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18 killed as Cyclone Aila lashes coast

Over 500 missing; livestock washed away; crops damaged; 19 killed in West Bengal

Star Report

Cyclone Aila hit the country's south-western coast yesterday afternoon, killing at least 18 people and washing away several thousand homes, as wind-driven tidal surge inundated vast tracts of land.

Four people in Bhola, three each in Khulna, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Laxmipur, one in Barguna and a child in Barisal died, while a few hundred thousand people were marooned in the affected areas.

Over 500 people were reported missing, mostly fishermen who were yet to return from the sea.

In the Indian state of West Bengal, at least 19 people died as Aila lashed Kolkata and five adjoining districts. The cyclone affected around one lakh people in West Bengal and paralysed normal life, reports our correspondent Pallab Bhattacharya from India.



Tidal waves batter the Patenga beach in Chittagong City yesterday destroying makeshift shops on the shore as cyclone Aila makes landfall. Scores of people were reported missing. Photo: Zobaer Hossain Sikder

Packing winds of up to 90km an hour, the storm roared into Khulna, Satkhira, Patuakhali, Bagerhat, Barisal, Barguna, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Laxmipur, Jessore and Bhola around 2:00pm yesterday.

Thousands of people were made homeless as tidal waves leaping up to 13 feet high rolled onto those coastal districts. The waves damaged river and flood-control embankments and dykes, submerging many villages in Khulna, Satkhira, Patuakhali and Barisal.

A large number of domestic animals and standing crops on farmland were lost in the surge.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzak officially confirmed five deaths in Bhola and Patuakhali.

Speaking at a hurriedly called press briefing at his ministry, he however could not give more details on casualties and losses as Bangladesh Navy and Coastguard ships could not go to the offshore islands from Chittagong due to the turbulent sea, reports UNB.

Heavy rain raised water level of rivers submerging thousands of thatched houses and shanties while strong wind uprooted trees and toppled houses. Many unions went under knee- to waist-deep water.

River communications between the capital and all southern districts remained cut off since yesterday morning. Power supply to those districts also snapped in the evening.

Ferry service between Paturia and Daulatdia was suspended around 3:00pm, while that in Mawa has already been put on hold since Sunday evening.

Local administration of districts and upazilas in the coastal belt had started evacuating people to safer places and many took shelter at cyclone shelters, schools and colleges before Aila made landfall.

The Met office has asked Mongla Port to hoist Danger Signal-7.

Bhola, Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Pirojpur, Jhalakathi, Bagerhat, Khulna, Satkhira, Jessore and their offshore islands and chars will be under this signal, read a special Met office bulletin issued in the evening.

It, however, advised Chittagong and Cox's Bazar ports to hoist Danger Signal-6.

In Dhaka and elsewhere in the country, there were strong wind and heavy rainfall since yesterday morning.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed her ministers to take necessary steps, from their respective positions, for helping the Aila affected.

At a cabinet meeting yesterday afternoon, she ordered members of the armed forces to join in the relief and rescue operations.

Our correspondent in Satkhira reports: Around one lakh people of 95 villages of Shyamnagar and Ashashuni upazilas became marooned as flood-protection embankments gave away in at least 25 places.

Over 100 people were reported missing in the district.

Flood-protection dykes on the Kabodak, Khalpetua, Madar, Chulkuri and Kalia breached and swamped a number of villages. Many villages near the Sundarbans went under water as well.

A large number of people have taken shelter at different cyclone centres, schools and madrasas.

Some rivers of the district were flowing eight to 13 feet higher than their usual levels.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Abdus Samad said a 33-member team of Bangladesh Navy has left for the cyclone-hit areas to conduct rescue operations. The team was facing difficulties due to the adverse weather.

Red Crescent has also gone in with water purifying tablets and other relief materials. The DC has allocated 10 tonnes of rice and Tk 1 lakh for immediate relief.

Our correspondent in Barisal reports: Aila snapped road and river communications in the district since Sunday night. Rivers, their estuaries and confluences became very rough.

High tides in rivers inundated many areas of the district causing considerable damage to properties. Strong wind also brought down houses and trees. The storm destroyed livestock and crops as well.

Rabbi, 7, of Char Laxmi Bardhan, drowned, said UNO of Bakerganj upazila.

In Bhola, the dead were identified as Harun, 27, and Giasuddin, 30, of Bhola Sadar, Nazim, 18, of Charfashion, Rozina, 4, of Manpura.

Crops on 25,000 acres of land were damaged, the UNO claimed.

Our staff correspondent in Khulna reports: Aila struck Khulna city and Bagerhat around 2:30pm with wind speed of up to 90kmph.

Three people died in Batiaghata and Koira upazilas while over one lakh people got marooned in the districts. Of the three dead, one was identified as Kuntal Biswas, 65, of Jileghata village of Batiaghata upazila.

Over one lakh people of Dacope and Koira upazilas in Khulna and Mongla, Sharankhola and Morrelganj upazilas of Bagerhat were moved to cyclone shelters or safe places.

Five ships were moved to the safety of the outer anchorage of Mongla Port.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Kazi Atiur Rahman of Dacope said six out of nine unions went under waist-deep water. Over 50,000 people were rendered homeless in the upazila.

Disaster control rooms have been opened up in upazilas of Khulna and Bagerhat where volunteers, officials of some non-government organisations and officials of Relief and Rehabilitation Department have been kept on standby to deal with the aftermath, said the deputy commissioners of the two districts.

Our correspondent in Patuakhali reports: Huge areas of Patuakhali and Barguna went under eight to 10 feet of

seawater.

Three people died in the storm in Patuakhali alone and another one in Barguna.

Of the dead in Patuakhali, Afzal Mollik, 60, of Bawfal upazila and two-year-old Sumaiya were identified.

Several kilometres of flood-control embankments in Golachipa, Kalapara and Patuakhali Sadar was washed away by the tidal surge.

Kuakata remained cut off from the rest of the country as three ferry terminals on Kalapara-Kuakata Highway got submerged.

In Nijhum Dwip in Hatia of Noakhali, Nazma Begum, 10, drowned and in Keringchar two other children died when a wall collapsed on them, reported private TV channel Desh TV.

The channel claimed that three, including two children, died in Chargajaria of Laxmipur.

Our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports: Twenty-one fishing trawlers went missing with 400 fishermen onboard.

Around 25-km-long embankment in Moheshkhali was damaged and about 800 shrimp enclosures were washed away in the tidal surge.

Acting Mayor of Cox's Bazar Municipality Sarwar Kamal said around 2,000 houses were flooded by the tidal waves.

Meanwhile, the ongoing HSC and equivalent examinations in Aila affected areas have been postponed.

A government handout last night said the HSC examinations scheduled for Tuesday in cyclone-affected areas would be held later on.

It said deputy commissioners of affected districts in consultation with the respective education boards would decide where examinations would not be held.

In Kolkata, incessant rain accompanied by strong wind, with speed reaching 100-120kmph, hit the metropolis and all flights at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport were suspended from 2:00pm, official sources said.

Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadeb Bhattacharya said he alerted the Indian army while the Border Security Force and police have begun rescue operations in the Sundarbans and South 24 Parganas district where hundreds of mud-built houses collapsed.

The army was moving into Sandeshkhali and Hingalganj in North 24 Parganas and at Sagar Dwip, Gosaba and Patharpratima in South 24 Parganas.