

Mango growers hit hard by cyclone

2 lakh tonnes of mangoes drop

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

At least 2 lakh tonnes of mangoes, which is around 16 percent of the country's total annual production, have fallen off the trees because of cyclone Amphan, said the Department of Agricultural Extension.

According to the farmers, however, between 20 and 50 percent of the total annual production of mangoes have been damaged.

The mango growers said the fallen mangoes were lying on the grounds of their orchards as none was there to purchase those.

They also sought immediate government intervention and suggested procurement of those mangoes by the fruit processing industries.

Sorof Uddin, senior scientific officer of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute, said the district administrations could take urgent initiatives to save those mangoes from being wasted.

"Mangoes fall from the trees in storms almost every year. A government policy ensuring good use of the dropped mangoes could help the farmers to alleviate their losses," he said.

Sorof himself lost some two tons of mangoes out of 12 tons on his orchard in Rajshahi.

According to meteorologist Omor Faruk, the Amphan hit Satkhira at a speed of 151km per hour while it hit Rajshahi region at a speed of 59km per hour.

Farmers of the southern districts in Khulna division, who provide a quarter of the country's total mangoes, suffered the worst.

SM Liakat Ali, a mango grower in Satkhira Sadar upazila, said at least 50 of his trees out of 250 were completely uprooted while rest lost their branches.

"I can't think properly after seeing such a loss," he said.

Liakat had been expecting a

production of 300 maunds of mangoes, but after the cyclone, he doubted survival of even 20 maunds.

"I didn't collect the mangoes that have fallen from the trees. Locals collected some while most of the mangoes were lying in the orchard," he said.

Shahadat Hossain, another mango grower at Dighalia in Khulna, said he expected 40 tonnes of mangoes from his orchards on a 13-acre land. Around 24 tonnes of his mangoes fell off the trees due to the cyclone.

Unlike Liakat, Shahadat collected some of the dropped mangoes for sending those to relatives and friends and making pickles.

Those in Rajshahi division that fetch over 50 percent of the country's total mango production claimed a loss between 20 and 50 percent.

Anwar Hossain Polash of Bagha said more than half of his mangoes were lost. He was expecting 24 tonnes of mangoes from his orchard.

Some locals purchased his mangoes that fell off from the trees at a rate of Tk 30 per kg whereas the regular market price was at Tk 70.

Even trucks were not available for carrying the mangoes that fell off the trees, he said.

Ismail Khan of Shibganj in Chapainawabganj said 20 percent of his mangoes fell off.

Most orchards in Naogaon, the country's highest mango producing district, also faced the crisis.

According to Mohammad Yousuf, DG of Department of Agricultural Extension, the production cost of mangoes mostly depends on how much care has been put to produce the fruit.

The production cost for mangoes is at Tk 78,000 per tonne in Chapainawabganj while it is Tk 60,000 in Rajshahi, Tk 22,000 in Naogaon, Tk 4,100 in Satkhira and Tk 1,975 in Chuadanga, he said.

Beximco hands over first

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Beximco Pharma, told The Daily Star.

Private hospitals treating Covid-19 patients will be able to buy it for Tk 4,800 because they are exempt from taxes.

A critically ill Covid-19 patient will need between six and 11 vials.

Developed by American biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, remedeivir was originally developed to treat the Ebola virus, but it did not work.

However, it turned out to be effective in helping Covid-19 patients based on the ability to disable the mechanism by which certain viruses, including the coronavirus, replicate themselves and potentially overwhelm their host's immune system.

While Gilead has a patent on

remdesivir, international trade rules allow nations defined by the United Nations as least-developed countries, including Bangladesh, to manufacture the drug for the local market without patent fees.

Six local companies -- Beximco, Eskayef (SK-F), Incepta, Beacon, Healthcare and Square -- are making the generic version of the drug.

"We are pleased to be the first generic company in the world to introduce this very important drug for treating the hospitalised Covid-19 patients," said Nazmul Hassan, managing director of Beximco Pharma, in a statement.

The first batch of the medicine was handed over by Hassan to Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque at a ceremony at the health ministry.

Coastal farmers take the brunt

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away. Embankments were also damaged in various areas such as Satkhira's Shyamnagar and Ashashuni," said DoF Additional Director General Md Ramjan Ali.

The fisheries department estimated that shrimp, finfish and crab farmers in the southwest division of Khulna were mostly affected, followed by farmers in Barishal, the southern coastal division.

Shrimp farmers, who export to Europe and the Americas to help the nation earn \$500 million annually, were worst hit.

Nearly Tk 175 crore of 18,450 shrimp farms in the southern coastal regions were lost due to the cyclone.

Also 21,700 finfish farms suffered losses due to Amphan.

In addition, it affected 176,000 hectares of crops, including standing Boro paddy, vegetables, and mango, said the agriculture ministry in its initial estimate.

The amount of loss of crops in monetary terms was not calculated, said the agriculture ministry.

"Mango growers in Satkhira suffered the biggest loss due to the cyclone," said Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque at a virtual media briefing yesterday.

Farmers in the southwest district of Satkhira grew mangoes on 4,000 hectares and the cyclone damaged up to 70 percent of those mangoes.

Take prompt steps to help

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start providing the support from yesterday, said a media release issued by the Press Wing of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The work on calculating the overall damages caused to houses, embankments and roads by the cyclone started yesterday morning. Besides, distribution of relief materials and pure drinking water, and repairing of damaged power supply lines in cyclone-hit areas also began.

"The prime minister has been monitoring the situation round the clock and giving necessary directives," said PMO Secretary Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah.

Following the directives of the PM, all district and upazila level officials have already been asked to work in coordination with the ministries and organisations concerned to estimate the damages and take measures accordingly, he said.

The PMO secretary and directors

in coordination with the deputy commissioners of the affected districts have already started work to estimate the damages caused by the cyclone.

The PMO officials will also remain active during the Eid holidays. The PMO always remains open, including on public holidays, due to the novel coronavirus lockdown.

The premier has been clearing files regularly offline and online and giving necessary directives considering the overall situation.

She also joined the meetings of the cabinet, Ecne, budget and the National Disaster Management Council as well as video conferences with leaders and grassroots officials from 64 districts in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The PMO has tirelessly been working for the last two days to safely evacuate people to cyclone shelter centres, arranging food and treatment facilities for the affected people, and to maintain social distancing.



Submerged vehicles are seen in a flooded alleyway after the landfall of Cyclone Amphan in Kolkata, yesterday. India and Bangladesh began a massive clean-up yesterday after the fiercest cyclone since 1999 killed at least 84 people, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake.

PHOTO: AFP

Amphan inflicts massive damage

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were affected.

The cyclone made landfall on the Digha coast in India on Wednesday afternoon, ravaging parts of West Bengal. It then moved towards Bangladesh on Wednesday afternoon, lashing the Sundarbans in its path. It claimed at least 72 lives in West Bengal.

Shah Kamal said they succeeded in keeping the casualty and damages to a minimum though Amphan was an extremely severe cyclone.

"We had formed a coordination committee comprising public representatives and members of the armed forces to face the natural disaster.

"We have once again proved that Bangladesh is a role model in tackling any natural disaster."

The cyclone hit 26 districts, of which three to four were very badly affected, he added.

More than 24 lakh people were moved to 14,636 permanent and temporary shelters in 19 coastal districts before the cyclone hit the country's coast.

DEATHS

At least 12 people were killed and three others injured as the cyclone battered the coastal districts on Wednesday.

Of the dead, two drowned and five were killed as trees fell on them.

The deaths were reported from Kalapara and Galachipa upazilas of Patuakhali; Charfashion and Borhanuddin upazilas of Bhola, Mathbaria and Indurkani upazilas of Pirojpur, Sadar upazila in Satkhira, Chowgachha upazila of Jashore and Sadar upazila in Jhenidaha.

DESTRUCTION

Amphan totally or partially damaged 82,000 houses in Khulna Division and another 60,000 in Barishal Division. It caused tidal surges that washed away several embankments in low-lying coastal areas.

Our correspondents from the two divisions reported that the cyclone rendered tens of thousands of people homeless, destroying thatched houses and uprooting trees.

Abdur Rakib from Dakkhin

Shakuchia village in Bhola's Manpura Upazila said he and his family members spent Wednesday night at a cyclone centre.

When he returned home yesterday morning, he found that it had gone under water.

"We are yet to get any help," Rakib told this newspaper yesterday afternoon.

Another affected villager, Mansur Gazi from Shyamnagar in Satkhira, used to run a small grocery shop.

He along with his family members took refuge in a nearby cyclone shelter and spent Wednesday night there.

Yesterday morning, he went out of the shelter to check on his shop.

To his dismay, Mansur found that his grocery shop was completely destroyed by the cyclone. His house was also damaged.

"I used to run my family with the earnings from the small shop. But now everything is gone. I don't know how we will survive," he said.

According to sources at Khulna Divisional Commissioner's Office, 5,80 lakh people were affected in the three worst-hit districts -- Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat.

More than 32 kms of embankments were partially damaged and 133 villages went under water in the three districts due to heavy rains and tidal surges. Besides, mangoes worth around Tk 150 crore were damaged in Khulna Division.

Over 10,000 shrimp enclosures were washed away in Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna, according to fisheries offices in the districts.

Md Anwar Hossain Hawlader, commissioner of Khulna Division, said they were yet to complete the assessment of the damage.

"We are getting data from the district and upazila level and are still assessing it. We have not yet received information from some remote areas such as Dakkhin Bedkashi in Koyra upazila."

The commissioner said they were trying their best to provide assistance to the affected people in the region.

Barishal Divisional Commissioner Yamin Chowdhury said onrushing water damaged protection embankments and

A night with howling winds

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the windows and glass doors of the nearly empty hospital; the wind roared with full fury, with each renewed howl carrying the threat of destruction of all in its path.

The sound was incredibly loud. Entirely inhuman.

Pieces were flying off. I heard the sound of bits of tin roof being lifted off a house close to the hospital and being buffeted about. A section of timber from a nearby building came off and the branches spread were scattered across the road.

The sound was disconcerting. And the splashes of rain were driving in through the cracks in the sliding windows. For moments, it felt there would be something that would come through the windows.

The lights went out before the storm peaked. It was almost pitch-black outside, making it difficult to see anything around us. But the chaotic chorus of nature's wrath, the roar of the wind and the creaking of the trees, helped us get an idea of the scene outside the hospital window.

As the night wore on, as the cyclone swirled onto land. I sensed things, but it was not worse than we were actually

imagining. I was waiting for daybreak to see just how bad things are.

First light yesterday revealed some destruction, yet not as severe as I feared. Trees in some parts of the city rolled over. Power lines were down in many areas, corrugated iron wrapped around a number of structures told a dual tale of destruction.

Meanwhile, people walked around with a dazed look.

Yesterday was still windy. I got phone calls from family members, relatives and friends in Satkhira, one of the areas worst hit.

They informed that a huge number of mud huts and trees were uprooted, roads washed away, crops destroyed and embankments broken down, inundating many villages.

They said they were left without power. Since midnight, I could not hear from them because the telephone network was down.

"I have never heard such a violent noise of cyclone in my life. It was worse than the cyclone in 1988. I'll never forget the roaring sound," one of my relatives from Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira told me over phone yesterday noon.

Zuckerberg 'confident' Facebook can stop US election interference

AFP, London

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said yesterday he was "pretty confident" his company could help prevent attempts to influence the political outcome of the US presidential election later this year.

Zuckerberg told the BBC in an interview that the social network was better prepared to counter online misinformation campaigns but admitted Facebook was "behind" during the 2016 election which Donald Trump won.

13 die

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Gobindaganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ramakrishna Barman told The Daily Star that most of the victims had their national identity cards and seven bodies had been handed to the families.

The seven victims are Shamsul Alam, 65, of Pirganj, Rangpur; Shoaib, 7, of Pirganj, Rangpur; Mohsin Ali, 18, of Palashbari, Gaibandha; Mizanur Rahman, 27, of Uliapur, Kurigram; Shariful Alam, of Kunia, Rangpur; Ishaq Khan of Pirganj, Rangpur; and Al Amin, 14, of Pirganj, Rangpur.

The victims were mostly garment workers and they got on the truck in Gazipur, the UNO added.

Gaibandha district administration is giving each family Tk 10,000, he said.

Cases, deaths

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adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization, said there are many people left beyond the coverage of sample testing.

"We won't be able to tell the actual rate and spread of infection until we can increase the number of daily tests," he said, suggesting that the government increase tests.

Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS, said the highest number of tests -- 10,262 -- were conducted in 47 labs in 24 hours from Wednesday morning. Four new labs are now conducting tests.

Of the 22 reported dead in 24 hours since Wednesday morning, 10 were from Dhaka, eight from Chattogram, three from Sylhet and another was from Mymensingh.

Of them, 19 were male and three female, the DGHS official said, adding that two of them were aged between 11-20, one between 31-40, two between 41-50, 10 between 51-60, three between 61-70, two between 71-80 and the other two between 81-90.

Meanwhile, 395 Covid-19 patients have recovered since yesterday, taking the total number of recoveries to 5,602, she added.

Around 154 people were put into isolation in the last 24 hours.

72 people killed

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that Nabanna building the State Secretariat was shaking due to the cyclone.

She said that she will visit the affected areas after three to four days once connectivity is restored.

"There is no telephone connection and there is no electricity in the parts of the state," she said.

The chief minister also said that there is scarcity of drinking water in the South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas districts and asked officials to ensure water supply in these districts.

Mamata said that forest department will have to plant trees on water footing as about 40% of trees of the affected areas have damaged.

The airport in Kolkata lay under water and several neighbourhoods in the city of 14 million people have had no electricity since the storm struck, according to residents.

After the storm passed people were trying to retrieve articles from the rubble of their shops in the city.

Pradip Kumar Dalui, an official in the state's South 24 Parganas area, said that storm waters breached river embankments in several places, flooding over half a dozen villages, that were home for more than 100,000 people.



Writhing in labour pain, 24-year-old Jhuma resting her head on her husband Shujan on a footpath near Shaheed Minar in the capital around 5:00am on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

twins or both.

How could the clinics and hospitals throw out a pregnant woman in labour? A minimum examination would have revealed that she was in no position to be shuttled from one clinic to another. At one stage, her bleeding had started, and even then she was shown the door. Except for fever, which can come from myriad reasons, including labour, Jhuma had no symptoms resembling those of Covid-19.

Recently, we have been publishing many stories of patients being routinely denied treatment for having fever, cough or respiratory issues. (See our story "Victims of denial", published yesterday, May 21, 2020). The requirement being demanded is a "no-Covid" certificate before admission. Except for a limited number of places -- 23 testing booths, whose locations are not well known -- and all government hospitals in the city, one cannot get such a certificate from anywhere else. If one is lucky to reach such a place and have themselves tested, the result takes anywhere between three to seven days to come.

So, what happens to patients in the

meantime?

Emergency patients afflicted with serious non-Covid ailments are routinely dying after being denied treatment. A health ministry directive issued last Monday clearly specifies that no patient can be refused treatment if there are treatment facilities. Such directives are meaningless to patients who are suffering and in some cases dying due to lack of treatment.

If nothing else, let us make special arrangements for pregnant women to receive treatment in these trying circumstances. More specifically, special arrangements must be made for expecting mothers who are in the last phases of their pregnancy, during which all sorts of emergencies may occur.

Post script

A simple solution would be that every hospital should have facilities to test for Covid-19 and admit patients accordingly. It can be mentioned here that the testing kit from Gonoshasthaya Kendra could provide the perfect solution if its claim proves to be correct. Yet, bureaucratic delay is holding its permission. Just imagine the difference such a testing facility would make.