

# Disastrous “Ditwah” cyclone creates immense catastrophe, killing potentially hundreds across Sri Lanka

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More than 200 millimeters of rainfall have accompanied the terrifying “Ditwah” cyclone currently battering Sri Lanka, unleashing floods, landslides and other calamities. By the evening of November 28, the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) reported at least 69 deaths, with several others missing. Tens of thousands—possibly hundreds of thousands—have been displaced by the ensuing devastation. The disaster is widespread and the worst in living memory.

According to the Department of Meteorology, the storm originated as a low-pressure system over the southwestern Bay of Bengal and Sri Lanka on the 26th. It developed into a deep depression and intensified into Cyclone Ditwah by the 28th, making landfall in Sri Lanka. Similar storms across Southeast Asia in recent days—affecting Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand—have killed hundreds and displaced millions, creating a regional catastrophe.

Since Thursday, Kandy, the capital of the hill country, has been completely cut off, with still no access as of Saturday morning. On Friday, the cyclone hit the war-ravaged northern province.

Areas such as Hettipola, Mahadawa, Kandaketiya, Habarana, Wewessa and Lelkadura have each received over 200 millimeters of rain. The highest rainfall, 300 millimeters, was recorded in Mahakalawewa, Batticaloa. Torrential rains have saturated the highlands, destabilizing slopes and triggering landslides, while major reservoirs are nearing or exceeding capacity.

With the full extent of the disaster still unknown, the death toll and number of injured are expected to rise. The total number of missing remains unclear. As of the 28th, the DMC reported that 43,991 families across 285 divisional secretariat areas in 25 districts have been affected. Forty-two houses have been completely destroyed and another 2,810 partially damaged. Thousands of displaced people have been moved into temporary shelters, including schools and religious institutions.

Disaster conditions exist in 93 divisional secretariat divisions across 20 districts, and red evacuation alerts have been issued for 41 divisions in seven districts. The National Building Research Organization (NBRO) has issued landslide warnings

for 10 districts, including Badulla, Hambantota, Kandy, Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya and Ratnapura. The NBRO also reports that 42 of the 73 major reservoirs managed by the Irrigation Department are releasing water, inundating hundreds of downstream villages. However, this warning was useless, as people have no safe places to go, and the government had not arranged any before issuing the warnings.

Numerous rivers and reservoirs are either already overflowing or dangerously close to doing so, displacing thousands in surrounding low-lying regions.

The highest number of deaths—over 35—has been reported in Badulla district in the Central Province, which is experiencing landslides, hillside collapses and flooding. Fatalities have occurred in the divisional secretariat areas of Badulla, Welimada, Lunugala, Passara, Kandaketiya, Uva Paranagama, Soranathota and Ella.

Many residents in these areas are tea estate workers living in dilapidated line rooms that offer no protection against even moderate rain. On the 27th, a major landslide in Badulla killed 11 people, with several still missing.

The Mahaweli River overflow has devastated Mahiyanganaya Hospital, submerging its lower floor under six feet of water. Expensive equipment and millions of rupees’ worth of medicine have been destroyed. Similar reports are emerging from other areas.

One particularly tragic incident in Nawalapitiya, Central province led to the death of a grandmother, mother and a three-month-old baby when a hillside collapsed on to their home. Road blockages and the dangerous terrain have hampered rescue efforts.

In addition to landslide fatalities in the central hills, major floods in the southern and other provinces have damaged crops and infrastructure. Hundreds of videos are circulating on social media showing horrifying images of cities underwater, people stranded on rooftops, and calls for help from those trapped in submerged homes. Many are also posting appeals for information on missing loved ones.

Landslides have damaged several sections of the central railway line, prompting the suspension of all train services from

6 a.m. on the 28th. With 75 major roads in the Central, Uva and Eastern provinces rendered impassable, transportation has ground to a halt in many regions.

Expressways have also suffered significant damage, according to Road Development Authority Director General Wimal Kandanmbi. A special public holiday was declared on the 28th for all government institutions except essential services. Authorities also shut down the University of Peradeniya and the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens due to the Mahaweli River's overflow.

Warnings have been issued against fishing and naval activity due to anticipated sea waves of 2–4 meters and wind speeds of 60–70 km/h, with gusts reaching up to 80 km/h.

Electricity is disrupted all over the country. Officially, there have been over 65,000 power outages, only 26,000 of which have been restored. Hundreds of thousands of people are still without electricity. Adverse weather has made repairs extremely difficult. According to the general manager of the Ceylon Electricity Board, the island's power supply has been disrupted by 25 to 30 percent.

Flooding, landslides and power outage have also severely impacted telecommunications. Phone services have been cut for more than 24 hours in flood-affected areas such as Gampola, Nuwara Eliya, Passara, Kadugannawa and Welimada, as well as much of the Kandy district, where a emergency situation has been declared.

The chairman of the National Water Supply and Drainage Board warned that disruptions at several major pumping stations could lead to a severe shortfall in the distribution of clean drinking water.

Also on the 28th, the president deployed over 25,000 soldiers to assist with rescue operations. Ordinary people across the country are also stepping up to help victims however they can.

Yesterday President Anura Kumara Disanayake brought several services under Essential Services Regulations, such as petroleum and gas, electricity, health, irrigation and all road and railway maintenance works.

There have been calls for the immediate declaration of a draconian state of emergency by opposition parliamentarians. On the 28th, the main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) MP for Kurunegala, J.C. Alawathuwala, made the call in parliament, while MP Ravi Karunanayake of the United National Party voiced support. Former President Chandrika Kumaratunge also joined the call.

These calls are not made out of genuine concern for disaster victims, but out of fear of social upheaval. The government ministers have said that in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, prices for all essential food items may skyrocket.

Though Disanayake has not yet declared a state of emergency, he has reportedly decided to place camps for displaced people under military control, according to a report in *Lankadeepa*.

In the coming days, the prices of vegetables and essential

foods will soar, plunging an already struggling population into deeper misery. Food riots are a real and growing possibility. A preliminary estimate revealed that 600,000 acres of rice and vegetable farmland have already been destroyed.

The government has announced 1.2 billion rupees in disaster relief—an amount grossly inadequate in the face of this catastrophe. On the 27th, Disanayake ordered compensation of one million rupees for each person killed in the disaster.

The government's infrastructure is incapable of managing such a disaster, and its relief measures are woefully inadequate. One video posted on the “*Dasatha*” YouTube channel captures this anger, showing residents in the flooded Kaduruwela area denouncing the government for failing to deliver any real aid.

Like their counterparts around the world, Sri Lanka's capitalist rulers have refused to invest in the infrastructure necessary to protect lives. The current Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National Peoples Power (JVP/NPP) government's election pledges to “balance economic growth and environmental conservation” have been exposed as lies. There is no such national solution under a capitalist framework for the economic and social crisis.

Obsessed with meeting the IMF's austerity demands, the JVP/NPP spends not a cent of the tax money wrung from the people to protect human lives—let alone the environment.

That is why even moderate rainfall leads, year after year, to mass deaths and devastation from landslides and floods. The government has ravaged the environment for unregulated development, abandoned people to their fate during disasters, and made no effort to build infrastructure capable of withstanding natural calamities. There are no serious programs to relocate those living in danger zones to safe areas or to allocate the necessary funds for long-term disaster preparedness.

Global warming, driven overwhelmingly by human activity—specifically the unrestrained burning of fossil fuels by giant industries in the advanced capitalist countries—is fueling the rise of extreme weather events. Large-scale deforestation, industrial agriculture, and urbanization intensify the problem, releasing greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere.

These are not “natural” disasters in the traditional sense, but the predictable and preventable byproducts of a capitalist system driven by profit, not human need. The only solution lies in replacing this social order with a rational, socialist society committed to safeguarding life and the planet.



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