

Over 100 killed after typhoon batters Vietnam

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At least 106 people have died over the past days, after Vietnam's south-central coast was battered by Typhoon Damrey on Saturday. The typhoon was the second major storm to hit Vietnam in the past month, and the twelfth since January.

Typhoon Damrey landed on Saturday with 125 mile per hour winds. It completely destroyed weak residential infrastructure around the tourist hub, Hoi An.

Over the weekend, gale-force winds, floods and landslides damaged at least 116,000 homes, destroying 40,000 of them. Electricity poles were felled in many areas, and trees flung atop buildings and on roads. Six cargo ships capsized along with hundreds of smaller fishing boats.

Although the storm passed within 24 hours, heavy rainfall lingered for several days. The flooding has yet to cease, destroying farmlands and crucial infrastructure. Dozens of reservoirs are reportedly on the verge of overflowing, threatening impoverished villagers and farmers with further catastrophe.

At least 25 people remain missing and 197 have been reported injured. The death toll has risen sharply over recent days and is expected to continue growing. At least 30,000 people have been displaced, and four million people affected.

The death and destruction has led some to brand the typhoon the worst that has hit Vietnam in at least 18 years.

The latest storm follows Typhoon Doksuri, which struck central Vietnam in September. Despite its quick sweep through the region, at least eleven people were killed and more than 190,000 homes damaged. In August, heavy flooding and landslides in the northwestern provinces resulted in 27 deaths and over \$45 million in damages.

The Vietnam Disaster Management Authority has boasted its response to Typhoon Damrey as a success,

citing the 35,000 villagers that were evacuated safely before the typhoon and the 16,000 soldiers who are engaged in recovery efforts.

However, reports from the ground indicated that the victims of the storm were given virtually no warning, and were abandoned by the authorities for days.

In most areas, residents and tourists were given minutes to evacuate. "At first we were given 30 minutes to get out. Later it got more serious and they said we had 15 minutes," a British tourist in Hoi An told the *Sun*.

Aid has been slow to reach the most damaged areas, due to blocked roads and ineffective bureaucracy. Nguyen Thi Dung, a local vendor in Hoi An cited by Agence France-Presse said, "Our family spent some days on the second storey of the house, eating only raw instant noodles as the power was cut off." Other survivors also reported being stranded with nothing to eat, and limited supplies of fresh water.

Hoi An is a popular tourist destination and a UNESCO World Heritage site, just 30 kilometres from Danang, where the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit begins today.

Minimal structural damage was reported within central business districts of Hoi An and Danang. Both have increasingly been developed into wealthier hubs for travel and business. The surrounding rural provinces, on the other hand, have been decimated.

Residents of a number of the southern and central provinces rely on subsistence farming, low-paid rural work and fishing. Poverty rates are as high as 50 percent in some areas.

At least 250,000 hectares of farmland were destroyed by the storm, jeopardising the livelihoods of tens of thousands.

Tuoi Tre News reported on Tuesday that in the Van Ninh District of Khanh Hoa province, up to 85 percent of fishing boats had been destroyed. "Villages in Van

Ninh District now resemble a giant landfill as they are filled with debris from damaged homes and the wreckage of local fishing boats,” the article stated.

One fisherman, Huynh Tai, commented: “We rely on nature to earn our living. Now nature has taken everything from us. My house has been knocked down, my ship is broken.” Tai said he would have to leave the village to find work elsewhere.

Those affected by the latest storm face a similar crisis to the victims of Typhoon Doksuri, who were given meagre state aid, and in many cases, were reportedly forced to rely on charity.

An article in the *Conversation* in September by Chinh Luu and Jason von Meding, who have researched flood disasters in Vietnam, noted: “Rapid population growth, industrial development and agricultural expansion have all increased flood risk, especially in Vietnam’s riverine and coastal areas.”

Luu and Meding stated that, “Socially marginalised people often have to live in the most flood-prone places, sometimes as a result of forced displacement.” A number of those hit by flooding disasters this year in northwestern Vietnam have previously been forced to leave their homes to make way for vast hydropower projects.

The plight of ordinary people is a product of the rapid growth of social inequality over the past three decades, as the Vietnamese Stalinist regime has pursued a program of capitalist restoration, and has sought to transform the country into a hub of foreign investment.

According to an Oxfam report on inequality released in February, there are now 210 “super-rich” individuals in Vietnam, with a combined wealth of \$20 billion. This cohort, which accounts for around two in every million Vietnamese, controls 12 percent of national gross domestic product.

At the other end of the spectrum, millions eke out an existence below, or near the official poverty line. The Oxfam report noted that between 1992 and 2002, the income share of the poorest 40 percent of the population fell by over two percentage points, to just 17.28 of the national total.

The social divide is on display this week. While millions hit by the latest typhoon are facing destitution, the government is laying out the red carpet for dignitaries and heads of state, including billionaire US President Donald Trump, at this week’s APEC summit.

The government allocated at least \$US17 million of last year’s budget to refurbishing central Danang for the event, which will doubtless feature discussions on how to maximize global corporate profits through the stepped-up exploitation of the south-east Asian working class.



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