

# PREPAREDNESS PAYS OFF: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON CYCLONE BIPARJOY

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A potent cyclonic storm, Biparjoy, [swept through Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan](#) last week and while it did cause noticeable destruction to the infrastructure, scores of injuries and cattle deaths, [there have been only two reported casualties](#). The India Meteorological Department began issuing its [first reports on the cyclone's trajectory](#) as early as June 8, and by June 11, the agency first [indicated that the storm would not bypass India](#), as previously estimated, but would likely sharply swing towards coastal Saurashtra, Gujarat. The storm was also categorised as falling in the 'very severe' category — average wind speeds of over 115 kmph. The four days of lead time and an estimate of its strength gave enough time for district authorities in Gujarat to begin evacuating people — nearly 1,00,000 people in the coastal regions of the States were moved to shelters and close to 30 central and State disaster relief teams were kept ready. The railways cancelled several trains and fishermen too received advance warnings of the cyclone's impact, that kept them away from the sea.

There were power outages in 1,092 villages, about 5,120 electricity poles were knocked down and an estimated 186 transformers and 2,502 feeders were damaged in the Saurashtra-Kutch region. While shops and establishments have reportedly re-opened, a full return to normalcy is still awaited. Experience from recent years shows that cyclones, whether in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea, and their [expected impact can be precisely gauged](#) only 36-60 hours ahead. While a greater lead time should in theory mean more time for preparation, the nature of coastal infrastructure, inefficient communication networks and livelihood patterns, combined with the natural fury that cyclones bring about, mean that there are limits to precautionary measures. A cyclone in 1998, that struck Gujarat, reportedly killed nearly 3,000 people, and it can be safely said that India has moved beyond that era. However, there are newer threats on the horizon. Several studies warn that the Arabian Sea, thanks to the effects of global warming, is likely to be the fountainhead of many more severe cyclones. Frequent evacuation cannot be implemented as a permanent policy intervention and efforts must be made to ensure that coastal-regulation-zone norms that prescribe the kind of structures permissible at specific distances from the shoreline must be strictly implemented. The dwellings of rural, coastal inhabitants must be strengthened and natural bulwarks such as mangroves at wetlands must be buttressed for improved resilience.

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