

'Super Cyclone' and Coronavirus: Mega Disasters 'Roll Into One' Says GFA World

As Cyclone Amphan slams South Asia, relief efforts prepare to launch

TOOWOOMBA, QLD -- One of America's biggest mission agencies was gearing up today to respond to a 'super cyclone' in South Asia -- a region also battling a coronavirus surge that's created a health and hunger crisis.

Cyclone Amphan -- a Category 2 hurricane-strength storm with winds over 160 kilometres per hour -- slammed into the densely populated Bay of Bengal delta region with devastating force on Wednesday, causing widespread fear and storm surges up to 5 metres.

"The severity of the cyclone and rains is unimaginable," said a church leader working alongside the Australian-based mission agency GFA World, www.gfaau.org. "All our networks seem to have stopped."

Another church leader in hard-hit West Bengal, India, said a river embankment had collapsed and the locals -- mostly fishermen and their families -- were fleeing for their lives and taking refuge in schools.

"Coronavirus has already paralyzed the region, and this disaster just makes the whole situation worse," said GFA founder Dr. K.P. Yohannan. "These are mega-disasters rolling into one -- and the result could be catastrophic."

GFA World is preparing to deploy its 'Servant Boat' team to the Sundarbans -- a cluster of dozens of islands in the cyclone's direct path, where 4.5 million villagers live in mud houses amid extreme poverty. The islands straddle the border of India and Bangladesh.

The team -- that has been stockpiling vital supplies -- is on standby to rescue stranded villagers, provide spiritual support to suffering families, and deliver aid, working with local governments to coordinate relief.

In 1991, a super cyclone killed more than 130,000 in Bangladesh.

Cyclone Amphan comes as India and Bangladesh reported a spike in new coronavirus cases after lockdown rules were relaxed. India, with more than 100,000 cases, is now seeing more than 4,000 new cases every day. Bangladesh has also reported a sharp rise.

7 Million Evacuated

By Tuesday, seven million people had been evacuated from the monster cyclone's path -- but thousands of families living in makeshift homes are still in the danger zone, as storm surges threaten to bring rapid-rising floods.

"Can you imagine mothers carrying their tiny babies, climbing trees as high as they can climb... to take those little babies and tie them up on the top of the trees," Yohannan said in a video message. "All these mothers want is to somehow save their children."

People in the region are "praying desperately together" as GFA World workers serve as frontline responders. GFA has launched a website to track cyclone relief efforts at www.gfaau.org/press/cyclone

"God is able to tell even the winds and the waves to be still," said Yohannan, whose faith-based organization helps the poorest of the poor, including children, families, and widows on one of the islands known as Widows Island.

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GFA World, www.gfaau.org is a leading faith-based mission agency, helping national workers bring vital assistance and spiritual hope to millions, especially to those who have yet to hear about the love of God. In GFA World's latest yearly report, this included more than 70,000 sponsored children, free medical camps conducted in more than 1,200 villages and remote communities, over 4,700 clean water wells drilled, over 11,400 water filters installed, income-generating Christmas gifts for more than 240,000 needy families, and spiritual teaching available in 110 languages in 14 nations through radio ministry. For all the latest news, visit our Press Room at <https://press.gfa.org/news>.

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