

South Asia cyclone death toll passes 100

May 22 2020, by Sailendra Sil With Shafiqul Alam In Dhaka



Amphan left many injured

At least 106 people died in the fiercest cyclone to hit Bangladesh and eastern India since 1999, officials said Friday as aerial footage revealed immense flooding in coastal areas.

Amphan, only the second "super cyclone" ever recorded over the Bay of

Bengal, bulldozed houses, tore off roofs, uprooted trees and left millions without power when it hit late on Wednesday.

Mamata Banerjee, premier of West Bengal said Friday that 80 people died in the Indian state, while Bangladesh's toll rose to 26, health department spokesperson Ayesha Akhter said.

The total was much lower than the many thousands of fatalities recorded in previous cyclones, thanks to better forecasting and the timely evacuation of over three million people.

However, huge damage was done in [coastal areas](#) as vast volumes of seawater rushed inland, inundating villages and shrimp farms that are vital to the Bangladeshi economy.

The United Nations in Geneva said Friday that the saltwater is expected to have "a severe impact on livelihoods for the next 2-3 years".

West Bengal's capital Kolkata was also badly hit, with 19 dead, parts of the old city flooded and hangar roofs at the airport caved in on top of aircraft.

The bodies of 11 people who were electrocuted were recovered from the flooded streets.

The storm also blew off the black weathercock on top of a 205-year-old church in Kolkata city centre that has survived countless cyclones before.

"It was as old as the church," Father Swarup Bar told AFP. "We have only been able to trace small pieces of one of the wings of the cock so far."



Villagers in Satkhira in Bangladesh set about repairing their homes damaged by cyclone Amphan

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning flew over the affected areas by helicopter and announced \$132 million in government aid.

"The whole country is now with West Bengal at this critical time and we will jointly rebuild the areas ruined by the [cyclone](#)," Modi said.

The European Union also announced initial funding of 500,000 euros (\$545,000) for India and 1.1 million euros for Bangladesh.

Habitats damaged

The damage did not appear to be as bad as feared in the Sunderbans, the vast mangrove forest area home to Royal Bengal tigers, Ganges dolphins and other endangered species straddling India and Bangladesh.

"Some Keora trees in the forest have been uprooted and some branches were broken. But overall the damage was not big," said Amir Hossain Chowdhury, Bangladesh's chief forester.

He said that 65 of the forest's 81 freshwater ponds that are vital for local fauna would now be pumped to remove seawater brought in by a smaller-than-predicted storm surge.

"This is a temporary setback for the forest's wildlife including the Bengal Tigers, monkeys, spotted deer and others," Chowdhury told AFP.

Four teams would also scour the dense 140,000-hectare forest to inspect the damage to wildlife, but so far no dead bodies had been found, he added.

Like in previous cyclones, the vast Sunderbans area, a UNESCO world heritage site dubbed the "lungs of Bangladesh", acted as a brake on the weather system.

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