in view of the shortage of oil.

"We always hear that we have huge gas reserves, but what happened recently is that the country is experiencing gas shortage," the FBCCI president said, referring to M Tamim's statement.

Annissul Huq urged the government to form a committee only to confirm the gas reserves in the country.

"When there is a great possibility of foreign direct investment, this kind of announcement is not very pleasurable," he said.

However, the commerce adviser assured him of forming a committee soon.

"We will find out the alternatives. If necessary, LP gas will be imported to give new gas connections in Chittagong," he told the business leaders.

Real facts regarding the gas crisis would be found out as "we now believe in the culture of crisis resolution," the adviser added.

Left parties

FROM PAGE 16 legal notice on the EC, giving it seven days for inviting them to the dialogue, otherwise they would file the writ petition.

The Morcha includes Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), Jatiya Gono Front, Workers Party, Biplobi Oikya Front, Gonoratnak Majdur Party, Samajtantrik Dal, Sramajibi Mukti Andolon, Gonoratnak Andolon, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal, Communist Party of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Andolon.

"We sent a letter to the Election Commission for holding the dialogue with us but it did not take any initiative," said Morcha Coordinator Junayed Saki at a press conference at the BSD office on Tophkhana Road yesterday. "The Election Commission wants to make a reform proposal discussing with very few political parties, which is an undemocratic step. We strongly oppose this decision," he said.

He said they will file the writ petition against the EC after seven days if the commission does not take any initiative within this time for inviting the Morcha to the electoral reform dialogue.

Morcha central leaders Khalequzzaman, Tipu Biswas, Saiful Haq, Advocate Abdus Salam, Moshrefa Mishu, Hamidul Haq, Badrul Alam and Shamim Imam, among others, were present at the press conference.

Niko case

FROM PAGE 1 case's first information report (FIR).

ACC Deputy Director Sabir Hasan, who is also the investigating officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka showing 51 persons as prosecution witnesses.

Of the accused, Hasina, Rafiqul and Towfiq are now in jail custody while the rest have been shown absconding in the charge sheet.

The investigating officer prayed for issuance of warrants of arrest against the fugitives and order for attaching their properties.

The charge sheet was submitted under section 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servant) and 109 (abetment) of the Penal Code and section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1947.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Golam Rabbani yesterday ordered for sending the case file to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka for taking it into cognisance for trial.

Earlier on April 30, the ACC approved the charge sheet in the case against Hasina and eight others after their involvement in corruption was primarily proved.

On December 9 last year, the ACC filed the case with Tejgaon

Police Station against Hasina and six others. The names of Moshirul and Anwarul were later included in the charge sheet as their involvement with graft was proved.

According to the charge sheet, the accused in collaboration with each other awarded gas extraction work at Chhatak, Kamta and Feni gas fields to Niko by cheating to gain personal financial benefit.

The charge sheet also mentions that the work was given to Niko in an illegal way without floating tenders, allowing it to extract 1,794 billion cubic feet (bcf) gas from a reservation of 2,834 bcf, which caused the country a loss of Tk 13,630.50 crore considering the then price of each million-cubic-feet gas at Tk 75.9783.

The ACC also alleges that the accused cheated and abused power by showing the east part of Chhatak gas field -- explored by Bangladesh but yet to be extracted -- as marginal and abandoned.

Hasina was arrested from her Dhanmondi residence on July 16 last year.

Earlier, she had been shown arrested on June 13 in the case filed by Azam Chowdhury and in two extortion cases filed by Nur Ali and another businessman with Tejgaon police in March.

Foreign policy

FROM PAGE 16 Rashid, while delivering the keynote on 'What is Foreign Policy? How it is formulated' in the first session, said the goal of foreign policy should be economic development and poverty alleviation.

Climate change, which is likely to affect 33 million people in the coastal belt of the country, should be taken seriously, he said adding, issues like food security, water resources, personal security, and development should be the pillars of modern foreign policy.

As the World Trade Organisation affects lives of the country's people, he suggested the government to restructure the foreign office to boost foreign trade and to attract investments, while creating opportunities for overseas employment for Bangladeshis in industrialised countries.

Suggesting taking advantage of the country's geographical location, he emphasised on regional cooperation among South and South East Asian countries for greater economic development.

While talking on 'Implementation of Foreign Policy -- Obstacles' during the second session, Rashid Ahmed said a lack of consensus among political parties, especially between the two major parties, on foreign issues, has been a major setback hindering development in foreign relations.

Citing a recent botched negotiation with Tata, he said a fear factor haunts Bangladesh in trade negotiations on investment issues. He suggested public debates on such issues before letting the counterparts know the country's position.

"Bangladesh is losing in many trade aspects just because of not taking up the issues on the table,"

Talking on the importance of concentrating on economic diplomacy, the former ambassador said trade issues are likely to be marginalised if diplomats have to consider too much of political and protocol issues.

He proposed merging the External Relations Division with the foreign ministry and a stronger link with the Board of Investment, and recommended having strong cultural and external publicity wings at foreign missions for building 'a true and better image of the country abroad'.

Former ambassador Farooq Sobhan spoke on 'Bangladesh Foreign Policy -- The Way Forward' during the third session, strongly criticising the role of the ministries linked with the foreign ministry in foiling a move to reorganise the latter a few years ago.

Line ministries go ahead with their programmes and sign deals without informing each other or the foreign ministry, a practice not found in any other country of the world, he said.

Pointing out an absence of a truly professional diplomatic service, he said the best are not picked for foreign services.

Citing examples of developed and neighbouring countries, Farooq Sobhan said training is necessary at all levels of the service and not just at the entry level.

He also stressed the need for learning foreign languages, subject wise specialisation, and 'fast-tracking'.

Saying that Bangladesh's foreign policy is the weakest in terms of authority and influence, he asked for steps to strengthen it. He also emphasised the need for diplomats' salary hike.

Stressing the importance of integration with regional cooperation initiatives, he suggested addressing the relation with India 'as the country cannot afford the luxury to ignore it'.

Noting that creating jobs 15 years from now will be much harder, he

said the foreign ministry should play a significant role in securing overseas jobs for Bangladeshis.

Pointing out that the foreign ministry gets very little help from sources outside the government, Serajul Islam said, "Within the government, the foreign ministry is in a situation where other ministries handle issues of foreign affairs with little coordination among themselves. It's like the hydra!"

Stressing the need for open and transparent discussions on foreign policy issues at different levels, Muhammad Zamir strongly criticised the lack of interest in performance within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, citing instances of foreign office representatives' absence at programmes where Bangladesh's interest was involved.

Anwar Hussain said foreign policies should be composed in ways that the country may take advantage of the opportunities offered by globalisation.

QAMA Rahim stressed the need for proper training of foreign service officials for dealing with international delegations.

Noting that discussions on foreign policies is usually limited to top offices, Nasim Firdaus urged for changing the mindset, instilling a sense of 'need to know' in the foreign ministry.

"Revitalising the foreign office is more important than reorganising it," he noted.

Mohammed Mohsin said the foreign office staff need to take proper preparations before attending any international meeting.

"We've never had a head of the government who had involvement in formulating foreign policy," Mahmud Hasan said.

Talking on training, Shahed Akhtar, principal of the Foreign Service Academy, said the academy is about bring in the directors of different ministries for a special training.

In his concluding remarks, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam urged the former ambassadors to raise public consciousness about the importance of the role of foreign policy, adding that their expertise will definitely benefit the country in achieving its goals.

Jamil Majid summarised the discussion after the sessions.

Serajul Islam moderated the first session while Shamim Ahmed, a former ambassador, and Shah Hossain Imam, associate editor of The Daily Star, moderated the second and third sessions respectively.

Former ambassadors Masum Ahmed Chowdhury, Masood Aziz, ABM Abdus Salam, Aminul Islam, Mohsin Ali Khan, Afsarul Qader, Abdullah Al Hasan, Shafullah, and Abdur Rahim were also among the discussants.

Businessman

FROM PAGE 16 was on way to his office by a rickshaw at around 9:30am. The armed men fled the spot after shooting him.

Locals rushed Shimul to Apollo Hospital in Bashundhara residential area where he succumbed to his injuries at noon.

Moksedul Alam, the deceased's elder brother, filed a murder case with Khilkhet police accusing four people: Mizan, Monir, Chanchal and Mosharraf.

Police arrested Mizan when he came to visit wounded Shimul at the hospital.

Kamrul Ahsan, a close relative of Shimul, told The Daily Star, "Both Shimul and Mizan were business partners and after five years of a joint venture in manpower export, Shimul opened a separate business six months ago."

"Since then, Mizan had been threatening Shimul over a business related feud," he said.

Arrest warrant

FROM PAGE 1 others in the case on Tuesday.

The anti-graft body said the eight accused were involved in receiving and giving the bribe to ensure that Sanvir does not face charges of killing Humayun Kabir Sabir, a director of Bashundhara Group.

NIKO CASE The same judge after examining case documents took the charges into cognisance for trial and issued the order against the five accused including Kamal Uddin Siddique, who are on the run.

The four others are Former senior assistant secretary of Energy and Mineral Resources Department CM Yousuf Hossain, former senior general manager of Bapex Meer Moynul Haque, former secretary of Bapex Shaiful Rahman, and Vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif.

The other accused who are in jail now, are former premier Khaleda Zia, former law minister Moudud Ahmed, former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam, Managing Director of One Group Giasuddin Al Mamun, and Chairman and Managing Director of International Travel Corporation Selim Bhuiyan.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) pressed charges against Khaleda Zia and 10 others on May 5 for abuse of power and corruption in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

ACC assistant director SM Sahidur Rahman, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, showing 68 people as prosecution witnesses.

Polls date

FROM PAGE 16 take time till October this year to complete the rest 20 percent voter registration.

The EC told the court 80 percent voters have already been registered and the target date for completion of the task is by October this year.

The petitioner argued that it is not acceptable that it would take till October to complete the remaining job.

Following the writ filed by Sobhan on January 27, a High Court bench of Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Shahidul Islam issued the rule on EC to explain why it should not be directed to hold the general elections within 90 days of issuing the rule.

The HC also asked the commission to explain why its failure to hold the elections within 90 days of dissolution of the last parliament in October 2006 should not be declared unlawful.

On April 30, the hearing of the rule started and an HC bench of Justice MA Rashid and Justice Ashfaqul Islam and the court asked the EC to inform the court through an affidavit when it will hold the voter list ready and when it will hold the next parliamentary elections.

The EC informed the court about it on Tuesday and the matter was fixed yesterday for further hearing.

Dr Shahed Malik submitted as the EC's counsel, while Additional Attorney General Salauddin Ahmad moved for the government.

Barrister Sobhan on January 27 filed the writ saying the commission had no authority to delay the general elections past the stipulated 90 days of dissolution of the last parliament.

The EC, the secretary of the EC Secretariat, the chief adviser and the law ministry represented by the law secretary have been made respondents to the rule.

The counsels for all parties of the case yesterday concluded their arguments over the issue.

Pro-Khaleda BNP

FROM PAGE 16 programmes for the release of our detained leader at the meeting. Programmes will be announced in a day or two," said Khandaker Delwar Hossain, BNP secretary general, appointed by Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Delwar made the comment while speaking with reporters following the meeting at his Nam flat in the capital.

Reiterating his earlier stance, he said the BNP would not take part in polls without the two top leaders -- Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. The citizens of the country will not accept any stage-managed elections without the two leaders and the party would not allow such elections either, he said in response to a query.

The leaders during the meeting also planned out programmes to be observed on the day of death anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of the party.

Commenting on whether the armed forces should participate in the proposed formal dialogues between the government and political parties, Delwar said, "The responsibilities of the armed forces are clearly stated in their service rules."

"The government can include them (the armed forces) if it is unable to hold the dialogues by itself, but then the other forces such as police and BDR should also be included in it."

Regarding the members of the civil society participating in the dialogues, the BNP leader said "...they [civil society and NGOs] have no link with the people."

Among others, BNP chairperson's adviser ASM Hannan Shah, Joint Secretaries General Selima Rahman and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Acting Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed, Hubo Dal Acting General Secretary Abdus Salam, former law makers Shamsuzzaman Duda, Selim Reza Habib, Khairul Kabir Khokon and Nazimuddin Alam, Chitra Dal General Secretary Shaiful Bari Babu and Zia Parishad President Kabir Murad were present at the meeting.

CG popularity

FROM PAGE 1 over with 16 months back, he said, "Yes, that looks to be true. You see popularity goes up and down."

Choudhury spoke on a wide range of subjects, encompassing the fate of general election, notion about militarisation, anti-graft trial, terrorism, climate change and bilateral trade and investment.

Asked whether he foresees silky road ahead of the elections, Choudhury, who closely watched twists and turns of