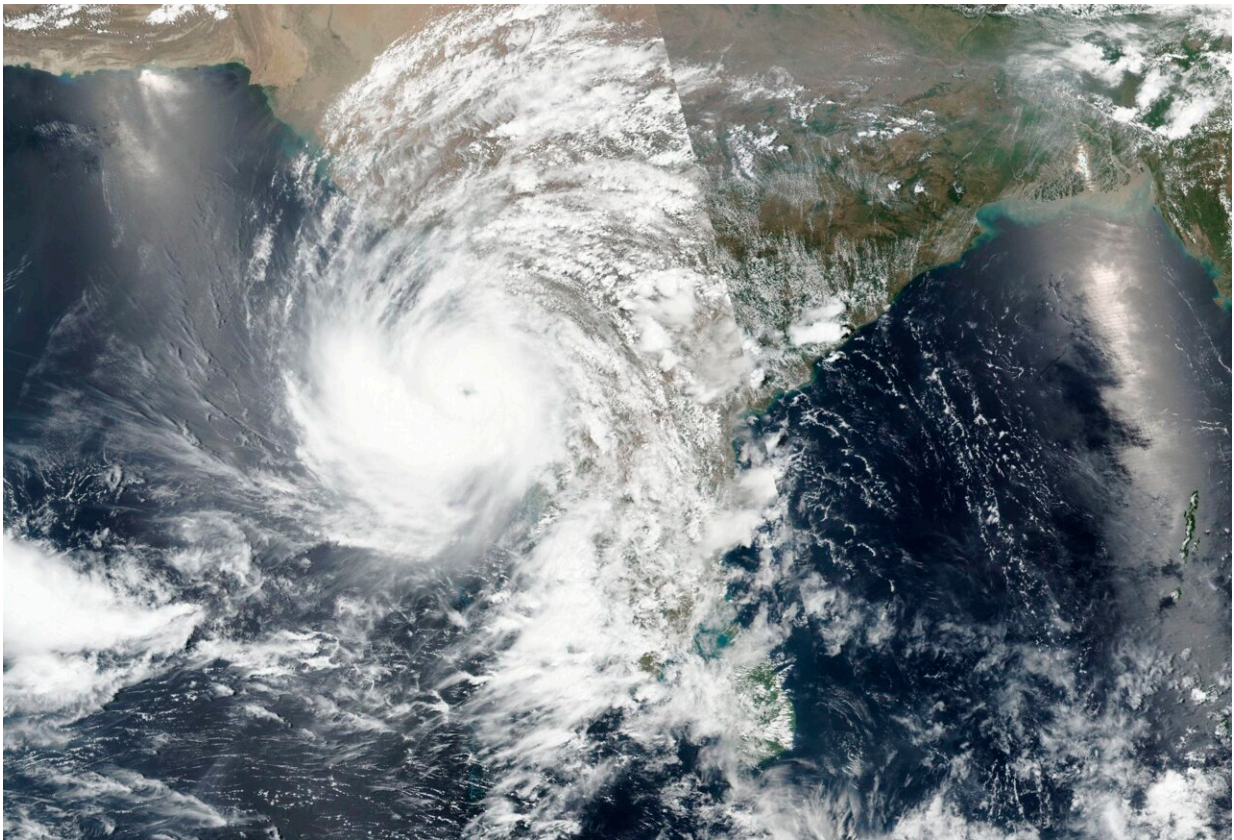


India braces for powerful cyclone amid deadly virus surge

May 17 2021



This Sunday, May 16, 2021, satellite image released NASA shows a cyclone approaching western India. A severe cyclone is roaring in the Arabian Sea off southwestern India with winds of up to 140 kph (87 mph), already causing heavy rains and flooding that have killed multiple people, officials said Sunday. Cyclone Tauktae, the season's first major storm, is expected to make landfall early Tuesday in Gujarat state, a statement by the India Meteorological Department said. (NASA Worldview, Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS) via AP)

A powerful cyclone roaring in the Arabian Sea was moving toward India's western coast on Monday as authorities tried to evacuate hundreds of thousands of people and suspended COVID-19 vaccinations in one state.

Cyclone Tauktae, which has already killed six people in parts of southern India, is expected to make landfall on Monday evening in Gujarat state with winds of up to 175 kph (109 mph), a statement by the India Meteorological Department said.

After the [cyclone](#) slams ashore, forecasters warn of the potential for extensive damage from [high winds](#), [heavy rainfall](#) and flooding in low-lying areas.

The massive [storm](#) comes as India is battling with a devastating coronavirus surge—and both the storm and the virus could exacerbate the effects of the other. The storm has already led to the suspension of some vaccination efforts and there is greater risk of virus transmission in crowded evacuation shelters

Virus lockdown measures, meanwhile, could slow relief work after the storm, and damage from the storm could potentially destroy roads and cut vital supply lines for things like vaccines and [medical supplies](#) needed for virus patients.

In Gujarat, vaccinations were suspended for two days and authorities worked to evacuate hundreds of thousands of people to temporary relief shelters. The state's Chief Minister Vijay Rupani Monday asked officials to ensure that the oxygen supplies to hospitals are not disrupted.



Policemen enforcing a lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus stand beneath a rain shelter in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Sunday, May 16, 2021. A severe cyclone is roaring in the Arabian Sea off southwestern India with winds of up to 140 kilometers per hour (87 miles per hour), already causing heavy rains and flooding that have killed at least four people, officials said Sunday. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



A police officer holds an umbrella to protect himself from the rain as he enforces a lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Sunday, May 16, 2021. A severe cyclone is roaring in the Arabian Sea off southwestern India with winds of up to 140 kilometers per hour (87 miles per hour), already causing heavy rains and flooding that have killed at least four people, officials said Sunday. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



Fishing boats that stayed off the Arabian Sea due to Cyclone Tauktae are anchored in the backwaters in Kochi, Kerala state, India, Sunday, May 16, 2021. A severe cyclone is roaring in the Arabian Sea off southwestern India with winds of up to 140 kilometers per hour (87 miles per hour), already causing heavy rains and flooding that have killed at least four people, officials said Sunday. (AP Photo/R S Iyer)



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In Maharashtra, operations at Mumbai city's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport were suspended for three hours.

Already, thousands of rescue and relief teams from the army, navy and [coast guard](#), along with ships and aircraft, have been deployed for recovery operations.

India's western coast no stranger to devastating cyclones, but changing climate patterns have caused them to become more intense, rather than more frequent.

In May 2020, nearly 100 people died after Cyclone Amphan, the most powerful storm to hit eastern India in more than a decade, ravaged the region and left millions without power.

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