

Myanmar junta

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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.

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 Horsey 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 Horsey 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 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 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 emergency supplies to the country.

Rangs Bhaban

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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, Range authority gave the missing security guard's family Tk 20 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

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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 Kailla, Delwar Hossain alias Aunda, Deel Mohammad alias Moti, Mahatoba Hossain, and Amir Hossain were given 43 years' each in jail.

Commissioner Aziz was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment.

Of the convicts, Abdus Salam, Zahid Hossain, Deel Mohammad, Monir, Mahatoba and Moazzam were on the run and tried in absentia.

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

Swapan, Faruk, Abdul Hossain, Jaber, Selim, Sattar, Joynal and Afas 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

group of criminals led by the defeated ward commissioner Aziz attacked the victory procession of his rival, the winning candidate Humayun Kabir, at about 10:30am on January 31, 1994.

They fired on the procession killing seven and leaving several others injured. The victims are Delwar, Gazi, Nazrul, Anwar, Hafiz, Aziz and Shah Alam.

Humayun Kabir, elected ward commissioner of ward no 59, filed a murder case against Abdul Aziz and 23 others with the Lalbagh police the same day.

In the past 14 years, the case was transferred to three courts for trial.

REACTION OF THE COMPLAINANT

Complainant Humayun Kabir expressed his dissatisfaction over the verdict, saying that Abdul Aziz was the prime accused in the case, but he was given 13 years' jail.

He would appeal against the judgement with the higher court, Kabir added.

Talking to The Daily Star, Babul, brother of victim Hafiz, Mojibur, brother of slain Nazrul, and Iqbal and Sumon, brother and son of victim Delwar, expressed disappointment over the verdict.

They were present at the court yesterday.

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Sector commanders

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Air-Vice Marshall (retd) A K Khandkar 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 (Retd) M Harun-ur Rashid Bir Pratik, Maj Gen (Retd) Zamil D Ahsan Bir Pratik, Maj Gen (Retd) M Masudur Rahman Bir Pratik, freedom fighter M Hamid, commander of Mukti Joddha Sangstha of Kurigram Aminul Islam, commander of Rangpur Mukti Joddha Sangstha Monjurul Islam and commander of Nilphamari Mukti Joddha Sangstha Joynal Abeezen also spoke during the four-hour-long meeting.

Says Zillur

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Foundation organised the programme at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel chaired by Sayeed Khokon, Hanif's 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 President Member Mosharrif 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 Suranjan Sengupta asked the government to announce the specific date for parliamentary election through concluding the official dialogue with the political parties by this month.

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

Presiding over the programme, Sayeed Khokon, one of the organising secretaries of city unit AL, demanded that the government form 'Metropolitan Government' for Dhaka before the next major 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 Ahsraf Islam, Organising Secretary Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, Dhaka city unit acting President MA Aziz and Mostak Hossain also spoke at the programme.

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 Jessor -- will provide daily information for its cell.

Kamaluddin Ahmed, an FBCCI director, heads the 28-member 'task force' while Shafquat 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.

Armed forces

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Ambassador to Bangladesh U Nyam 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.

While talking on 'Implementation of Foreign Policy -- Obstacles' during the second session, Rashed 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 is affecting 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, Rashed 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.

Noting that discussions on foreign policies is usually limited to top offices, Nasir 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 bringing in the directors of different ministries for a special training.

In his concluding remarks, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam urged the former ambassador 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 session.

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.

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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 as 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 (abatement) 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 filed by Azam J Chowdhury and in two extortions cases filed by Nur Ali and another businessman with Tejgaon police in March.

Arrest warrant

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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 Yousaf Hossain, former senior general manager of Bapex Meer Moynul Haque, former secretary of Bapex Shafur 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 Mosharrif 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 Sabir 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.

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.

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, Nasir Firdaus urged for changing the mindset, instilling a sense of 'need to know' in the foreign ministry.