

Indian expats relieved families are safe

Saman Haziq

DUBAI — With what is said to be India's strongest tropical cyclone to make landfall in 20 years, Cyclone Fani made landfall on the eastern coast of Odisha on Friday morning. With wind speed touching nearly 200kmph, wreaking havoc in the state, it crossed several districts before advancing to neighbouring West Bengal. Glued to their television sets as well as frantically checking social media and making calls to their loved ones residing in the affected areas, non-resident Indians of the UAE said they trust their government on the better preparedness this time.

Striking near the city of Puri, the equivalent of a Category 4 hurricane is expected to weaken as it moves north-northeast towards Kolkata and Bangladesh.

Speaking to *Khaleej Times*, Dubai expat Captain Saurav Mishra from Odisha said his parents as well as his in-laws were in Puri, just about half a kilometre from the beach. "The last correspondence I had with them was early morning today, when they spoke about how the strong winds had caused some damage to their house windows and that there was a power outage. I have not been able to speak to them after that as the lines are down, and since that area does not have underground wires, they have all broken and poles and trees are uprooted.

Mishra said residents of Odisha were better prepared this time as they were told about the situation in advance. "I had advised my parents to tie some heavy drums outside the house so that rain water could be stored and used later since we were expecting water and electricity to get cut. Also due to the damage, we knew prices of perishable items will skyrocket or availability will be less. So most of the people have stocked their houses with the required food in advance because the aftermath will be harsh."

Mishra said he has relatives living about 100km away from the



Scenes of destruction in the Indian state of Odisha on Friday. Though power outages and telecom disruptions delayed connections to their loved ones back home, India expats in the UAE felt that the government authorities were better prepared for the cyclone. — PTI



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Captain Saurav Mishra, Dubai resident



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Priyadarshree Panigrahi, Dubai resident



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Yogesh Bhayani, Dubai resident

area where his parents live. "I managed to contact them and they have reassured me that the damage is not as bad as it was last time, when 10,000 people lost their lives in 1999. I am not so worried because I had spoken to my parents in the morning only and they were well prepared and quite comfortable then. Also we were informed that it won't last for more than 36 hours, and it is already weakening in intensity. So hopefully, I'll be able to speak to my parents by evening or so."

Eleven districts along the Odisha

coast are on red alert, and around 900 cyclone shelters have been set up to take in evacuees. Schools were closed across the state on Thursday and Friday, while teams have been going door to door to warn people.

Two women tourists to the UAE from Odisha said they were from the handful of those who took the last few flights from Bhubaneswar airport on Thursday afternoon before it was shut down in the evening.

Speaking to *Khaleej Times* on the condition of anonymity, one of the women said: "We were lucky enough to take off at 1.50pm on Thursday

from Bhubaneswar airport to Muscat and will be coming to Dubai shortly. We had planned this trip sometime back but had no idea about the cyclone Fani coming. So when we were told about it, we were almost sure that our flight will be cancelled. However, we were lucky enough to be part of the last few passengers to fly out of Bhubaneswar. We will return after a week or so once the situation gets a bit better."

Lauding Odisha's preparedness ahead of the cyclone's landfall, Dubai resident Priyadarshree Panigrahi said: "Hats off to the pre-

paredness of the state this time that they managed to evacuate more than a million people to cyclone shelters. They have set up 5,000 kitchens to provide food to the evacuees. There is a big effort to move people and the government gave a call for zero casualty. They have done a great job in terms of arrangements. These are all learnings from the previous experience and the hope and prayers are that there won't be many casualties."

Another expat, Yogesh Bhayani, who belongs to one of the affected towns, Chandbali, said: "I spoke to

my mother a couple of hours later and she was fine. The electricity fluctuating due to strong winds, it is not too bad. I feel the government has taken proper arrangements to tackle the situation and has been able to save many lives through evacuation of people on time, raising awareness through different channels, putting disaster management team on duty. I am following electronic media and also other social sites of Odisha and have been able to stay connected with family back home over phone."

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BHUBANESWAR, KOLKATA FLIGHTS AFFECTED DUE TO FANI

All flights to and from Odisha's Bhubaneswar airport were cancelled from midnight on Thursday, while Kolkata's airport cancelled flights from 3pm local time Friday.

Emirates cancelled all flights to the affected areas on Friday while SpiceJet advised its passengers flying to and from Kolkata and Odisha to check the airline website for their flight status.

Tweeting from their official handle, local airline Vistara

stated #Importantupdate "Cyclone FANI update: Please note flight cancellations for Bhubaneswar (BBI) and Kolkata (CCU) below. We will try to operate special flights to clear backlog if required, once airports re-open."

Issuing a travel advisory, Indigo airline tweeted: "Due to Cyclone Fani, flights to/from #Kolkata have been cancelled for today (May 3, 2019/3pm onwards). You may visit website to opt for alternate

options or get a refund."

Another airline, GoAir, tweeted: "Passengers travelling to and from Bhubaneswar, Kolkata and Ranchi could be inconvenienced. We are waiving cancellation and rescheduling fees for Bhubaneswar, Kolkata and Ranchi flights to travel between May 2 to May 5. Flights must be re-booked within seven days of scheduled departure. Customers may contact our airport ticketing offices for more details."

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