

Lightning strikes kill dozens across Bangladesh

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Bangladesh is planting millions of palm trees to reduce the risk from lightning strikes following a similar scheme in Thailand

Dozens of Bangladeshis were killed in lightning strikes as pre-monsoon thunderstorms wreaked havoc across the South Asian country, an official said Thursday.

Farmers harvesting rice in open fields made up the majority of victims, Iftekharul Islam, a director at Bangladesh's disaster management department, told AFP.

"In the last 24 hours, 29 people have died from [lightning](#) in 12 districts. Almost all of them are farmers," he said.

Scores of people die every year after being struck by lightning during Bangladesh's wet season, which runs from April to October, but officials say the numbers are exceptionally high this year.

Islam said that more than 112 people had been killed in strikes in the first 10 days of May.

"Every day 10-12 people are dying from lightning," he explained, adding that it was instilling fear in farmers who harvest rice during this time of the year.

Authorities declared lightning a natural disaster after 82 people were killed in a single day in May 2016.

Independent monitors estimated that some 349 Bangladeshis died from lightning that year.

Experts say deaths are rising as Bangladesh, one of the world's poorest nations, witnesses the increased deforestation of rural areas.

Farmers are known to chop down trees to free up space to grow more rice.

Disaster management officials are trying to reduce the high death toll by planting five million [palm trees](#) to provide better shelter.

"We have already planted 3.8 million palm trees. But the trees take years to grow tall," said Islam.

Bangladeshi officials say a similar tree-planting programme in Thailand has yielded results.

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