

Nepal refutes Indian Army's abominable yeti claim

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's army yesterday refuted the Indian military's hairy claim that its soldiers had discovered yeti footprints in the Himalayas, saying they were more likely just a bear.

The Indian army posted images of "yeti footprints" from near the Nepal-China border late Monday on Twitter, triggering considerable ridicule on social media.

Nepal Army spokesman Bigyan Dev Pandey said Nepali liaison officers went to the spot but that by the time they arrived the markings in the snow had disappeared.

But he said locals had told the officers that a bear was the likely culprit, and that strange prints were often seen.

"According to locals and porters such unusual footprints appear frequently in the area and are made by wild bears," Pandey told AFP.

This matches comments by wildlife experts who said what the Indians saw were bear footprints enlarged by the sun and wind.

The Indian army's tweeted images showed a series of foot-shaped

impressions, each almost a metre (yard) long.

"For the first time, an #IndianArmy Mountaineering Expedition Team has sited Mysterious Footprints of mythical beast 'Yeti'," the typo-ridden tweet on the army's official account said.

It added the "elusive snowman has only been sighted at Makalu-Barun National Park in the past", referring to footprints reported by British explorer Eric Shipton in 1951 on the west side of Mount Everest.

The army said the footprints measured 32 inches by 15 inches (81 centimetres by 38) and were spotted by a team on April 9 close to the Makalu Base Camp in Nepal.

The yeti or "Abominable Snowman" is traditionally described as an ape-like creature, taller than a human, living in the Himalayas, Siberia and parts of Central and East Asia. The North American version is known as Bigfoot.

Forensic results of previous samples have proved to be from prehistoric bears and one purported piece of evidence turned out to be a gorilla suit made of rubber.

Cyclone Fani

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district while three more died in Bhubaneswar and nearby areas. The teenager was killed when a tree came crashing down on him in Puri.

In Nayagarh district, flying debris from a concrete structure hit a woman, leaving her dead.

Besides, a 65-year-old woman died after suspected heart attack at a cyclone shelter in Kendrapara.

In West Bengal, thousands of people were asked to move to safer places. Local airports were shut, while train lines and roads remained closed.

In a statement, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said no flights would depart or arrive at the Kolkata airport from 3:00pm yesterday to 8:00am today.

"We are monitoring the situation 24x7 and doing all it takes... Be alert, take care and stay safe for the next two days," tweeted Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee. She cancelled her election rallies for 48 hours because of the cyclone.

The winds of the enormous cyclone were felt as far away as Mount Everest, with tents blown away at Camp 2 at 6,400 metres (21,000 feet) and Nepali authorities cautioning helicopters against flying.

"It just went dark and then suddenly we could barely see five metres in front of us," said one resident in Puri.

"There were the roadside food carts, store signs all flying in the air," the man told AFP from a hotel where he took shelter. "The wind is deafening."

Another witness said he saw a small car being blown by winds along a street and then turned over.

Meteorologists had warned of the "total destruction" of thatched houses, the uprooting of power and communication poles and damage to crops in some areas.

Remove all barriers

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although Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral deal on repatriation in November 2017.

In June last year, Myanmar also entered into a tripartite deal with the UN Refugee Agency and the UNDP, allowing them to assess conditions in Rakhine state.

The UN says conditions in Myanmar have not been conducive for sustainable, voluntary and dignified return of the Rohingyas, who have been fleeing persecution in Rakhine since 1980s. They were denied citizenship and basic rights, including rights to movement, education and healthcare.

Escalation of armed clashes between the Myanmar Army and Arakan Army, a Buddhist rebel group seeking greater autonomy in Rakhine, has further complicated the situation there.

Despite preparations from both the countries, Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar camps refused to return in November last year, arguing that the conditions were not safe and secure, and that there was no guarantee for their citizenship and recognition as an ethnic group.

The Bangladesh foreign ministry said the JWG held substantive discussions on issues related to safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the forcibly displaced Myanmar citizens.

"Bangladesh highlighted the need for deeper engagement

between the Myanmar authorities and the prospective returnees with a view to convincing and motivating them," said the statement.

To this effect, Bangladesh proposed that Myanmar delegations can visit Cox's Bazar to directly engage with the Rohingyas, it added.

The two countries agreed to speed up the verification of Rohingyas.

Referring to a dispute on the eligibility of more than 2,000 prospective returnees from the first batch of verified Rohingyas, Bangladesh proposed hosting the first meeting on dispute settlement mechanism soon. Myanmar agreed to the proposal.

Bangladesh also highlighted the need for allowing greater engagement of the international community, including the ASEAN and other interested partners, in improving the ground situation in Rakhine.

Dhaka urged Nay Pyi Taw to share verifiable information on the ground situation in Rakhine so that prospective returnees can take an informed decision, said the statement.

International relations experts have suggested that Bangladesh should take a strong stance on the repatriation of Rohingyas as their presence has become a huge burden for the country -- economically, environmentally and diplomatically.



A rickshaw van crosses a partially submerged pontoon at Pankhali ferry terminal in Khulna's Dacope upazila yesterday. The authorities later suspended ferry services due to inclement weather caused by cyclone Fani. Bottom right, warning flags have been put up by the upazila administration in Chalna Bazar area. Bottom left, large waves crash on Patenga Beach in Chattogram as some visitors look on.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN, RAJIB RATHAN

12 lakh moved to shelters

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overflowed them. Water level was also rising in rivers in those districts.

In Cox's Bazar's remote island Kutubdia, at least 20 villages went under water as tides as high as four-five feet struck those areas yesterday morning.

In Patuakhali, at least 17 villages were flooded as dykes in Kalapara, Mirzagonj and Rangabali collapsed on impacts of the tidal surge, said Hasanuzzaman, executive engineer at Patuakhali WDB.

At least three villages in Bagerhat's Shoronkhola were also flooded.

In Barishal, many boats that went to fishing in the deep sea did not come back till yesterday evening.

Standing crops in different districts were also damaged, although the extent was not immediately clear.

The whole country will experience

heavy rainfall and storm today. After making landfall in Bangladesh, Fani will move towards Assam.

"Though it became week, it still is a very severe cyclone. The whole country would experience rainfall and cyclonic storm on its impact tomorrow [today]," said Shamsuddin Ahmed, director of the Met office.

Operations of all water vessels will remain suspended until further notice. Due to bad weather, two domestic flights of Biman Bangladesh were cancelled while several others had to be rescheduled.

Braving the rough weather, members of navy, coastguard, police, Ansar, VDP, volunteers and political party activists shifted lakhs of people to cyclone shelters from vulnerable areas.

The rescue operations began at 10:00am and continued till evening.

"Our target is to evacuate 21 lakh people. But till 6:00pm, we could shift 12.40 lakh. The rescue work is still on," Enamur Rahman, state minister for relief and disaster management, told The Daily Star around 9:30pm.

The people were taken to 4,071 cyclone shelters in 19 coastal districts, he added.

Adequate medicine, drinking water, dry food and other necessary goods as well as medical teams have been sent to all the shelters, said Shah Kamal, senior secretary at the relief and disaster management ministry.

However, tens of thousands of people are still in the offshore islands in Bhola and Noakhali.

Around 17,000 people were stranded in Dhal Char union of Bhola's Charfassion as there is no cyclone shelter there, said Abdus Salam, chairman of the union.

Despite the risk, the people there cannot move to the mainland due to bad weather.

There are two concrete buildings in Dhal Char -- a police outpost and the union council office -- where only 600 people can take shelter, locals said.

Many panicked locals were taking shelter in the mangroves to save their lives as the water level in the Bay was rising, reports our correspondent there.

In Hatia, the cyclone shelters at Hatia Bazar and Ali Bazar were found empty yesterday though the district administration kept those ready and requested the people to go there, according to our Noakhali correspondent.

For medical emergency, the affected people have been advised to call these hotline numbers: 01937-000011, 01937-110011 and 01927-711785.

Anxious wait at cyclone shelters

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would arrange dry food for those staying in the cyclone centres.

He said there were 83 cyclone shelters and 163 primary and high school completely ready to shelter those living in the coastal areas of Khulna.

District administration sources said more than 1.8 lakh people of that coastal region were evacuated to the shelters and schools.

Visiting a nearby temporary shelter in Uttar Kaminibasia Binapani Government Primary School in the same union, this correspondent saw there over a hundred people

from nearby villages. The school can shelter more than 300 people, said the teachers there.

Talking to The Daily Star, Krishna Paba Mondol, a farmer from Kaminibasia, said he carried his 78-year-old paralysed mother to the school, after hearing about cyclone Fani from the TV.

"My other family members will come here soon," he said, adding he could not bring with him his cattle and belongings.

Kalpana Mondol, a woman union parishad member, said she was supervising the shelter and asked the villagers to go there for their safety.

Contacted, Khulna Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Helal Hossain said they began the evacuation around 11:00am.

More and more people from the coastal areas of the district started to arrive at the shelters after afternoon following drizzle and heavy wind, he said.

UNO Wadud said, "We are working for 100 percent evacuation".

Polash Kumar Banerjee, executive engineer of Water Development Board (Division-2), Khulna, said they were closely monitoring the dykes and were arranging sandbags to repair them.

Save people

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to safer places before the cyclone hits the region.

A press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office yesterday said Hasina was monitoring the overall situation round the clock.

She also urged the people to remain ready to face the aftermath of the possible disaster.

The release said the PM has also directed the army, navy and the air force as well as all the law enforcement agencies to stay ready to face the disaster.

All these forces have already begun their work to face the situation.

As per the PM's directive, the release said, the people of the coastal regions have already been taken to nearest cyclone shelters, schools and colleges.

On Thursday, PM's Principal Secretary Nojibur Rahman also directed the district administrations of the coastal regions to take necessary preparations to deal with the cyclone.

According to the press release, the PMO was kept open at the weekends (yesterday and today).

4 land in jail

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touched his daughter inappropriately in the class and threatened her of dire consequences if she shared it with anybody.

Although the principal and management of the madrasa were informed about the incident through another teacher, they did not take any action. On top of that, they threatened the father of the victim, he added.

Meanwhile, president of the madrasa management committee Yakub Hossain Biswas said they informed the matter to upazila education officer, upazila nirbahi officer and chairman.

"People involved in the incident should be and will be punished," he added.

AFP, Seoul

South Korean foreign minister Kang Kyung-wha said yesterday that Pyongyang needs to show "visible, concrete and substantial" denuclearisation action if it wants sanctions relief, as the North's deadlock with the United States continues.

Kang's comments at a press conference come just days after a senior North Korean official warned Washington of an "unwanted outcome" if it didn't adjust its stance on economic sanctions.

Washington and Pyongyang have been at loggerheads since the collapse of a summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump in February.

The summit broke down after cash-strapped Pyongyang demanded immediate sanctions relief, but the two sides disagreed on what the North should give up

in return.

South Korean president Moon Jae-in -- who brokered the first meeting between the mercurial leaders -- has tried to salvage the diplomacy, but Pyongyang has remained largely unresponsive.

Earlier this week, North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui said Pyongyang's denuclearisation will "only be possible when the US revises and reshapes its current calculation".

But Seoul's Kang said sanctions relief requires action from Pyongyang that "assures us that they are well on their way to complete denuclearisation", stressing that existing sanctions have been imposed by the United Nations, not just Washington.

"Therefore there has to be some visible, concrete and substantial action on that track for the global community to do anything about the sanctions," she said.

Separately, Kang told the press conference that Seoul was doing everything it could to secure the release of seven North Korean defectors currently held in China.

Rights groups, who in the past have accused South Korea of pursuing rapprochement with Pyongyang at the expense of human rights, say the seven face forcible repatriation, and protesters held a rally in front of China's embassy in Seoul this week pressing Beijing not to send them back.

Kang said although human rights were "not a priority" at the moment, "the South Korean government has been participating in and supporting the international community's efforts" on the issue.

"I think it's not a priority for the government to bring this issue to the (negotiating) table of denuclearisation and building of a peace regime with North Korea," she said.