



A general shot shows houses destroyed by the strong winds caused by typhoon Haiyan at Tacloban, eastern island of Leyte, yesterday. Haiyan, one of the most powerful typhoons in history, is believed to have killed 1,200 people in the Philippines. Haiyan is expected to make landfall in central Vietnam early today. Inset, a satellite image of the typhoon.

PHOTO:
AFP

1,200 feared dead

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600-kilometre stretch of islands, authorities said they were unable to give a proper assessment of how many people had been killed.

Philippine Red Cross secretary general Gwendolyn Pang said her organisation estimated 1,200 people had died, while a UN official who visited Leyte described apocalyptic scenes.

"This is destruction on a massive scale. There are cars thrown like tumbleweed and the streets are strewn with debris," said Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, the head of a UN disaster assessment coordination team.

"The last time I saw something of this scale was in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami," he said, referring to the 2004 disaster that claimed about 220,000 lives.

Stampa made his comments after arriving in Tacloban, the destroyed capital of Leyte with a population of about 220,000 people.

More than 100 bodies were littered in and around Tacloban's airport, according to the facility's manager.

AFP journalists who arrived in Tacloban on a military aircraft encountered dazed survivors wandering amid the carnage asking for water, while others sorted through what was left of their destroyed homes.

Energy Secretary Jericho Petilla reached the fishing town of Palo, about 10 kilometres from Tacloban, by helicopter and said he believed "hundreds" of people had died just in that area.

Pope Francis tweeted his support for the

typhoon victims: "I ask all of you to join me in prayer for the victims of Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda especially those in the beloved islands of the Philippines."

Meanwhile, the military, government relief workers and non-government organisations battled to reach communities and deliver desperately needed supplies.

Fifteen thousand soldiers were in the disaster zones and helping in the rescue effort, military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Ramon Zagala told AFP.

Zagala said helicopters were flying rescuers into priority areas, while infantry units deployed across the affected areas were also proceeding on foot or in military trucks.

Philippine authorities had expressed confidence on Friday that only a few people had been killed, citing two days of intense preparation efforts led by President Benigno Aquino.

Nearly 800,000 people in danger zones had been moved to evacuation centres, while thousands of boats across the archipelago were ordered to remain secured at ports. Hundreds of flights were also cancelled.

An average of 20 major storms or typhoons, many of them deadly, batter the Philippines each year as they emerge from the Pacific Ocean.

The Philippines suffered the world's strongest storm of 2012, when Typhoon Bopha left about 2,000 people dead or missing on the southern island of Mindanao.

UN's top court to rule in Thai-Cambodia temple spat

AFP, The Hague

The UN's top court will hand down tomorrow its verdict in a dispute between Thailand and Cambodia over a flashpoint temple that threatens to reignite nationalist tensions.

The Hague-based International Court of Justice is to rule in the bitter border conflict between the two Asian neighbours, over which at least 28 people were killed in clashes in 2011.

Tens of thousands of people were displaced in the fighting over the patch of land around the 900-year-old Preah Vihear temple, leading Cambodia to ask the ICJ for an interpretation of an original 1962 ruling.

Thailand does not dispute Cambodia's ownership of the temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, but both sides claim an adjacent 4.6-square-kilometre (1.8-square-mile) patch of land.

Leaders of the two countries have appealed for calm ahead of the ruling by 17 international judges but residents on the border have been building bunkers in anticipation of renewed violence.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said Thursday he had spoken with his Thai counterpart Yingluck Shinawatra and the two agreed to accept the verdict and to maintain peace along the border.

"I would like to appeal to all armed forces who are fulfilling their duties protecting the border to remain calm, show restraint and to avoid any activities that could cause tension or clashes," he said on state television.

The verdict poses a particular challenge for the Thai government, which is already grappling with mass street demonstrations over a contro-

versial political amnesty bill.

If the ICJ rules against Thailand, the country's opposition is likely to direct public anger towards the government.

The dispute has touched a raw nerve in Bangkok, with Thai censors briefly banning a documentary film on the issue, saying it could "cause disunity among Thais and jeopardise national security".

Monday's ruling will be broadcast live on Thai national television and Yingluck is scheduled to address the nation shortly afterwards, according to government spokesman Teerat Ratanasevi.

Tensions between the two nations have calmed since mid-2011 when Yingluck, the sister of exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, became Thai prime minister.

Thaksin and Cambodia's Hun Sen are close friends.

Last year, the ICJ ruled that both countries should withdraw forces around the ancient Khmer temple, which is perched on a cliff top in Cambodia but with access much easier from the Thai side.

Access from the Cambodian side was so difficult that in the 1970s it was the last place to fall to the Khmer Rouge regime, and also the communists' last holdout in the 1990s.

Cambodia and Thailand finally pulled hundreds of soldiers from the disputed area in July 2012, replacing them with police and security guards.

But Cambodia told the ICJ earlier this year that Thailand must withdraw its security personnel from the temple so as to respect the 1962 judgement.

Five DU students hurt in police firing

DU CORRESPONDENT

Five BCL activists of Dhaka University were injured when police fired rubber bullets at a group of BCL men at the capital's Chankharpool after an altercation with them last night.

The injured were receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Two other students, including Aminul Islam, president of Shahidullah Hall unit of BCL, were beaten up by cops in a police patrol van.

Witnesses said some students of Shahidullah Hall of the DU got into an altercation with Mithu, organising secretary of Bongshal unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), while having dinner at a restaurant at Chankharpool around 11:00pm.

Being informed by fellow students, Aminul along with some of his followers went to the spot and found a group of Bongshal unit BCL men staying with police there.

All of a sudden, police opened fire on the DU students, leaving five of them injured.

Contacted, DU acting proctor Amzad Ali said police cannot open fire on students without any valid reason. He demanded the authorities punish the cops involved in the firing.

A Bongshal police official, however, claimed that they opened fire to avoid any law and order situation.

7 dead in Nigeria raid on insurgents plotting 'attacks'

AFP, Kano

Nigerian security forces staged lethal raids yesterday on suspected Boko Haram insurgents in the northern city of Kano allegedly plotting "suicide attacks" there and in the capital Abuja, the military said.

Five suspected "terrorists" and two soldiers died in gunbattles during the swoop on two addresses in Kano conducted by elite troops and domestic intelligence officers, military spokesman Captain Iweha Ikedichi said in a statement.

"Intelligence available indicates that the terrorists were in the process of finalizing plans to carry out simultaneous suicide attacks in Abuja and Kano respectively," he said.

Troops recovered a cache of arms and ammunition, he said.

Nigerian forces are waging an offensive against Boko Haram after President Goodluck Jonathan extended a state of emergency in three states in the volatile northeast in a bid to quell the Islamist group's bloody insurgency.

Kano is the stronghold of Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group that since mid-2009 has attacked Christians, Muslims, students, politicians and other groups opposed to its ambition to impose Sharia, or strict Islamic law.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and top oil producer. The northern half is mostly Muslim and the more prosperous south is predominately Christian.

Australia ends asylum boat stand-off with Indonesia

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday said it will take a boatload of asylum-seekers at the centre of a high-seas stand-off with Indonesia to its Indian Ocean outpost of Christmas Island.

Australia had requested Indonesia take the group of about 60 people who were picked up by an Australian vessel south of Java on Thursday but Indonesian officials had so far failed to agree to this.

"The Indonesian Government has advised Australian officials overnight that they are reviewing the request put forward by Australia," Immigration Minister Scott Morrison said in a statement.

"While we welcome Indonesia's review of our request, in the best interests of the safety of the passengers and crew of the rescued vessel and the Australian vessel that has been rendering assistance, earlier this morning I requested Lieutenant General (Angus) Campbell to transfer the persons rescued... to Christmas Island."

Morrison said they would then be rapidly transferred to camps on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island or the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru, in line with Australia's headline policy on asylum-seekers arriving by boat.

"They will not be resettled in Australia," he

said.

Morrison said the request that Indonesia take the asylum-seekers was consistent with the standard practice given the incident took place inside its search and rescue zone and close to its coast.

"On two recent occasions, Indonesia has agreed to these requests and facilitated an on water transfer," he said.

Australia's new Prime Minister Tony Abbott has vowed to turn asylum-seeker boats back to Indonesia -- from where many embark on the dangerous journey -- when it is safe to do so.

But Jakarta has received the policy coolly, and on Friday an official angrily rejected the idea of asylum seekers being returned to Java.

"The Indonesian government NEVER AGREED to such wishes or policies of Australia," Djoko Suyanto, co-ordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs told AFP in a text message.

"Australia already has its own 'detention centres' in Nauru and PNG. That's where the asylum seekers should be sent, NOT TO Indonesia."

The row over the would-be-refugees comes as tensions between the two countries have been under pressure following a report that Australian missions across Asia, including the one in Jakarta, were involved in a US-led spying network.

Country looks down

FROM PAGE 1

Rizvi Ahmed yesterday at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltn central office said lives and security of the opposition leaders and activists were at stake.

Rizvi, who has been staying at the office to avoid arrest, also sought cooperation from journalists, human rights activists and lawyers for the safety of the opposition men.

Meanwhile, a huge contingent of law enforcers was deployed around the BNP central office.

Police arrested nearly 100 BNP-Jamaat-Shibir activists all over the country in the 24 till 6:00am yesterday.

Border Guard Bangladesh was deployed on the streets of Dhaka around 7:00pm in the evening.

However, a fresh bout of violence marked the eve of the hartal. At least 15 vehicles were set ablaze in the capital and surrounding areas, said fire service sources.

The injured in the last 60-hour shutdown are still recovering at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Another person with burns was admitted to the DMCH yesterday evening. Mintu, 20, an office assistant, suffered 15 percent burns as hartal supporters set fire to a bus in the capital's Shahbagh around 6:00pm. The youth was immediately taken to the burn unit of DMCH.

In Jatrabari, hartal supporters set a BRTC double-decker bus on fire and exploded four home-made crude bombs around 8:45am. Police found another eight bombs at the spot, said Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station.

Pro-hartal activists set fire to a bus of Titumir Government College at Mohakhali around 11:30am, said Bhuiyan Mahbub Hasan, OC of Banani Police Station.

Students caught one miscreant when he was running away and handed him over to police. During primary interrogation, he said he had committed the offence on instructions of Mehedi, a local leader of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal associated with the BNP, the OC said.

In one of the incidents outside Dhaka, 20 vehicles and 50 shops were vandalised in Feni and Pabna, reported our correspondents. At least 10 people were injured in clashes in Feni.

Crude bombs were exploded in many districts.

The previous two spells of shutdowns since October 27 had claimed at least 18 lives and left scores injured across the country.

Among the deceased was 14-year-old Monir, who suffered burns over 95 percent of his body on Monday last when pickets set alight his father's lorry. He breathed his last on Thursday after going through excruciating pain for about three days.

Eight-year-old Sumi, who suffered critical burns on Sunday last when hartal supporters torched the bus she was travelling by, is still undergoing treatment at DMCH.

Due to the opposition's latest call of countrywide shutdown, three examinations of Junior School Certificate and Junior Dakhil Certificate had to be rescheduled.

The exams scheduled for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday will now be held on November 14, 16 and 21 respectively, announced Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at a press briefing yesterday.

On top of that, eight exams of O- and A-levels are also going to coincide with the hartal.

Gunmen attack Nato vehicles in NW Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Gunmen yesterday opened fire on two trucks carrying Nato vehicles in Pakistan's troubled northwest near the Afghan border, wounding two drivers.

The trucks came under fire in Jamrud area of Khyber, one of seven districts that make up Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt, as they crossed into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

Pakistan is a key transit route for the Nato mission in landlocked

Afghanistan.

"The two trailers were on their way to Karachi when gunmen attacked them at different locations in Jamrud and opened fire on them, wounding their drivers," a local intelligence official told AFP.

A senior local administration official, Jehangir Azam Wazir, confirmed the incident and said the attackers had fled.

No group has claimed responsibility for the latest attack but the Taliban have in the past said they carried out

such attacks to disrupt supplies for the US-led international troops fighting in Afghanistan.

Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants frequently launch attacks across northwestern Pakistan and the lawless tribal belt, which Washington has branded the most dangerous place in the world.

From November 2011 to July 2012, Pakistan shut its Afghan border to overland Nato traffic after botched US air raids that killed 24 Pakistani troops.



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