

International

Super cyclone Yasa hits Fiji bringing floods, landslides

Govt warns over 850,000 Fijians are in the direct path of the cyclone

SUVA: Super cyclone Yasa slammed into Fiji's second-largest island yesterday, tearing roofs off buildings as it triggered flash floods and landslides in the Pacific island nation. After days of dire warnings about widespread destruction, Fiji's Met service said the top-of-the-scale Category Five storm made landfall on Vanua Levu late yesterday packing winds gusts of up to 345 kilometers an hour (210 miles an hour). It said the cyclone, one of the most powerful ever recorded in the South Pacific, would be accompanied by monster waves exceeding 10 meters (33 feet). Yasa, which is expected to move out to sea early today, landed in the sparsely populated Bau province. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties but social media posts showed flooded villages and corrugated sheeting blown off homes.



SUVA: A Fijian family takes refuge in a temporary shelter from the strong damaging winds in the capital city of Suva yesterday. — AFP

But Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama earlier warned the storm was so big that its impact was likely to be felt across the entire country. He feared destruction from Yasa would be worse than a cyclone four years ago that killed dozens. "Over 850,000 Fijians are in the direct path of the cyclone—more than 95 percent of our population," he said.

"Everywhere in Fiji, we can expect the rains will get worse, the winds will become more destructive. "In low-lying areas, we anticipate flash flooding and severe coastal inundation, including waves up to 10 meters (33 feet) in height." He said Yasa "could easily surpass" the de-

Japan man probed over insults tied to Netflix star's suicide

TOKYO: Japanese police said yesterday they have referred a man to prosecutors over online abuse he directed at Hana Kimura, a reality television star who took her own life earlier this year. Tokyo Metropolitan Police referred the suspect in his 20s to prosecutors for further investigation after the May death of Kimura, a cast member on Netflix's internationally popular "Terrace House".

The man has not been arrested and his identity will not be disclosed until prosecutors decide whether to indict him on charges of public insult, a police spokesman said. "The suspect... in May posted messages on a social media account of the victim, including 'You have such an awful personality. Is your life worth living?' and 'Hey, hey. When will you die?'" the spokesman said.

He "posted these insults for many random individuals to view and

struction wrought by Cyclone Winston in February 2016, which killed 44 people and destroyed tens of thousands of homes.

The Fijian leader, a long-time campaigner for climate action, blamed global warming for such super storms, which were once rare but have become relatively common. "As the world is getting warmer, these storms are getting stronger," he said. "Every one of us must treat these climate-fuelled catastrophes with deadly seriousness."

Lessons learned

Fiji has opened evacuation centers and people living near the coast have been advised to flee to higher ground. Housing in Fiji's villages is largely made from timber and corrugated iron, making them vulnerable to high winds. Sheltering in schools, church halls and even shipping containers offers better protection but runs the risk of health issues if people stay longer than a few days.

All schools and public transport were closed, with non-essential public servants told to stay home and a curfew in place for last night. Authorities also declared a state of natural disaster for the next 30 days, which gives sweeping powers to emergency services. "We don't want anybody losing their lives out there," assistant police commissioner Abdul Khan said. "We will be here to protect you. Please take this seriously and let us prepare for a worst-case scenario." New Zealand-based meteorological service Weatherwatch said Yasa was of capable of cutting a swathe of destruction 300 kilometers wide. "This storm has the ability to swamp entire islands, inundate entire coastal communities, wipe some small islands off the map entirely," Weatherwatch managing director Philip Duncan said.

Save the Children said lessons had been learned from Winston in 2016 and Fijians were taking cyclone preparation seriously. "We've seen people stocking up on essential food items and supplies," the aid agency's Fiji chief Shairana Ali said. "People are stocking up on water because there is a warning from the Fiji Water Authority that people will not have proper water supply for at least 10 days."

Fiji's borders remain closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, which Ali said could present a challenge for international relief efforts. Aid agencies have pre-positioned supplies across the country in anticipation of a major disaster during cyclone season, which runs until May next year. The most recent Category Five storm to hit Fiji was Cyclone Harold, which killed 31 people as it tore through the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga in April this year. — AFP

therefore he publicly insulted" Kimura, the spokesman added. Kimura, a confident pink-haired professional wrestler, was a fan favorite on "Terrace House", in which six young people share a home while looking for love. But she was targeted by a torrent of abuse online, reportedly including comments such as "everyone will be happy if you're gone".

The television show was cancelled after Kimura's death, which also prompted Japanese ministers and lawmakers to do more to tackle cyberbullying. In a statement reported by Japanese media, Kimura's mother Kyoko welcomed news that the man had been referred to prosecutors. "I pray this will deter people from slandering others so that fewer people will face this kind of hardship," she said. She also asked that those involved in cyberbullying her daughter not be publicly identified or attacked. "Hana would not have wanted to see a tragic chain reaction which turns the perpetrator into the next 'victim'," Kyodo news agency quoted her as saying.

Kimura's suicide made international headlines and brought renewed social attention to the problem of cyberbullying in Japan and other countries. In South Korea, for example, the deaths of K-pop stars have prompted calls for strong punishment for abusive online comments. And a huge online campaign against cyberbullying, using the hashtag #BeKind, took off after the suicide in February of Caroline Flack, who hosted British reality show "Love Island". —AFP

Eight HK activists charged over security law protest

HONG KONG: Eight prominent Hong Kong democracy activists were charged yesterday with taking part in an "illegal assembly" the day after Beijing imposed its broad security law, bolstering an already sweeping crackdown on dissent. Those charged included veteran activist "Long Hair" Leung Kwok-hung, the former chief of Hong Kong's Democratic Party Wu Chi-wai, ex-legislator Eddie Chu and Figo Chan, the organizer of an annual July 1 rally marking the British handover of the city to China in 1997.

Both Chan and Leung chanted slogans inside the court after the charges were read out, an AFP reporter said. Chan shouted "Release all political prisoners" while Leung chanted "Peaceful assembly is not a crime. Shame on political persecution."

The group, who were later bailed and ordered to surrender their passports, have been hit with various "unlawful assembly" charges—namely organizing, inciting or taking part in an illegal gathering. The charges stem from protests that broke out on July 1 this year. The date has traditionally witnessed large pro-democracy protests in a city where millions have taken to the streets in recent years.

During months of protests that swept the city in 2019, the legislature was stormed on handover day by crowds in an unprecedented challenge to Beijing's rule. The day before this year's handover anniversary Beijing enacted its draconian national security law, bypassing the legislature and keeping its contents secret until the moment it was imposed.

The law enhanced Beijing's control over the city, outlawed certain political views and deepened the crackdown against democracy supporters. Tens of thousands defied the law and hit the streets that day in protests that were swiftly broken up by riot police.—AFP



HONG KONG: Former lawmaker Leung Kwok-hung (left), also known as 'Long Hair', convener of civil human rights front Figo Chan (center left), former lawmaker Eddie Chu (center right) and district councillor Tsang Kin-shing (right) arrive at West Kowloon court yesterday to face charges of illegal assembly for a protest on July 1 this year. — AFP