

Disasters bulletin

5 March – 7 August 2007

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Extreme precipitation events dominated the period from March to August 2007 across the world. In the United Kingdom, record rainfall and widespread flooding damaged over 60,000 properties and triggered insured losses estimated at \$6 billion. Elsewhere, Pakistan suffered major floods in June, while in late July and early August, the south west monsoon brought the worst floods for more than 30 years to northern India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. An estimated 50 million people were affected.

China experienced its worst flooding since 1998, with over 450,000 homes destroyed and 200 million people affected. Initial estimates suggest that economic losses arising from the China floods will be at least \$6.9 billion. Other significant flood events occurred in Afghanistan, Argentina, Colombia, Haiti, Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

By contrast, southern and southeastern Europe sweltered in record temperatures that peaked at 49°C in Sicily. Wildfires raged across Greece,

Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Canary Islands and elsewhere. July 2007 was the worst month for wildfires ever recorded in Europe.

While the Atlantic proved to be hurricane free over the period, Super Cyclone Gonu became the first tropical cyclone to enter the Gulf of Oman, causing major damage as it did so, with economic losses estimated at \$4 billion and insured losses in hundreds of millions of dollars. Elsewhere, Tropical Storm Chantal inflicted damage on the Canadian Maritime provinces, Tropical Storm Barbara battered southeast Mexico and Typhoon Pabuk took lives in the Philippines.

Geologically, the period was reasonably quiet. Most notable was a magnitude 6.6 earthquake close to the Japanese city of Niigata, which damaged a nuclear power plant and generated economic losses of around \$12.5 billion. Other, smaller earthquakes took lives in China and Tajikistan, while volcanic activity in Colombia and Indonesia required evacuation of nearby populations.

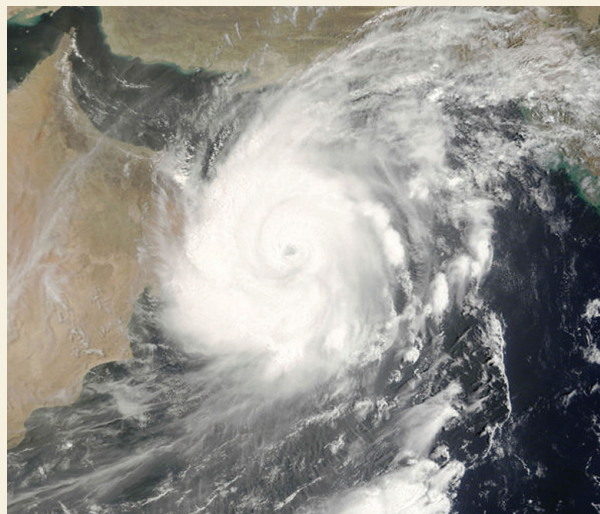
Territory: Arabian Gulf

Region: Oman

Date: 27 May – 7 June 2007

Event: Cyclone Gonu

Impact: A combination of torrential rain (up to 61cm) and a storm surge left many coastal roads in Oman flooded, while strong winds brought down power and telephone lines in the east of the country. Extensive damage occurred in the city of Sur, leading to closure of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) terminal that handles 10 million tonnes of gas annually. Damage to oil related infrastructure was minimal, but production was disrupted for three days. Ports and airports were also closed for the duration of the storm. At least 49 people were killed in Oman and 20,000 affected. In Muscat, winds of 100kmh and heavy rains left the capital city flooded and without power, with the Al Qurm commercial district particularly affected. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), waves as high as 10m damaged fishing boats and tourist hotels. Winds of 111kmh caused some building damage and power outages in the Iranian city of Chabahar, while a surge damaged many homes along the south coast of the country. Torrential rains (up to 7.4cm) led to flooding and the collapse of a dam in Nikshahr County. Economic losses are estimated at \$4 billion for Oman, and \$216



Cyclone Gonu and its track across the Arabian Sea
Courtesy NASA and National Hurricane Center



million for Iran. Figures for the UAE are not currently available. Initial insured loss estimates are in hundreds of millions of dollars, rather than billions.

Summary: Super Cyclone Gonu was the most powerful recorded in the Arabian Gulf since records began in 1945, and equalled the most powerful tropical cyclone in the storm catalogue for the northern Indian Ocean. Gonu started life on May 27th, in an area of strong convection in the Arabian Sea. By May 31st, this had spawned a tropical disturbance around 650km south of Mumbai, India, which, by June 1st was

classified as a tropical depression. A day later, the growing storm was 685km south west of Mumbai and by June 3rd, it was heading north west and intensifying at a remarkable rate, with peak 1-min sustained winds of 260kmh and gusts to 315kmh (equivalent to a Category 5 storm on the Saffir-Simpson Scale), while located about 285km off the Oman coast. On June 4th, sustained wind speeds reached 240kmh, and the storm was classified as a super cyclone. Wind speeds reduced by the 5th, but were still above 150kmh when the storm made landfall in easternmost Oman.

Gonu intensified slightly as it emerged into the Gulf of Oman, the first tropical cyclone ever to be recorded here. It diminished to a tropical storm as it headed towards Iran on June 6th.

Data sources:

Wikipedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonu>
Reuters Alertnet
www.alertnet.org

Additional sources:

NASA Earth Observatory
<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards>