

Are We Prepared Enough to Face the Upcoming Cyclone Season?



Niaz Md. Farhat
Rahman

Various kinds of calamities, both natural or man-made, are occurring around us. The frequency of these incidents has made disasters a normal part of our daily lives. However, we ignore these issues until they affect our personal lives. But natural disasters, particularly cyclones, are a terrible reality now for those who live in the coastal areas of Bangladesh.

The rise in average temperature is caused by climate change. According to recent research, Bangladesh's average temperature rose by almost 1.24 degrees Celsius between 1976 and 2019. The changed nature of summer is also an indicator of climate change. It was previously believed that April was the country's hottest month. However, as the summer season gets longer, it is consistently seen that heat waves are lasting even during the rainy season. The average temperature of Bangladesh has risen significantly over the last three decades in comparison to the preceding three decades.

Another major factor contributing to this crisis is irregular rainfall. There was hardly any rain this winter. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) of the government states that rainfall is declining during the winter season beginning from December to February and the pre-monsoon season from March to May. However, it is quite rare that the amount of rainfall has been more than usual during the monsoon season from June to September and after the monsoon period from October to November.

Regarding climate change risks, Bangladesh ranks among the top ten nations in the world, according to the World Climate Risk Index. NAP data shows that the frequency of fifteen kinds of disasters in the country will increase in the coming years. In addition to climatic risks, the disasters include irregular rainfall, sea level rise, river flooding, drought, river erosion, flash floods, urban flooding, cyclones, salinity increase, intense heat waves, severe cold, lightning, landslides, sea surface temperature increase, and acidity. So, as the cyclone season is approaching, the question remains how prepared are we to handle it?

A cyclone is formed after the formation

of low pressure in the Bay of Bengal as a result of air turbulence and the wind's high rotational speed. In Bangladesh, cyclones often form between March and July and between September and December. Of these, May and November witness the most devastating storms.

A total of 42 cyclones have made land-fall in Bangladesh in the last 55 years, according to data on cyclones collected from multiple sources between 1970 and 2024. An analysis of cyclone statistics reveals that there were 21 cyclones with an average maximum wind speed of 138 km/h during the 30 years from 1970 to 1999 and 22 storms with an average maximum wind speed of 141 km/h during the most recent 25 years from 2000 to 2024. These figures make it quite evident that cyclones' frequency and intensity have increased over time. Specifically, 2023 has seen the highest number of cyclones (four) and the number is higher than the previous years.

Since the independence, Bangladesh has faced several devastating cyclones, which have had a huge impact on people's lives and property as well as the economy. The 1971 cyclone hit the Chattogram and Sundarbans regions, causing high tides and flooding of low-lying areas. Almost six hundred people lost their lives due to the 1974 cyclone in Khulna, and the Bhola cyclone in 1975 also caused huge damage. More than 11,000 people lost their lives in 1985 when a powerful storm struck Chattogram, Noakhali, and Cox's Bazar with a speed of 154 km/h. In 1988, a severe cyclone hit the Sundarbans at a speed of 162 km/h, creating a tidal wave of up to four and a half metres, killing around 5,708 people. In the country's history, an estimated 138,000 people were killed by the most devastating cyclone, which hit the Chattogram region in 1991 with the wind speed of 235 km/h. It caused damage worth more than \$1.5 billion.

Every cyclone paints a horrifying picture of disaster. So, here comes the question -- are we taking lessons from past experiences into account? Each year, we witness cyclones causing major damage to our economy, environment, and public life. Our failure to take proper measures will worsen the extent of the damage in the future.

But are we prepared enough? Cyclones in particular are one of the biggest threats to the country's coastal population. Besides, the blow of the cyclone on the country's agriculture is so widespread that it can cause profound damage to food security, agricultural production, farmers' livelihoods, and economic stability.

However, the world has praised Bangladesh's efforts to address climate change and natural calamities to achieve social safety targets, including poverty alleviation. But the world bears more of the blame for climate change than we do. To save less developed nations like ours, rich nations must step forward in this regard. Similarly, the government should start taking necessary preparations soon before the beginning of the cyclone season to safeguard people's lives and property.

The writer is Principal Scientific Officer (PSO), Agricultural Statistics Division, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRRI).
Email: niaz.sust@gmail.com

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