

Official Cyclone Mocha death toll in Myanmar rises to 145

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Official death toll surges in Myanmar as the UN says at least 800,000 people are in need of emergency food aid and other assistance

Naipyidó, May 21 (RHC)-- At least 145 people were killed when Cyclone Mocha hit the country this week, Myanmar's ruling military has said. The impoverished western state of Rakhine bore the brunt of the storm that on Sunday tore down houses, communication towers and bridges with winds of up to 210 kilometres per hour (130 miles per hour), and triggered a storm surge that inundated the state capital Sittwe.

The military government said in a statement on Friday that as of May 18th, a total of 145 people had been found dead, including 91 in camps for internally displaced people. Earlier this week, it had said three people were killed by the storm.

Rakhine has a large population of approximately 600,000 Rohingya people, a persecuted, mostly-Muslim minority that successive governments in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar have refused to recognize. "Relief groups of respective states ... are working on rescues and rehabilitation work along with charity civil society groups," the military government said in the statement shared on its Telegram channels and on Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV).

However, the United Nations and other non-governmental organisations said relief efforts were stalled as they awaited permission from the military to deploy personnel and much-needed food, water and medical supplies to the affected regions.

At least 800,000 people are in need of emergency food aid and other assistance, the UN said. The UN's World Food Program (WFP) described "a trail of devastation" across Rakhine State.

The cyclone left "houses flattened, roads cut off by uprooted trees, hospitals and schools destroyed, and telecommunications and power lines severely disrupted," Anthea Webb, WFP's deputy regional director for Asia and the Pacific, told reporters in Geneva via video link from Bangkok.

"There are at least 800,000 people in urgent need of emergency food assistance," she said, adding that "greater needs for food, shelter, water, health and other humanitarian aid are expected to be revealed as we reach more areas."

Some 400,000 people were evacuated in Myanmar and Bangladesh before the cyclone made landfall, as authorities scrambled to avert heavy casualties from one of the strongest storms to hit the region in recent years.

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