

Strong cyclone lashes east India, impacts Asian subcontinent

May 3 2019



Damaged signage lies on a street in Puri district after Cyclone Fani hit the coastal eastern state of Odisha, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani tore through India's eastern coast on Friday as a grade 5 storm, lashing beaches with rain and winds gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour and affecting weather as far away as Mount Everest as it approached the former imperial capital of Kolkata. (AP Photo)

Cyclone Fani tore through India's eastern coast on Friday as a grade 5 storm, lashing beaches with rain and winds gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour and affecting weather as far away as Mount Everest as it approached the former imperial capital of Kolkata.

The India Meteorological Department said the "extremely severe" cyclone in the Bay of Bengal hit the coastal state of Odisha around 8 a.m., with weather impacted across the Asian subcontinent.

Dust storms were forecast in the desert state of Rajasthan bordering Pakistan, heat waves in the coastal state of Maharashtra on the Arabian Sea, heavy rain in the northeastern states bordering China and snowfall in the Himalayas.

Around 1.2 million people were evacuated from low-lying areas of Odisha and moved to nearly 4,000 shelters, according to India's National Disaster Response Force. Indian officials put the navy, air force, army and coast guard on high alert. Odisha Special Relief Commissioner Bishnupada Sethi said the evacuation effort was unprecedented in India.

By Friday afternoon, Fani had weakened to a "very severe" storm as it hovered over coastal Odisha and was forecast to move north-northeast toward the Indian state of West Bengal by Friday evening.

In Bhubaneswar, a city in Odisha famous for an 11th-century Hindu temple, palm trees whipped back and forth like mops across skies made opaque by gusts of rain.



Motorcycles lie on a street in Puri district after Cyclone Fani hit the coastal eastern state of Odisha, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani tore through India's eastern coast on Friday as a grade 5 storm, lashing beaches with rain and winds gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour and affecting weather as far away as Mount Everest as it approached the former imperial capital of Kolkata. (AP Photo)

It is a "very, very scary feeling," said Tanmay Das, a 40-year-old resident, who described "the sound of wind as if it will blow you away."

Most of the area's thatched-roof houses were destroyed, and there was no electricity.

The national highway to Puri, a popular tourist beach city with other

significant Hindu antiquities, was littered with fallen trees and electricity poles, making it impassable. A special train ran Thursday to evacuate tourists from the city.

The airport in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, closed from 3 p.m. Friday to Saturday morning, and rail lines were closed.

At least 200 trains were canceled across India.



Damaged structures and trees are seen amid gusty winds in Puri district after Cyclone Fani hit the coastal eastern state of Odisha, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani tore through India's eastern coast on Friday as a grade 5 storm, lashing beaches with rain and winds gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour and affecting weather as far away as Mount Everest as it approached the former imperial capital of Kolkata. (AP Photo)

The storm hit in the middle of India's six-week general election, with rain forecast in Kolkata forcing political parties to cancel campaign events.

The National Disaster Response Force dispatched 54 rescue and relief teams of doctors, engineers and deep-sea divers to flood-prone areas along the coast and as far afield as Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a group of islands that comprise a union territory about 1,300 kilometers (840 miles) east of mainland India in the Bay of Bengal.

Up to four inches (10 centimeters) of rain were expected in much of Sri Lanka, the island nation off the eastern tip of India.

More than 2,300 kilometers (1,430 miles) away on Mount Everest, some mountaineers and Sherpa guides were descending to lower camps as weather worsened at higher elevations. The government issued a warning that heavy snowfall was expected in the higher mountain areas with rain and storms lower down, and asked trekking agencies to take tourists to safety.

Hundreds of climbers, their guides, cooks and porters huddled at the Everest base camp, according to Pemba Sherpa of Xtreme Climbers Trek, who said weather and visibility was poor. May is the best month to climb the 8,850-foot (29,035-foot) Everest when Nepal experiences a few windows of good weather to scale the peak.



Damaged structures and uprooted trees lie along a road in Puri district after Cyclone Fani hit the coastal eastern state of Odisha, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani tore through India's eastern coast on Friday as a grade 5 storm, lashing beaches with rain and winds gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour and affecting weather as far away as Mount Everest as it approached the former imperial capital of Kolkata. (AP Photo)

"It is still the beginning of the month, so there is no reason for climbers to worry" that weather from the cyclone will cost them their chance to reach the summit, Sherpa said.

On India's cyclone scale, Fani is the second-most severe, equivalent to a Category 3 hurricane.

Its timing is unusual, according to data from the Meteorological Department. Most extremely severe cyclones hit India's east coast in the post-monsoon season. Over roughly half a century, 23, or nearly 60% of the cyclones, to hit India were observed between October and December.

Because Fani spent 10 days gathering strength over the sea, it delivered a huge blow when it made landfall.

Some of the deadliest tropical cyclones on record have occurred in the Bay of Bengal. A 1999 "super" cyclone killed around 10,000 people and devastated large parts of Odisha. Due to improved forecasts and better coordinated disaster management, the death toll from Cyclone Phailin, an equally intense storm that hit in 2013, was less than 50, according to the World Meteorological Organization.



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The 1999 super cyclone reached wind speeds of 260-280 kph (161-173 mph), said India Meteorological Department scientist Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

"This is not as bad," he said.

"Apart from these winds which may cause damage in terms of uprooting small trees in West Bengal and some big trees in Odisha and extensive damage to thatched houses and mud houses ... (and) disruption of power and telecommunication lines," Mohapatra said, "it can also impact the rail and road traffic and also air traffic for some time."

Sethi, the special commissioner in Odisha, said communications were disrupted in some areas, but no deaths or injuries had been reported.

In the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh just south of Odisha, Fani topped electricity poles and uprooted others, leaving them in sharp angles. In the Srikakulam district, where around 20,000 people were evacuated, thatched-roof houses collapsed and fishing boats left unmoored on beaches were sliced into shards.



A destroyed fuel filling station by cyclone Fani after its landfall is seen on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Extremely severe cyclonic storm Fani made landfall in Eastern Indian state of Odisha coast, triggering heavy rainfall coupled with high velocity winds with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour. (AP Photo)

The district experienced wind speeds of 140 kph (87 mph) and received [heavy rains](#) but no loss of life or major damage was reported, district collector J. Niwas said.

Authorities in Bangladesh evacuated about 400,000 people and took them to cyclone shelters—decades-old, raised concrete structures—as the weather office forecast that the storm would cross the country's vast southwestern coastal region by midnight.

The world's largest mangrove forest, Sundarbans, is located in the

region.

Shah Kamal, a Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief official, said Friday in the capital, Dhaka, that members of the navy and coast guard, as well as police and volunteers, were working around the clock to help with evacuations and stocking emergency supplies of dry food and medicine.

"But I think we will not be affected severely given the weakening force of the cyclone Fani," he said.



Street shops are seen collapsed due to gusty winds preceding the landfall of cyclone Fani on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Indian authorities have evacuated hundreds of thousands of people along the country's eastern coast ahead of a cyclone moving through the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists say Cyclone Fani was expected to make landfall on Friday with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour likely starting Thursday night. It warned of "extremely heavy falls" over parts of the

state of Odisha and its southern neighbor Andhra Pradesh. (AP Photo)

Operations of water vessels in Bangladesh, which is crisscrossed by about 130 rivers, were suspended since Thursday.

Local media reports said at least 10 villages had been inundated with water in coastal Patuakhali district in southern Bangladesh after flood embankments were breached by the force of the cyclone.

Authorities also halted activities at Chittagong Seaport, which handles 80% of the country's overseas trade.

Aid agencies warned that more than 1 million Rohingya from Myanmar living at refugee camps near the coastal district of Cox's Bazar were at risk. Hillol Sobhan, local communications director for the aid group Care, said it had emergency supplies for refugees.

Police used hand-held microphones to clear people off a beach in Cox's Bazar and hoisted red flags near the choppy sea.



A motorcyclist braves gusty winds ahead of the landfall of cyclone Fani on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Indian authorities have evacuated hundreds of thousands of people along the country's eastern coast ahead of a cyclone moving through the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists say Cyclone Fani was expected to make landfall on Friday with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour likely starting Thursday night. It warned of "extremely heavy falls" over parts of the state of Odisha and its southern neighbor Andhra Pradesh. (AP Photo)



Stranded passengers wait outside the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose international airport after all the flights were suspended following cyclone Fani landfall in eastern coast, in Kolkata, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani has made landfall on India's eastern coast as a grade 5 storm, lashing the emptied beaches with rain and wind gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour. (AP Photo/Bikas Das)



Stranded passengers wait for announcements outside the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose international airport after all flights were suspended following cyclone Fani landfall in eastern coast, in Kolkata, India, Friday, May 3, 2019. Cyclone Fani has made landfall on India's eastern coast as a grade 5 storm, lashing the emptied beaches with rain and wind gusting up to 205 kilometers (127 miles) per hour. (AP Photo/Bikas Das)



An abandoned house and trees bend with gusty winds ahead of the landfall of cyclone Fani on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Indian authorities have evacuated hundreds of thousands of people along the country's eastern coast ahead of a cyclone moving through the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists say Cyclone Fani was expected to make landfall on Friday with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour likely starting Thursday night. It warned of "extremely heavy falls" over parts of the state of Odisha and its southern neighbor Andhra Pradesh. (AP Photo)



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An Indian farmer lies on the road after falling while crossing the road due to gusty winds ahead of the landfall of cyclone Fani on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Indian authorities have evacuated hundreds of thousands of people along the country's eastern coast ahead of a cyclone moving through the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists say Cyclone Fani was expected to make landfall on Friday with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour likely starting Thursday night. It warned of "extremely heavy falls" over parts of the state of Odisha and its southern neighbor Andhra Pradesh. (AP Photo)



Villagers move to safer places amidst gusty winds ahead of the landfall of cyclone Fani on the outskirts of Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha, Friday, May 3, 2019. Indian authorities have evacuated hundreds of thousands of people along the country's eastern coast ahead of a cyclone moving through the Bay of Bengal. Meteorologists say Cyclone Fani was expected to make landfall on Friday with gale-force winds of up to 200 kilometers (124 miles) per hour likely starting Thursday night. It warned of "extremely heavy falls" over parts of the state of Odisha and its southern neighbor Andhra Pradesh. (AP Photo)

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