Super Typhoon Bavi leaves a trail of death and destruction in the Pacific

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At least 26 people have been reported dead in the Philippines from landslides and flooding associated with Super Typhoon Bavi, while the enormous storm forced millions to evacuate and caused widespread disruption from the US-controlled Mariana Islands to Taiwan and China.

In the Philippines, where Bavi was named Inday, the storm did not make landfall. However, its vast circulation intensified the southwest monsoon producing days of torrential rain. As of Wednesday, the Office of Civil Defense reported 26 deaths from drowning and landslides, with 14 people still missing. More than one million people were affected, about 22,000 remained in evacuation centres, and 766 houses had been destroyed.

The heaviest loss of life was on the impoverished southern island of Mindanao. Ten deaths were recorded in Sarangani, seven in Lanao del Sur, four in Davao Occidental and two in Bukidnon. These deaths occurred in areas with fragile housing on floodplains and unstable slopes, without adequate drainage, protective works or ready access to safe accommodation, meaning these deaths were not simply the inevitable product of extreme weather.

The disaster comes amid a far-reaching corruption scandal over Philippine flood-control infrastructure. At least 9,855 projects worth more than 545 billion pesos ($8.8 billion USD), undertaken since the Marcos administration took office in 2022, are under investigation. The scandal involves allegations of substandard, overpriced and non-existent works, as well as demands for political kickbacks.

While no direct connection has yet been established between projects under investigation and the communities struck by Bavi, the scandal underscores that infrastructure essential to protecting human life has been subordinated to contractors, political patronage and private enrichment.

Bavi reached Category 5 intensity near the Marianas on July 5, with sustained winds of 290 kilometres per hour. NASA reported sea-surface temperatures of about 30 degrees Celsius along its path. It was already the third tropical cyclone of 2026 to reach Category 5 strength. More than 1,000 kilometres across, Bavi retained an unusually well-preserved warm core and carried vast quantities of tropical moisture deep into China after landfall.

Taiwan escaped a direct strike but was lashed by torrential rain and powerful winds. At least 134 people were injured, mostly in falls or by flying debris. More than 14,000 residents were evacuated from areas threatened by floods and landslides, and hundreds of flights were cancelled. No deaths were reported due to effective closures, warnings and evacuations, underscoring the point that the fallout from natural disasters is heavily influenced by the resources mobilised to protect the population, as well as proper housing and infrastructure.

Bavi made landfall in China’s Zhejiang province late on July 11, after weakening to winds of about 144 kilometres per hour. More than 2.8 million people were evacuated across China. As the storm moved north, roads were submerged and vehicles swept away in Hebei and Liaoning. Forty-six rivers rose above warning levels, around 1,800 villagers were stranded in Kuancheng, and more than 260,000 people were subsequently evacuated in Liaoning. Schools and transport services were suspended across parts of the northeast.

China had barely begun recovering from Tropical Storm Maysak, the previous tropical system to strike the country little more than a week earlier. Maysak-

related flooding killed 39 people and left nine missing in Guangxi. Twenty-six died after the partial collapse of a reservoir dam in Hengzhou, east of Nanning, while about 130,000 people were evacuated across the region.

The Hengzhou dam failure and repeated inundation expose serious weaknesses in infrastructure and raise urgent questions about the protection afforded to poorer urban and rural communities as extreme rainfall intensifies.

Bavi's strongest winds struck Rota, an island of roughly 2,000 people in the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Bavi's Category 5 eye passed directly over the island. Preliminary assessments found damage to more than half its homes, businesses and government facilities. Residents initially lacked power and running water, while the mayor warned that full electricity restoration could take two to three months.

Rota is part of the same strategic island chain that Washington is transforming into a forward base for war against China. Nearby Guam hosts major air, naval and Marine facilities. Washington's planned 16-site missile-defence network to be installed there is estimated to cost about $10 billion over a decade. A 2025 US Government Accountability Office report noted that the missile sites were planned to rely primarily on their own generators because of concerns about the reliability of the local grid. It also documented ageing civilian water and wastewater systems, poor roads and growing pressure on housing and public schools.

The Northern Marianas is a neo-colonial territory which is represented in Congress by a single delegate who cannot vote on final legislation.

The broad relationship between human-induced global warming, which increases atmospheric moisture, and tropical-cyclone rainfall has been firmly established. For a world warmed by 2 degrees Celsius, assessments by the US government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) project that average near-storm rainfall rates will be about 14 percent higher, global cyclone intensities 1 to 10 percent greater, and thus a larger proportion of storms reaching Category 4 and 5 strength.

As much as 90 percent of the Pacific Ocean has been experiencing marine heat-wave conditions since January with persistence hot spots lasting for six months. There is a high probability that climate change is the major contributor to the warming along with a developing El Niño weather pattern in the regime.

Warmer waters help fuel tropical storms of a greater size and intensity. In mid-April, the Marianas were hit by Typhoon Sinlaku—another very powerful typhoon that briefly reached Category 5—and caused significant destruction.

Bavi and Maysak are warnings of the immense social consequences of the accelerating climate crisis. The technology and resources exist to provide resilient housing, modern drainage and power systems, universal early warnings and rapid evacuation. Under capitalism, however, these necessities remain subordinated to private profit, fossil-fuel interests and escalating military expenditure.