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Amphan slams into the coast

Heavy rains, tidal surges up to 9 feet; at least 5 die; 50 lakh without electricity; over 24 lakh people moved to cyclone shelters

STAR REPORT

More than 24 lakh people were moved to safety in 19 coastal districts as Cyclone Amphan bore down on the country's coast yesterday afternoon, causing heavy rains and tidal surges up to nine feet.

The cyclone claimed at least five lives in Bhola, Barguna, Patuakhali and Pirojpur. The extent of damage could not be assessed immediately. Over 50 lakh subscribers were left without electricity in a dozen districts as Amphan battered the country's south-western part.

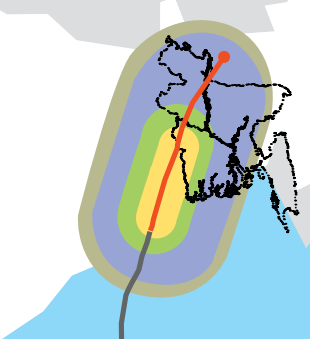
"The cyclone made landfall on the Digha coast in India yesterday afternoon and then moved towards Bangladesh through the south-western part," Shamsuddin Ahmed, director of Bangladesh Meteorological Department, told The Daily Star.

In a tweet, the Indian Meteorological Department said the cyclone made landfall on the Digha coast around 2:30pm (local time).

Bangladesh Met office said Amphan hit the country's coast around 5:00pm and kept moving inwards with gusts of up to 160 kilometre per hour. The wind speed in

Amphan made landfall at 2:30pm yesterday near Digha, West Bengal.

Crossed West Bengal and parts of Bangladesh between 4:00pm and 8:00pm.



Satkhira was recorded at 151 kmph around 9:00pm.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday evening, Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, said, "A total of 24,08,819 people took refuge in 14,636 cyclone shelters till 3:00pm." They also brought more than five lakh cattle to the shelters.

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Two men trying to take their dinghy to safety as the sea begins to get rough near EPZ Beribandh in Chattogram. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon, hours before cyclone Amphan made landfall. The cyclone hit the coast around 5:00pm and moved inwards.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN



Sundarbans the bulwark

PINAKI ROY

Govt always responds fast to disasters

Says PM as Amphan makes landfall

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government, unlike the previous governments, always responded very fast to the forecast of any disaster by engaging every human and material support to reduce the loss of lives and properties.

She was addressing a meeting of the National Disaster Management Council to review the preparations to face the possible assault of cyclone Amphan.

"We have the preparations [to face cyclone Amphan]. We are taking all possible measures to protect people's lives and properties from the

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The Sundarbans have once again proved to be the key saviour of the country in times of natural calamity as the mangrove forest absorbed the fury of Cyclone Amphan, much as it had done before with similar forces of nature.

The forest is a gift of nature to Bangladesh as it acts like a wall whenever a severe cyclone hits the country, said green campaigners, forest and biodiversity experts, urging the government to halt all kinds of economic and commercial activities in and around the Sundarbans.

It could not be immediately ascertained how much damage the forest had sustained as it absorbed the worst of Amphan.

"We cannot say yet how much the damage could be. But we have evacuated our remote forest offices and brought all our staffers to safer places, knowing the cyclone will leave a heavy blow," said Amir Hossain Chowdhury, the acting Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF).

The acting CCF said they have evacuated all staff from nine offices, including in Kotka, Kochikhali, Shelarchar, Pashakkhali, Baheerakhali, Puspakathi, Notabeki, Kachikata, Kawakhali, located near the coast.

"Nearly 60 to 70 staff members are posted in those forest offices. We have brought them to other offices which have better structures," said Chowdhury.

The forest department has also asked all honey collectors who could not return from their excursions to take shelter at nearby forest offices, he said.

The forest department will start assessing damages caused by the cyclone in a day or two.

During Cyclone Sidr in 2007, the forest had suffered severe damage.

The cyclone hit the eastern parts of the forest, especially Chandpai range -- which includes Kochikhali, Kotka, Hiron Point, and Dublarchar -- leaving a trail of severe devastation.

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,617
New cases in 24hrs



26,738
Total cases



386
Deaths



5,207
Recoveries

Victims of denial

Patients being refused treatment without Covid-19 test results

AL-AMIN

Healthcare facilities by definition are supposed to treat each and every patient seeking their services.

But in the ongoing battle against the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been painfully noticed that hospitals and clinics in the country, especially the private ones, are not complying with the very commitment for which they had been authorised to operate by the government.

If you are running high temperature, having breathing difficulties, chest pain, need a surgery or dialysis, you are invariably running the risk of not being treated in any private hospital or clinic, a common complaint from many patients and their family members.

With those symptoms you are considered a Covid-19 suspect and you need to do the necessary PCR test to come out clean before getting any treatment.

Otherwise, you are left with the tortuous and often uncertain prospect of seeking medical support from the already-overcrowded public hospitals, which can treat only 30 percent of the country's people seeking healthcare services.

In the last week, this newspaper ran some stories and a few powerful pictures

that gave an indication of patients and their family members' untold sufferings while they were running around the city from one hospital to the other like virtual beggars desperate for treatment.

Also, a number of people died without treatment. Two cases perhaps deserve detailed deliberation just to grasp how painful their situations were.

Anwar Hossain's death in particular was cruel. The man in his 60s was taken to the capital's Mugda General Hospital on Saturday morning with breathing difficulties and fever. He died on a gurney and his wife, while lamenting outside the hospital around 1:30pm, told The Daily Star photojournalist Anisur Rahman that the hospital authorities did not treat her husband.

"The security guards at the main gate first did not allow us to enter. But after a lot of requests they allowed us in and we took my husband inside on a gurney [kept for carrying food for patients]. We waited in front of emergency for a long time with my husband struggling in pain. But no doctor or nurse turned up to treat my husband.

"As we were looking for help, some hospital staffers came and told us to take the

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Faster increase in new cases

WHO says Bangladesh is unlike other Asian countries; record 1,617 new cases, 16 deaths reported

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Bangladesh is now seeing a faster rise in Covid-19 cases compared to some other Asian countries, with the number doubling every five days, said the World Health Organization.

The number of positive cases has shot up as the government has ramped up testing.

The Directorate General of Health Services in its daily briefing yesterday said that Covid-19 positive cases surged to a record 1,617 in a single day with 16 new deaths.

A total of 10,207 tests were carried out at 43 labs in 24 hours since Tuesday morning, said Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS.

Of the 16 dead, seven were from Dhaka, five from Chattogram, one each from Sylhet and Rangpur division.

The death toll now stands at 386.

Bangladesh reported its first confirmed Covid-19 case on March 8 and crossed 100 cases on April 9. It then exceeded 200 cases in two days, data shows.

"As of May 18, the cases doubled every five days," said the latest situation report by WHO.

The increase in the number of cases is higher in India than in Bangladesh. It is, however, lower in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka than in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, government officials and experts fear further spread of the infection in the coastal areas due to difficulties in maintaining social distance inside the cyclone shelters.

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BUSINESS

ROLLING BUDGET CAN GIVE GOVT MORE LEEWAY TO FIGHT PANDEMIC

In these extraordinarily uncertain times, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal could consider adopting a rolling budgeting exercise, which allows accommodation to unexpected changes and circumstances.

To begin the process, the government can articulate the most pressing expenditure needs for the first six months and consider financing options.

STORY ON B2

PANDEMIC WILL CHANGE THE AVIATION INDUSTRY FOREVER B2

TK 10,085 CR NEEDED PER MONTH TO SUPPORT POOR, NEW POOR B1

BANGLADESH EYES FDI BOOM AS NATIONS RELOCATING FACTORIES B1

FIVE MORE PORTS OF CALL NOW FOR INDO-BANGLADESH TRADE B1

MARICO'S PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION MARCH CONTINUES B1

NEW DEADLINE FOR SETTING UP SALES REGISTERS WOULD BE IN BUDGET SPEECH B1



A man walking while holding his newborn after crossing the Postogola bridge. After police on Monday tightened checks in the area to prevent people from leaving or entering the capital, many have been walking across the bridge. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Gono University lead virology scientist Prof Dr Bijon Kumar Sil and his team have been agonisingly waiting for the approval of their rapid testing kits that they proudly announced can detect coronavirus within five minutes. Dr Sil and his team, and probably the country are waiting for the low-priced kits to pass the final test. The scientist from Nature usually avoids public attention but gave consent to an interview by Golam Mortoza of The Daily Star. Here is an excerpt of the conversation.

Rapid, low-cost kit awaits nod

Prof Bijon Kumar Sil, the brains behind it, explains why such kits are very important for us



The Daily Star (TDS): Tell us about the current status of your kit.

Bijon Kumar Sil (BKS): We have done our part regarding the 'G Rapid Dot Blot' kit that we invented for detecting coronavirus. Now the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) is conducting tests to have an assessment about the effectiveness of the kit. We have provided 400 kits to BSMMU for the trial and are expecting that they are also getting good results like we did.

TDS: You were confident from the very beginning that your kit would be a success. What makes you so confident?

BKS: We have developed a kit which is capable of doing both antigen and antibody tests. And if you can conduct both the tests, you will get the correct result in

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