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## Survivors are hungry and desperate

Shafiq Alam

BANGLADESH SAID on Sunday the death toll from a massive cyclone has reached over 2,200, with that grim tally certain to rise as the impoverished country struggled to aid millions left homeless and hungry.

The death toll has been jumping by hundreds at a time as rescue workers fight their way to remote areas where entire villages were flattened by the fury of Cyclone Sidr, which tore through southern Bangladesh on Thursday night.

Victims in the worst-hit areas said they were helpless and in desperate need of food and water.

"I lost six of my family members in the cyclone. I am afraid that the rest three of us will die of hunger. We are without food and water for the last few days," said 55-year-old farmer Sartar Gazi in the village of Nishanbari.

"For the corpses we don't even have clothes to wrap them in for burial... we are wrapping the bodies in leaves," he said in the village, situated on the Bay of Bengal coast and smashed by a six-metre (20 foot) high tidal wave.

Abdul Zabbar, a 50-year-old teacher, said the situation in the area was now unbearable.

"There is no food and drinking water. The whole village is unlivable. Bodies are still floating in the rivers and paddy fields," he



AFP/FARJANA KHAN GODHULY

A cyclone-affected woman prepares food in front of her destroyed house in Rupsha on the south coast of Bangladesh on Sunday.

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SATTAR GAZI, farmer

said, adding the rice harvest—or four months of food — had also been washed away "And still no relief officials and rescue officials have come to our area."

Officials described the humanitarian situation in coastal districts like Barguna, 200 kilometres south of the capital

Dhaka, as the worst in decades.

"I have never seen such a catastrophe in my 20 years as a government administrator," said district official Harisprasad Pal, adding that millions were living in the open and aid was reaching only one percent of victims.

Aid efforts were being hampered by roads blocked by fallen trees. In some places elephants were used to remove the trees.

"In the remote areas it is slow-going, they are almost chopping trees as they go along," said Douglas Casson Coutts of the World Food Programme, adding that officials were working with the military to organise air drops to the most inaccessible districts. AFP

## cyclone sidr

# Was the warning sent out too late?

**Nazimuddin Shyamol**

Chittagong, November 18

A STORM is brewing between Bangladesh meteorologists and the country's sailors in the aftermath of super cyclone Sidr over whether earlier warnings could have prevented more deaths.

Nearly 2,000 people are known to have died when the cyclone struck on Thursday night, packing winds of up to 250 kmh and triggering a 5 metre storm surge.

Bangladesh adopts a 10 point storm severity signal system, with 1 being raised for even a small storm and 10 saved for all but the most severe. The international Tropical Storm Tracker uses a five point scale, with 5 being the most severe.

Alamgir Kabir, captain of St. Vincent-flagged Ashrar E Mostafa, said that they were caught off guard when Bangladesh officials raised the signal directly from 4 to 9 in a matter of hours.

"That initially confused men on merchant ships in the Bay of Bengal," he said.

Had they raised the signal gradually, he said, it would have been easier for sailors to make

preparations.

As the warning signal was raised, Chittagong Port ordered all vessels to leave their berths and move to outer anchorages.

"We were put in a mad race to get the ships out of the jetties," said Mohammad Zulfiqar, captain of Bangladeshi merchant ship Banga Bijoy

Bangladesh Meteorological Department officials defended their actions, saying the signal had been raised swiftly because the situation warranted it.

### Certain to hit

"Not all of the sea storms hit the shore," said Shah Alam, a senior meteorologist at BMD. "So we (only) raise the alarm when we are certain that it is going to hit us."

Kabir's 126-metre St. Vincent's ship was discharging cement at Chittagong port after arriving from Colombo when authorities ordered it to an off-shore anchorage.

"The ships are sent to the outer anchorage for safety when a storm comes dangerously near the coast to save ships from colliding and pounding each other or on the jetties," a port official said. Reuters