

# Amphan, a bolt from the blue

People of a char in Bhola had no clue the raging storm was coming

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It's water, water everywhere. Strong current coupled by the fierce gales has inundated almost everything that can be seen through the eerie darkness. Women and children have been huddled in a boat tied up with a tree in a nearby jungle with men straining every nerve to survive the perilous night by grasping something firm.

Such was the extent of uncertainty that some 1,000 people of Char Shajalal, around three and a half kilometre away from mainland Bhola, had been through for hours after the cyclone Amphan made landfall in the evening of Wednesday.

But thanks to their rock-solid resilience, the char dwellers apparently won against the calamity as no fatality was reported there until last night.

The char dwellers claimed that they were not informed about the cyclone. But it caught them off guard when the river Tetulia took a different look in the afternoon and it was already too late to move elsewhere.

"The water flowed so speedily that it inundated our home before we could take any preparation," said Nasim, a resident of the island.

"I was holding a tree for several hours and at one point it seemed that I might die. Now, I think none but Allah has protected us," he said.

Another survivor Shahidul said, "At first, we got panicked. Later, we thought that we will die if we lose our courage. So, we fought courageously against the nature that helped us to

survive."

A female survivor Hanufa Begum was describing her terrible experience in the boat.

"The boat was overcrowded and was swaying dangerously due to the heavy waves. Every one of us was clutching each other's hand so that no one falls into the water," she said.

Many islanders were injured while some 120 houses were damaged due to the cyclone, said the survivors.

Later on yesterday morning, they were rescued by the local administration and taken to the mainland.

Talking to The Daily Star, some of them alleged that they were not served any food till 4:00pm yesterday.

Contacted, Lalmohon upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) Habibul Hasan Rumi said, "Earlier, I was not informed about the people of that particular island. I came to know about them on Wednesday night when a rescue operation was not possible. They were rescued the next morning."

Replying to a question regarding food, he said the people would be provided with food shortly.

Around 20,000 people remained confined to the 21 islands of Bhola, which is one of the worst victims of the cyclone.

Some 1,600 houses were partially damaged while 332 houses were completely damaged in the district. Crops and vegetables of around 5,000 hectares of land were damaged while many have lost their cattle, according to sources at district administration.

## Beximco hands

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patients based on the ability to disable the mechanism by which certain viruses, including the new 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 ignore such patents and make drugs more affordable in those markets.

Subsequently, six local pharmaceuticals companies --

## Mango growers hit

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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 Polish 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.

## Take prompt measures

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She gave directives to 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



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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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.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shah Kamal, senior secretary at disaster management and relief ministry, 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 evening.

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 Jhenidah.

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have twin boys. At 3:00am on Thursday, she experienced premature labour pain. She and her husband went to clinics in the area and everyone refused to admit her as she had fever. Using the internet, they found the name of a clinic in Mirpur with its own ambulance service. They availed themselves of the service and thought their troubles were over.

On reaching the clinic, they were told it could not admit her without a no-Covid certificate because of her fever. The two were advised to go to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. On reaching the DMCH emergency, they were told to go to the specialised Covid unit. The couple justifiably feared being infected and hence refused to go there and took refuge on the footpath when our photojournalist Anis met them.

By this time, her bleeding had started, and she had nowhere to go and none were helping them. She was desperate and delirious. Anis hailed an ambulance that happened to accidentally pass by and pleaded with the driver to take Jhuma to some clinic on humanitarian grounds. The driver, having first refused, reluctantly agreed seeing the desperate condition Jhuma was in.

The driver took them to clinics in other areas, and being continuously refused, the couple decided to seek refuge in the locality where they reside. One ramshackle clinic back in Gazipur agreed to admit her, on condition that they do not reveal its name or address, where she gave birth to twins by a C-section at 12:40pm in the afternoon. As of yesterday, both the mother and the twins were well.

The story ended happily.

But it could, just as well, have not. Jhuma was in labour with twins which meant that something had to be done within a limited time and that she needed medical attention immediately. Each clinic that refused her literally condemned her to a dangerous eventuality which could have proven to be fatal for her or her

### TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

Amphan totally or partially damaged 82,000 homesteads in Khulna division and another 60,000 in Barisal division. It caused tidal surges that 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 assistance," Rakib told this newspaper yesterday afternoon.

Another affected villager, Monsur 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 spend Wednesday night there.

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

To his dismay, Monsur 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 this small shops. 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.

# Inhuman behaviour by some hospitals



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

## 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.

## 13 die

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A team of police from Palashbari reached the scene around half an hour after the crash and they also didn't realise that so many people had died, said Masudar Rahman Masud, officer-in-charge of Palashbari Police Station.

The truckers managed to flee the spot, said Abdul Quader Zilani, OC of Gobindaganj Highway Police Station.

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 Ulipur, 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.

## In 2 weeks cases

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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.