

Amphan slams into the coast

FROM PAGE 1
The country never saw evacuation of this scale during any natural disaster, mentioned Enamur.

The districts near the Sundarbans -- Sathkira, Bagerhat and Khulna -- could be affected badly by the cyclone," the minister added.

Amphan, formed in the Bay of Bengal on Saturday, turned into a super cyclone within just 18 hours on Monday. But it gradually weakened and became an extremely severe cyclone.

Yet, it made landfall with a wind speed of 160 kmph and caused tidal surges up to nine feet in some coastal areas. Hundreds of villages were inundated in Bhola, Patuakhali, Barguna, Khulna, Bagerhat and Sathkira. And tidal surges battered the char areas in Barguna, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barishal and Laxmipur.

Almost all the coastal districts experienced rain and strong wind since early yesterday due to the influence of Amphan. It started raining heavily in the evening, reported our correspondents from different districts.

Dhaka and its adjacent districts also experienced gusty wind and rain since yesterday afternoon.

Many low-lying areas of Barishal, Chattogram and Khulna went under water due to tidal surges. In some areas, onrushing water breached protection embankments.

Barishal Divisional Commissioner Mohammad Yamin Chowdhury said scores of low-lying areas in the district went under three to four-foot-deep water.

The areas include Dhal Char, Char Nijam and Char Kalatali of Bhola; several villages of Rangabali and Galachipa upazilas of Patuakhali; and Majhir Char of Pirojpur.

The Meghna, Bhola, Baleshwar, Bishkhali and Paira rivers were flowing above the danger mark at several points in Patuakhali, Barguna and Bagerhat, said Water Development Board officials.

"Some areas in Rangabali and Galachipa upazilas got flooded due to overflow of rivers," said Md Hasanuzzaman, executive engineer at the WDB Patuakhali Circle.

Different areas in Dacope and Koira upazilas of Khulna were also flooded as Rupsha, Shibshar and Pashur rivers were flowing above the danger level.

Onrushing water overflowed the protection embankment in Dakhin Betkashi of Koira, said locals many of whom were seen putting sandbags on the embankment.

"We don't think it will work," said Harendranath Sarkar, Ward-9 member of Koira Sadar union.

Our correspondents in Khulna and Barishal divisions reported that people in the districts were experiencing

power cuts and disruption of mobile network since yesterday evening.

THE DEATHS

Shah Alam, the leader of a team of Red Crescent volunteers, drowned as a boat capsized in a canal in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila yesterday morning.

The body of the 40-year-old man was found around 6:00pm, said Asaduzzaman, assistant director of Kalapara Cyclone Preparedness Programme.

In the same district, a five-year-old boy was killed as a tree branch fell on him while he was on his way to a cyclone centre.

The victim was identified as Rashed, son of Shah Alam from Galachipa upazila, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shah Md Rafiqul Islam.

In Bhola, an elderly man was killed in a similar way in Charfashion in the afternoon.

A tree fell on Siddikur Rahman, 70, as he stepped out of his house. He died on the spot, said Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of Bhola.

Besides, 50-year-old Shahajah Molla, a farmer from Pirojpur, was killed in a mudslide during the cyclone. Another elderly person died on the way to a cyclone shelter in Barguna early yesterday.

NO ELECTRICITY

Nearly 50 lakh subscribers of Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) in a dozen districts were left without electricity due to the cyclone, said BREB officials.

The districts include Khulna, Bagerhat, Sathkira, Barishal, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Laxmipur, Jashore, Barguna and Noakhali.

Many of the subscribers had no electricity since yesterday evening, BREB Chairman Major General Moin Uddin (Retd) told The Daily Star around 9:30pm.

Moreover, around three lakh customers of West Zone Power Distribution Company in Barishal Division were left without electricity, said its Executive Engineer Amul Kumar Sarkar.

CTG, MONGLA PORTS

Great danger signal 9 was hoisted at the Chattogram port due to Amphan, said Md Omar Faruk, secretary at Chattogram Port Authority.

Loading and unloading of goods at jetties as well as lighterage of goods from big vessels at the outer anchorage had been suspended since Monday evening. Delivery of goods was also suspended yesterday evening.

All 19 vessels from the berths and more than 50 vessels from the outer anchorage were sent to the deep sea by yesterday noon, said the port secretary.

At the Mongla port, 11 foreign ships were moved to safe locations away from the port, said Harbourmaster Sheikh Fakhrudin.



Policemen charge truncheons on women garment workers who blockaded the Dhaka-Mawa highway demanding arrears. Inset, police also fired tear gas canisters to open the road to traffic after the workers, who claim to be of Civic Apparel Ltd, kept the road blocked for several hours in Postogola area of the capital yesterday morning. Related story on page 12.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rapid, low-cost kit awaits nod

FROM PAGE 1

almost all the tests. That may not be 100 percent correct but close to that mark. When we conducted the trial, we got 100 percent correct results. Let me give you an example for a better understanding (for both tests).

Last Sunday, a doctor's family -- father, mother and son -- contacted us. All were tested positive for Covid-19 RT-PCR tests on May 12. We tested their samples with our kits and found the son developed antibodies, and the father developed antibodies so insignificant that it is hardly traceable. The mother has not developed antibodies. But both the mother and the father have developed antigen. Had we conducted only antibody tests we could have found one Covid-19 positive case. But by doing both the antibody and antigen tests we could identify three positive cases. And this is the specialty of our kits.

TDS: Is it taking a bit longer than expected?

BKS: There are certain things that you cannot control. We are the first in the world to announce that we have developed Covid-19 detection kits. The United States and Europe followed suit. Senegal and other countries started the development after us but have already produced kits for public use. However, Senegal is conducting only antibody tests. A company in the United States has produced a kit capable of both antibody and antigen tests like ours and they have got the approval from the FDA last week. We have announced it first, but the others are already in the market and we are not suspended yesterday evening.

TDS: People are asking what happened to the Gonoshasthaya-RNA Biotech Limited kits.

BKS: We had an opportunity or possibility to present our kit to the world first. Anyway, it's now in BSMMU under trial. They need to follow a certain process and they also have their limitations. We have submitted 200 antibody kits and as many antigen kits. They have got space constraints and that's why they are not taking the whole samples. We

are hopefully getting their report next week.

TDS: Tell us about your joining at Gono University and your involvement with the development of the kits.

BKS: When I joined Gono University in February this year, the coronavirus has already spread in China where it has originated. But the whole world was yet to take it seriously. Since I have previously worked during the SARS outbreak, which is 82 percent similar to Covid-19, I told Zafrullah sir (Zafrullah Chowdhury) that these types of viruses are lethal and that I want to develop testing kits for Covid-19. He endorsed the idea immediately and we started our work.

TDS: The world did not take Covid-19 seriously in February. What were your thoughts at that time?

BKS: When the coronavirus was detected in China in December last year, I think it was an ideal time for the virus to spread. It was the time for the Chinese New Year when around 20 to 25 crore Chinese people travel from one place to another. I was suspecting that the virus would spread like wildfire across the world thanks to the introduction of budget airlines and make no mistake there is not a single country in the world where you will not find a Chinese citizen.

TDS: Is it taking a bit longer than expected?

BKS: There are certain things that you cannot control. We are the first in the world to announce that we have developed Covid-19 detection kits. The United States and Europe followed suit. Senegal and other countries started the development after us but have already produced kits for public use. However, Senegal is conducting only antibody tests. A company in the United States has produced a kit capable of both antibody and antigen tests like ours and they have got the approval from the FDA last week. We have announced it first, but the others are already in the market and we are not

TDS: People are asking what happened to the Gonoshasthaya-RNA Biotech Limited kits.

BKS: We had an opportunity or possibility to present our kit to the world first. Anyway, it's now in BSMMU under trial. They need to follow a certain process and they also have their limitations. We have submitted 200 antibody kits and as many antigen kits. They have got space constraints and that's why they are not taking the whole samples. We

are hopefully getting their report next week. These kinds of kits are very important for us now. Many people might have been infected but they can't be confirmed without a test. If our kits get approval it will take only five minutes to identify.

TDS: If approved where and how do you want to conduct tests? Do you need a lab for that or it could be done without a lab?

BKS: We are working on it. What I can say is that it is very simple to test with our kits. Anybody can do the testing and a lab is not necessary.

However, there is a certain element of risk for testing without a lab because if the test is not done carefully the person who is conducting the test might run the risk of being infected. That's why we are thinking of doing tests in labs. We can test samples outside a lab at a later stage. That's what we have planned at the moment.

TDS: Is testing samples in the lab an impediment for massive testing?

BKS: Not necessarily. A PCR testing takes two days to get results. For a lab to test 500 samples through a PCR machine, it takes 10 days. But with our kits, you can get 500 samples or more tested in a day.

TDS: You have already become popular as a research scientist. With people grappling with coronavirus pandemic, what is your advice for mass people?

BKS: Coronavirus pandemic has infected Bangladesh like the other countries in the world. We will have to face it. We should not panic and avoid thinking that we might die if we get infected. The infection trend in Bangladesh so far indicates that the damaging capability of Covid-19 here is weak. If you don't get nervous or panic after being infected, the virus will not cause you much harm. If you feel bad, run temperature or cough, drink raw tea with spice. Besides, vitamin C is most effective to protect ourselves from coronavirus. I would suggest everyone to take 500mg vitamin C every day, half in the morning and the other half at night. We must also use masks while going out.

TDS: I'm quite surprised that WHO is focusing more on coughing and sneezing. They are not talking about spitting which is a more serious vector of Covid-19 than coughing and sneezing.

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

Objects hidden

FROM PAGE 12

The items were likely hidden in the chimney because block 17 was used to house manual workers.

"It is no coincidence that a chimney was used as a hiding place in the very building where chimney sweeps were accommodated," the fund's structural consultant Johannes Hoffmeister said, according to a press release from the fund.

The objects are not expected to be on display at the exhibition, due to open in 2021, but instead have been handed over to the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum for conservation.

One million European Jews died at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which Nazi Germany set up in occupied Poland in 1940 and which became Europe's biggest death camp.

More than 100,000 others including non-Jewish Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war and anti-Nazi resistance fighters also died there.

Items scattered around the camp and its surroundings continue to turn up periodically during works.

Pandemic bites

FROM PAGE 12

And like US counterpart Donald Trump he has also promoted the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine against the virus despite studies showing it has no benefit. Brazil's health ministry yesterday recommended using chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat even mild and moderate cases of Covid-19.

CLASHES IN CHILE

Chile is also suffering from a sharp rise in cases and on Tuesday deployed soldiers on the outskirts of its locked-down capital Santiago after clashes with protesters angry about food shortages and job losses.

"People don't have work, they don't have money and they don't have food," said Monica Sepulveda, a 46-year-old unemployed security guard from El Bosque, a working class neighbourhood where residents armed with clubs and stones clashed with riot police.

Faster increase

FROM PAGE 1

AMPHAN CONCERN

Expressing fear that the risk of infection will rise among the people taking shelter at the cyclone centres, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of COAST Trust, told this correspondent that the government should not move all the people from the coastal areas at the same time.

The local administration should move only the people from high-risk areas and evacuate them 10 hours before the cyclone hits, he said, adding that this would reduce exposure to the virus.

"Early transfer means they will have to provide food to these people. Naturally, during the distribution, social distancing regulations will be violated," he added.

Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of Bholia, said they have so far moved 3.5 lakh people to about 1,104 cyclone centres.

He said they are requesting people at the cyclone centres to maintain distance, wear masks and wash hands regularly.

"It's difficult to manage such a huge number of people Officials working at the centres are also run the risk of contracting the virus."