

Cyclone Watch - Burma

(11-14 May 2008)

National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma

Irrawaddy Division

As another potentially destructive storm and accompanying heaving rains are heading for Burma's cyclone-devastated Irrawaddy Division (marked dark red on the map) and as the international community, including the United Nations, is warning of another round of calamity if inadequate relief efforts continue, the Burmese generals are reported to have reluctantly agreed to let 150 foreign aid workers from Bangladesh, China, India, and Thailand to enter the country.

Despite new estimates by the International Red Cross which now raises the cyclone death toll to between 68,833 and 127,990, the Burmese generals are continuing their uncaring attitude refusing to let Western humanitarian assistance and disaster relief experts to join the humanitarian and rescue efforts.

Monsoon has already started in Burma. Thousands in Irrawaddy Division have had their homes destroyed and many are without food, clothing, and shelter. To cope with the situation, the military regime has formed small ad hoc relief and rescue teams in Irrawaddy Division comprising members of the military-supported Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and local ward/village peace and development councils.



ad hoc relief and rescue teams in Irrawaddy Division comprising members of the military-supported Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and local ward/village peace and development councils. The teams are meant to help the victims. But our observers monitoring their activities report that in Labutta Township -- one of the worst hit areas -- very little relief and rescue efforts are underway. Most operations are only around Pyinzalu Village which happens to be an area that high ranking officers could come and inspect and is easily accessible.

(A family of cyclone victims in a makeshift "shelter" in Kungyangon - DVB Photo)

Fuel oil is very scarce in the region and these ad hoc relief teams, which are allotted fuel oil by the junta, are seen using the boats to search for timber and logs, fishing nets, and other salvageable goods of value floating around in the water.

At the time of this report relief aid has not reached any of the remote villages, big and small, which are located up the rivulets and streamlets. Dead bodies continue to float in the area and some corpses are seen on trees. Corpses and carcasses of draft animals are everywhere. No potable or clean water is available in the area as lakes and ponds in the villages are contaminated and filled with reeking human and animal remains.

Relief aid that has come to the region is mostly from local people and private donors who have been extending help despite restrictions imposed by the authorities.



Cyclone victims of Kungyangon ... people without homes, children without schools -- photograph from DVB

The local township Peace and Development Council in Labutta no longer allows donors who arrive in the region to distribute relief aid. It has also blocked entry into the area, preventing non-residents from visiting or providing assistance.

A ban is also in place prohibiting local people from searching for or burying dead bodies without the authorities.

Soldiers are seen patrolling and guarding the area but are not involved in any relief or rescue operations. The junta has authorized local Peace and Development Councils to undertake that task and may have given the councils a free hand to

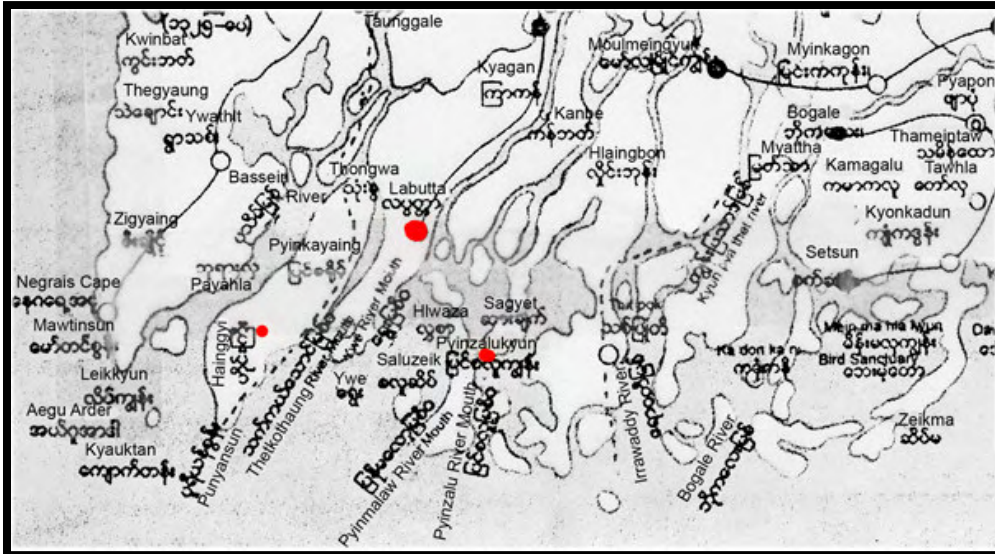
deal with emergency conditions in their localities. That may be the reason why Labutta authorities have unofficially declared a state of emergency with security measures similar to Martial Law in place in the area.

The immediate impact of the restrictions is that survivors and relatives whose family members are still missing can no longer go to other villages to look for their lost family members and relatives. But as is the usual practice in Burma, people who have the wherewithal can still look for their dead relatives to perform religious rites as long as they rent motorized boats from the authorities at a cost of around \$ 150 a day and travel around quietly.

The following table shows the situation of villages between Pyinzalu and Labutta, the approximate number of people in the villages before and after the cyclone:

SITUATION OF VILLAGES BETWEEN PYINZALU & LABUTTA

No	Village name	# of homes (Approx.)	Population before cyclone (Approx.)	Population after storm (Approx.)
1	Amat	300	2000	80
2	Bawgon	500	4000	80
3	Betut	500	4000	80
4	Daungkyigon	150	1000	25
5	Saluzeik	300	2000	85
6	Hlwaza	350	2500	50
7	Hnakhaungpauk	100	1000	15
8	Kadanlay	300	2000	50
9	Kanzeik	100	500	8
10	Kanbalagyi	30	200	3
11	Kanukama	150	1000	80
12	Kanyingon	300	2000	35
13	Kanyinkaing	300	2000	30
14	Kanyinkwin	350	2500	40
15	Khanaung	150	1000	20
16	Khayankwin	100	700	30
17	Kokko	200	1400	40
18	Kongyi	150	1000	30
19	Kwakwagyi	50	300	0
20	Kwakwalay	150	1000	25
21	Kyapinkaing	100	500	25
22	Kyagongyi	200	2000	35
23	Kyagonlay	100	700	15
24	Mayangon	50	300	0
25	Nyankwin	250	2000	40
26	Padegaw	150	1000	30
27	Pothin	100	700	50
28	Polaunggyi	300	2500	30
29	Polaunglay	200	1500	50
30	Pyinzalu	800	5000	100
31	Seiktha	100	500	13
32	Shwekyuntha	500	5000	80
33	Thaingchaung	200	1600	20
34	Thaingkyun	30	300	0
35	Thayaseik	80	600	5
36	Theinbingongyi	500	3000	80
37	Waingdaung Chaung	300	2000	80
38	Yekyawwa	200	1000	15
39	Ywathaya	100	1000	15
40	Sagyet	150	1000	80
41	Zinmingon	150	700	50



Map of Lower Delta region showing Labutta, Pyinzalu and Hainggyi Islands (in red spots)

Hainggyi

Hainggyi Island, where a naval base is located, is one of the worst hit areas by Cyclone Nargis. Visitors to the island have described the island as deserted.

Since the island is close to the sea, the inhabitants mostly earned their living through the fishery industry. Most people have now lost their sources of income since their fishing boats have been destroyed. People who drowned in the tidal surge following the cyclone were washed away and no corpses were found.

This was, however, not the case in the many villages around Hainggyi. Villages like Chaungwa, Pyinkayaing, Phontawthit, Taunglaw, Khongyi, Setzeik, and Kyaukkalut were also almost completely destroyed. Bodies can be seen in these areas.

Only about 40 houses remain on Chaungwa and Pyinkayaing and these homes and monasteries are being used as temporary shelters for the cyclone victims who number about 7,000.

The authorities have not been able to adequately feed the victims yet. Several private aid relief groups have been in the area to help but there is serious shortage of food and drinking water.

Health situation

Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) on 11 May said incidents of cholera are reported among the cyclone victims in Bogale of Irrawaddy Division and a suburb of Rangoon, South Dagon.



Happy faces welcome the arrival of relief aid from a private donor in Pyapon town -- DVB photo



(Children waiting for their share of half-a-banana -- Reuters photo

The outbreaks are attributed to unclean water and Bogale is reported to have more than 100 people suffering from cholera, said DVB citing a relief worker.

Meanwhile Mizzima reported, "there are at least 10 cholera patients in each relief center in Labutta" and lack of potable water and crowded relief centers will exacerbate the current situation in all 32 relief centers in that town.

"There is an outbreak of cholera. It is taking an epidemic form as over 2,000 victims have to share limited toilets in the relief centers. This situation will worsen," said Mizzima, quoting a doctor from Labutta providing medical attention to the storm victims.

There are over 80,000 survivors in Labutta with 2,000 to 3,000 survivors taking shelter in each relief camp.

"People are suffering from open sores and cholera. Over 100 people have cholera and that is what we have seen. They may be more", said the relief worker in Bogale.

Relief teams are still unable to reach distant villages because boats have to maneuver around corpses when traveling to nearby villages. He said Bogale is facing shortage of food and medicines.

Meanwhile in South Dagon Township, a local said, "There were eight cholera patients in the hospital yesterday and today there are six. Children in the wards are also suffering from cholera because they are consuming unclean water." More patients were also reported in Ledaunggan and another area. "All of them are children", he said.

South Dagon, he added, has not received any substantial relief aid from the authorities but local officials are setting up tents given by the international

community because they have received word that a high-ranking official would be visiting the area.

Abusing Aid

There have been reports of junta-appointed relief personnel abusing aid given by the international community as well as local donors.

In Bogale, a volunteer aid relief worker said local officials refused a private donor bringing in a truckload of relief goods. They demanded "one third" of whatever was on the truck as their share before the truck was allowed in.

In Insein, there was an incident of local authorities posing for the media with large quantities of rice and potatoes being distributed. But when the actual distribution is made, a cyclone victim is only given a potato and two cans of rice.



At the Kyongyi shelter for cyclone victims in Twante, a relief aid of three bags of rice, 1,000 eggs, two crates of tomatoes, two boxes of cigarettes, and two boxes of Thai instant noodles, Yum Yum, were donated to the cyclone victims in the name of Minister Soe Tha. After the minister left the area, two firefighters arrived at the shelter asking for half of what the minister had donated, saying that the share would go to the local authorities. The cyclone refugees refused to hand over the relief goods complaining that they did not receive any supplies donated by the minister when he came the first time round.



Red Cross tissues on sale at a Rangoon Market -- FTUB photos above

Incidents similar to the examples above are taking place everywhere. Under the situation, the Burmese generals have pledged to investigate any misuse of relief aid meant for cyclone victims and vowed to take tough action.

particularly at the grassroots, will not work because it is these very officials who are abusing relief aid.

The only problem with that promise is finding people who will lead the investigations. Official corruption, from the lower echelons up, is widespread and appointing investigating officials,

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