

Bangladesh introduces SMS cyclone alert system

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Bangladeshi villagers rebuild an embankment in Padmapukir on the outskirts of Satkhira, some 400 km from Dhaka, on June 3, 2009. Bangladesh is trialling a text message service to warn people of natural disasters, including floods and cyclones, a government official said Wednesday.

Bangladesh is trialling a text message service to warn people of natural disasters, including floods and cyclones, a government official said Wednesday.

Disaster Management Bureau spokesman Syed Ashraf told AFP the service would be piloted for six months in the southeastern districts of Cox's Bazar, where cyclones frequently hit, and Sirajganj in the north, prone to flooding.

"The SMS messages will be sent warning people of floods or cyclones.

They'll be told whether to go to shelters and what to do," he said.

Some 300 people were killed when [Cyclone](#) Aila hit southern Bangladesh and West Bengal in India on May 25, though the pilot for the scheme had been planned for some months and was not being trialled in areas affected by the latest storm.

Despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh -- with a population of 144 million people -- has a booming telecommunications sector with an estimated 44 million people owning a cell phone.

In 1970, around half-a-million people died in a cyclone; an estimated 138,000 people died as a result of a cyclonic surge in 1991 and 3,500 people died during a cyclone in November 2007.

The lower death tolls in recent years are attributed to a network of cyclone shelters and a [warning system](#) introduced after the 1970 disaster.

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