

# Cyclone Amphan (India): People of Bengal rely on themselves

Monday 25 May 2020, by [CHANDA Aratrika](#), [No Borders News](#) (Date first published: 24 May 2020).

**As of May 24, India is reporting 131,868 coronavirus infections and 3,867 Covid-19 deaths. The pandemic has thus far hit Maharashtra state on the west coast the hardest, including the city of Mumbai with nearly 1,000 [confirmed] Covid-19 deaths [1]. Prime Minister Narandra Modi initially won high marks from some quarters for ordering a relatively immediate lockdown, but the virus now appears to be on an upward trajectory in one of the most unequal societies in the world.**

**Compounding this crisis, cyclone Amphan [2], the largest storm to hit Bay of Bengal on India's west coast in 100 years, has left approximately 100 people dead after making landfall late last week.**

Hundreds of thousands are homeless, without power, and lacking basic necessities, leading some residents to protest the slow government response [3]. Damage is extensive in Kolkata (formerly spelled Calcutta) and even worse in 24 Parganas (North and South) where health and sanitation infrastructure are now in peril and where hastily organized emergency shelters may provide vectors by which the coronavirus can spread.

In the absence of well-coordinated state support, many residents have turned to mutual aid in support of their families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. No Borders News spoke to Aratrika Chanda, a recent graduate from the National College of Ireland in Dublin where she is coordinating a fundraiser to provide direct aid to her home town of Kolkata. If you are in a position to do so, please donate to Amphan Disaster Response.

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## **No Borders News: What have you heard from your family in Kolkata? Are they safe?**

Aratrika Chanda: My mother lives in Kolkata. I couldn't reach her for more than 36 hours because Kolkata is cut off from the rest of the world. I was really very nervous and I didn't know what to expect next. Our house is submerged but she has not received any support from the government. She's had to manage with her own funds. So when I woke up this morning and got a call saying my mother is doing ok, I decided, that's it, I have to do something. I can't imagine what people on the ground there now are feeling.

## **NBN: Can you describe the storm and the damage it did?**

AC: Amphan's winds hit 185 kph, or about 120 mph. So it was very destructive and has left at least 90,000 people homeless and many more without power and it will take at least a month to restore. Unfortunately, some people have been electrocuted by downed powerlines in the canals. It's

devastating for the common people who live in mud houses or brick houses. They have gone through the worst of it.

**NBN: People have begun to protest due to the government's slow response.**

AC: People in Kolkata are vocal and they know about their rights. Whenever something is not right, they raise their voices. It's only ethical, it's only moral because if the government or the opposition or anyone who is in power is not answerable to the people they are elected by, then that's not a government really. They should protest.

**NBN: Can you explain how the Covid-19 crisis will impact relief and recovery efforts?**

AC: Basically, it's a very complex situation. Because of the virus, you are not allowed to go outside. You're not allowed to meet with people in close vicinity, you're not allowed to be in the streets. But due to the cyclone, people have lost their homes and they must be outside. There is no point telling them to stay in their homes! People will have to fend for themselves and look after each other and this will force them to come in contact with each other. So it's a double-sided problem.

**NBN: How has Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded?**

AC: Well, I'll just state some facts. When the Covid-19 crisis began, he responded within 72 hours and that is very important for the common people. But two days after Amphan hit, he had still not responded. So I am not saying that he can or he cannot do this, but judging from the response metrics, we can only assume the people are going to have to fend for themselves. We have to look after ourselves. That's the message I'm getting. Since there is no prompt response from the government or its agencies, we will have to do a basic grassroots response.

**NBN: So people are relying on mutual aid and you decided to launch a fundraiser. Why did you decide to act?**

AC: It was pretty evident that help was not being provided by the government at the moment it was needed so people had to fend for themselves, especially during the first three days. The money that I'm trying to raise is about 10,000 euros. I'm just an individual and that seemed like an amount that could help.

Frankly speaking, I have been through this before. I remember the 1999 cyclone that hit Orissa (today known as Odisha) when I was enrolled in school as a child. The cyclone destroyed everything when I was a fourth standard (grade) student. So when my teachers send me pictures of what it looks like today, I can say that it is the same as in 1999. Then, I was out of school for six months I had to move away from Orissa to Kolkata to re-enroll in school. So this hit me hard.

I'm actually a very shy person and I would never think of starting a movement or a fundraiser in a million years. But this thing was so provocative that I couldn't stop myself because I've been through it personally and I know how it feels. I know what it is to go for months and months waiting for people to respond or to bring aid. When I went back home to Orissa as a child, I remember seeing people living on their rooftops and in school buildings and how dead bodies were still all over the place. That's why I had to do this. I was hoping to go back home in June, but now I'm stuck until at least November because of the situation. So I am just doing what I can and I appreciate anything your readers can do to help.

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## **P.S.**

- No Borders on May 24, 2020

<https://nobordersnews.org/2020/05/24/aratrika-chandu-people-of-bengal-rely-on-themselves-after-cyclone-amphan/>

- Please donate to Amphan Disaster Response.:

<https://www.facebook.com/donate/604098196855393/3022758391145503/>

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/covid-19-2-608-new-coronavirus-cases-in-maharashtra-60-deaths-2234131>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/21/kolkata-surveys-damage-after-bearing-brunt-of-cyclone-amphan>

[3] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/cyclone-amphan-protests-across-kolkata-as-power-water-crisis-continues/articleshow/75918222.cms>