

CLOSE TO 28% OF SUNDERBANS DAMAGED IN CYCLONE AMPHAN

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

Heavy destruction: A strip of damaged land seen at Sunderbans after the cyclone receded. AP

About 28% of the Sunderbans have been damaged by Cyclone Amphan, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday at the launch of a drive for planting mangroves and trees to mark World Environment Day.

She said 1,200 sq km of the 4,263 sq km forests had been “destroyed”. The Indian Sunderbans, an area south of the Dampier Hodges line, is spread over 9,630 sq km, of which the mangrove forest accounts for 4,263 sq km.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Ravi Kanta Sinha said the damage was mostly in the Patharpratima and Kultali areas of South 24 Parganas. “The damage has been much more on the Indian side and not on the Bangladesh side,” he said.

On trees turning yellow and red after the cyclone, he said the phenomenon was mostly due to salinity. “The trees that turned yellow were not mangrove trees, it was mostly due to the dense fog of saline water. We are not sure whether the trees will survive. Maybe if the salinity of the soil comes down, some trees can survive,” he said.

Despite the massive plantation drives, it may take years to restore the mangroves, officials said. Experts say the mangroves not only reduce wind speed but also break the waves during a cyclone.

The Chief Minister said the Forest Department should be prepared to plant 3.5 crore mangrove trees by July 14, World Forest Day.

Ms. Banerjee said 16,000 trees were damaged in Kolkata. About Rs. 100 crore would be spent on plantation drives in Kolkata and adjoining areas. Trees had been lost not only on the streets but also in parks and gardens.

The Chief Minister wrote on Twitter, “We must all work together to restore the greenery in our State.”

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