

21 of 23 major cyclones worldwide in Indian region

Twenty-one of the 23 most devastating cyclones worldwide during the last 200 years occurred in the northern Indian Ocean zone popularly known as the Indian region.

'Though the Indian region faces only five to six percent of the total number of cyclones erupt every year, the magnitude of these cyclones is very high,' said Akhilesh Gupta, scientific advisor to the science and technology ministry.

'We have found that 21 of the 23 devastating cyclones across the globe during the last two centuries occurred in the Indian region,' Gupta told IANS.

The Indian region comprises India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, the Maldives and Oman.

Gupta, a leading meteorological scientist and former director of the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, said though the number of cyclones hitting the northern Indian Ocean zone is significantly less, the fury of these natural calamities is devastating.

The 23 cyclones worldwide have been measured in terms of their casualty, he said, defining a major cyclone as one that has killed 10,000 or more people.

'Every year, nearly 85 cyclones hit countries across the world but the Indian region gets only four or five cyclones. Most of the cyclones get stimulated over the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean regions.

'But the maximum deaths are happening in the Indian region, especially in India and Bangladesh,' he added.

In November 1970, around 500,000 people lost their lives in a cyclone, considered the deadliest disaster so far. Similarly, in 1991, another cyclone devastated the country and killed nearly 140,000 people.

The November 1977 cyclone in Andhra Pradesh and the October 1999 supercyclone in Orissa left tens of thousands of people dead and rendered many more homeless.

The latest cyclone Nargis has already claimed over 34,000 lives in India's neighbouring country Myanmar and the United Nations has warned that the death toll could exceed 100,000.

Gupta, who has been studying these cyclones, said that a shallow ocean bed and a huge population in the coastal region were the primary reasons for cyclones wreaking such havoc in the Indian region.

'Besides the primary factors, the Indian region gets affected by cyclones in two different seasons - pre-monsoon (April and May) and post-monsoon (October and November). This is a unique feature of our geographic region and increases our vulnerability.

'West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh are quite prone to devastating cyclones. In Orissa, districts like Jagatsinghpur (home to the Paradeep port), Kendrapada, and Cuttack are always at

risk of major cyclones,' he said.

The scientist also said the East and West Godavari, Guntur and Krishna districts in Andhra Pradesh were very susceptible to such disasters. Parts of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are also vulnerable.

Talking about preparedness against cyclone , H.S. Brahma, additional secretary of the National Disaster Management Authority, said: 'India is already providing cyclone alerts and warnings to neighbouring countries and fresh initiatives are being considered to reduce the error margin.'

'India will deploy special aircraft that can go into the eye of the cyclone to probe, alert and assess the impact of the disaster in costal districts of India. We are putting together things for its successful implementation,' he explained.

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