Typhoon Ragasa surges through southeast Asia, killing at least 28

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Between September 19 and 25, Super Typhoon Ragasa caused severe damage and loss of life in a number of Asian countries, particularly the Philippines and Taiwan, but also Hong Kong, Macau, southern China and Vietnam.

At least 28 people were killed, over 200 injured and at least 9 are still missing. Tens of thousands of other people were displaced or otherwise affected by the damage.

Typhoon Ragasa, also called Super Typhoon Nando by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), was the most intense tropical cyclone of 2025 to date. At its peak, Ragasa reached sustained wind speeds of 270 km/h (165 mph), classifying it as a Category 5 tropical cyclone on the Saffir-Simpson scale.

Ragasa initially developed in the western Pacific Ocean east of the Philippines on September 18, before rapidly intensifying over the following two days. Much of the devastation occurred between September 21 and 23. Over three days, Ragasa brought massive rain, floods and landslides to eastern Taiwan and the northern Philippine Island of Luzon.

Huge winds and waves also affected Hong Kong, injuring at least 90 people and compelling hundreds more to seek refuge in emergency temporary shelters. As Ragasa tracked toward China on September 24, it also struck the southern coast of China, resulting in evacuations of at least two million people, before making landfall near the city of Yangjiang.

The true death toll is likely to be higher than 28. Deaths and injuries resulted from a number of causes, including drowning, landslides and infrastructure collapses.

Beyond the fatalities and injuries, millions of people were impacted by Ragasa. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes, either by direct damage or evacuation orders. Millions of people suffered power outages. Almost 500,000 households in Vietnam experienced power outages, with a similar figure being reported from southern China. In northern Luzon, almost 750,000 households were hit by blackouts.

The disastrous impacts from Ragasa are in line with the predictions made by climate scientists about how these weather systems would behave in a warmer world. As reported in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report from 2022, tropical cyclones and typhoons in the Pacific are expected to become more intense under global warming. Historical data from the past half century have shown that in the southeast Asian region, typhoon rainfall levels have become more extreme, resulting in higher flood risks for urban and rural populations.

It is highly probable that the meteorological conditions that gave rise to Ragasa were a result of climate change. An initial study published on ClimaMeter concluded that the super typhoon was “an event of exceptional meteorological conditions whose characteristics can mostly be ascribed to human driven climate change.”

In the words of the study’s lead author, Davide Faranda, “greenhouse gas emissions do far more than warm the world—they make typhoons wetter, stronger, and more violent.”

Tropical cyclones and typhoons like Ragasa require warm waters to form, and the oceans are rapidly warming from climate change. 2024 saw the hottest recorded levels of global ocean temperatures, creating the conditions for more intense cyclones in subtropical regions.

The death toll from Typhoon Ragasa was a product not only of meteorological, but social and political

factors. This was most sharply expressed in Taiwan, where 16 people were killed from the bursting and overflow of the Matai'an Creek Barrier Lake. This catastrophe, accounting for over half of Ragasa's fatalities, was entirely preventable if scientific warnings had been heeded.

The barrier lake formed in July in the aftermath of landslides that were triggered by earlier typhoons. Rocks and debris formed a dam across the natural lake, blocking water and natural drainage, forming a lake that reached a size of 0.92 square kilometres by mid-September.

When the barrier lake was breached on September 22 by heavy rainfall and winds from Ragasa, 60 million tonnes of silt-laden water and debris overflowed into the Guangfu township, which has a population of 12,000. The resulting deluge had comparable force to a tsunami.

Many of the 16 people who died were elderly people trapped by water surging into their homes, with water levels reaching as high as the second floors of some houses. The breach also caused a major road bridge to collapse, resulting in vehicles being swept away or submerged, and a critical evacuation route being severed, leaving the affected towns isolated from emergency supplies.

Residents in Guangfu said they received little to no warning from authorities. Professor of Geology Chen Wen Shan reported: "Failing to evacuate residents properly is one of the factors why the disaster became so severe."

Even more damning is the total disregard of previous warnings given by scientists about the risk that this barrier lake posed to nearby communities if it were to breach. Hydrologists had warned from the dam's formation in July that it was unstable and would inevitably overflow, posing serious risks to the downstream towns.

Despite these warnings, no serious attempt was made by authorities to mitigate the barrier lake hazard. Taiwan's Ministry of Agriculture stated that its focus was on "enhanced monitoring and downstream disaster mitigation," instead of excavating the dam wall or using siphon pumping to drain out the lake.

No explanation has been provided by Taiwan's government for why appropriate measures were not taken to mitigate the hazard, beyond a vague reference to the "difficulty" of bringing equipment to the remote location.

The failure to safeguard affected towns from a preventable disaster is an indictment of the Taiwanese government, but more broadly the capitalist system as a whole. Governments the world over are systematically ignoring the scientific necessity of both reducing greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate risks, and taking basic public safety measures to protect vulnerable people from its impacts.

The devastation of Ragasa is another sharp indication that the corporate profit system is fundamentally incompatible with social needs and the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, primarily the working class and poor.