

Powerful cyclone floods homes, cuts communications in western Myanmar; at least 6 dead, 700 injured

May 14 2023, by Julhas Alam



Rescue workers remove the fallen tree after a storm in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon

Rescuers on Monday evacuated about 1,000 people trapped by seawater 3.6 meters (12 feet) deep along western Myanmar's coast after a powerful cyclone injured hundreds and cut off communications. Six deaths were reported, but the true impact was not yet clear in one of Asia's least developed countries.

Strong winds injured more than 700 of about 20,000 people who were sheltering in sturdier buildings on the highlands of Sittwe township, such as monasteries, pagodas and schools, according to a leader of the Rakhine Youths Philanthropic Association in Sittwe. He asked not to be named due to fear of reprisals from the authorities in the military-run country.

Seawater raced into more than 10 low-lying wards near the shore as Cyclone Mocha made landfall in Rakhine state Sunday afternoon, he said. Residents moved to roofs and higher floors, while the wind and storm surge prevented immediate rescue.

"After 4 p.m. yesterday, the storm weakened a bit, but the water did not fall back. Most of them sat on the roof and at the high places of their houses the whole night. The wind blew all night," the rescue group leader said.

Water was still about 1.5 meters (5 feet) high in flooded areas later Monday, but rescues were being made as the wind calmed and the sun rose in the sky. He asked civil society organizations and authorities to send aid and help evacuate residents.



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, a lamppost damaged by Cyclone Mocha lies on a street in Kyauk Phyu township, Rakhine State. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP

Six deaths were reported by Myanmar media and rescue groups. Several injuries were reported in neighboring Bangladesh, which was spared the predicted direct hit.

Mocha made landfall near Sittwe township with winds blowing up to 209 kilometers (130 miles) per hour, Myanmar's Meteorological Department said. By midday Monday, it had weakened to a tropical depression, according to the India Meteorological Department.

The State Administration Council issued disaster declarations for 17 townships in Rakhine state.

High winds crumpled cell phone towers, but in videos collected by local media before communications were lost, deep water raced through streets and wind blew off roofs.

Myanmar's military information office said the storm had damaged houses and electrical transformers in Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, and Gwa townships. It said roofs were torn off buildings on the Coco Islands, about 425 kilometers (264 miles) southwest of the country's largest city, Yangon.



Rescue workers help an elderly woman to reach a makeshift shelter after a storm in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and

Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon

Volunteers previously said shelters in Sittwe did not have enough food after more people arrived there seeking help.

Mocha largely spared the Bangladeshi city of Cox's Bazar, which initially had been in the storm's predicted path. Authorities had evacuated hundreds of thousands of people before the cyclone veered east.

A Bangladesh government official, Enamur Rahman, said the damage was still being assessed, but that about 2,000 homes had been destroyed and 10,000 others were damaged on Saint Martin's Island and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district.

He said no deaths were reported.

About a dozen people were injured on Saint Martin's Island, the Prothom Alo newspaper reported.

U.N. agencies and aid workers in Bangladesh had prepositioned tons of dry food and dozens of ambulances in the refugee camps that house more than 1 million Rohingya Muslims who fled persecution in Myanmar.



Women spend time with their children at a makeshift shelter set up for residents of coastal areas, in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Fisherman walk near the boats anchored at the coast in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar are bracing as an extremely severe cyclone starts to hit their coastal areas, and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



In this image from a video, a tree falls on an empty road as Cyclone Mocha approaches in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as the extremely severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo



In this image from a video, local people walk on a flooded street caused by heavy rain as Cyclone Mocha approaches in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as the extremely severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo



Fisherman stand under an umbrella and watch their boats at the coast in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar are bracing as an extremely severe cyclone starts to hit their coastal areas, and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Fisherman walk at the coast in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar are bracing as an extremely severe cyclone starts to hit their coastal areas, and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Women arrive at a makeshift shelter set up for residents of coastal areas, in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Fisherman take shelter under a shack near the coast in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar are bracing as an extremely severe cyclone starts to hit their coastal areas, and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Rescue workers remove the fallen tress after a storm in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



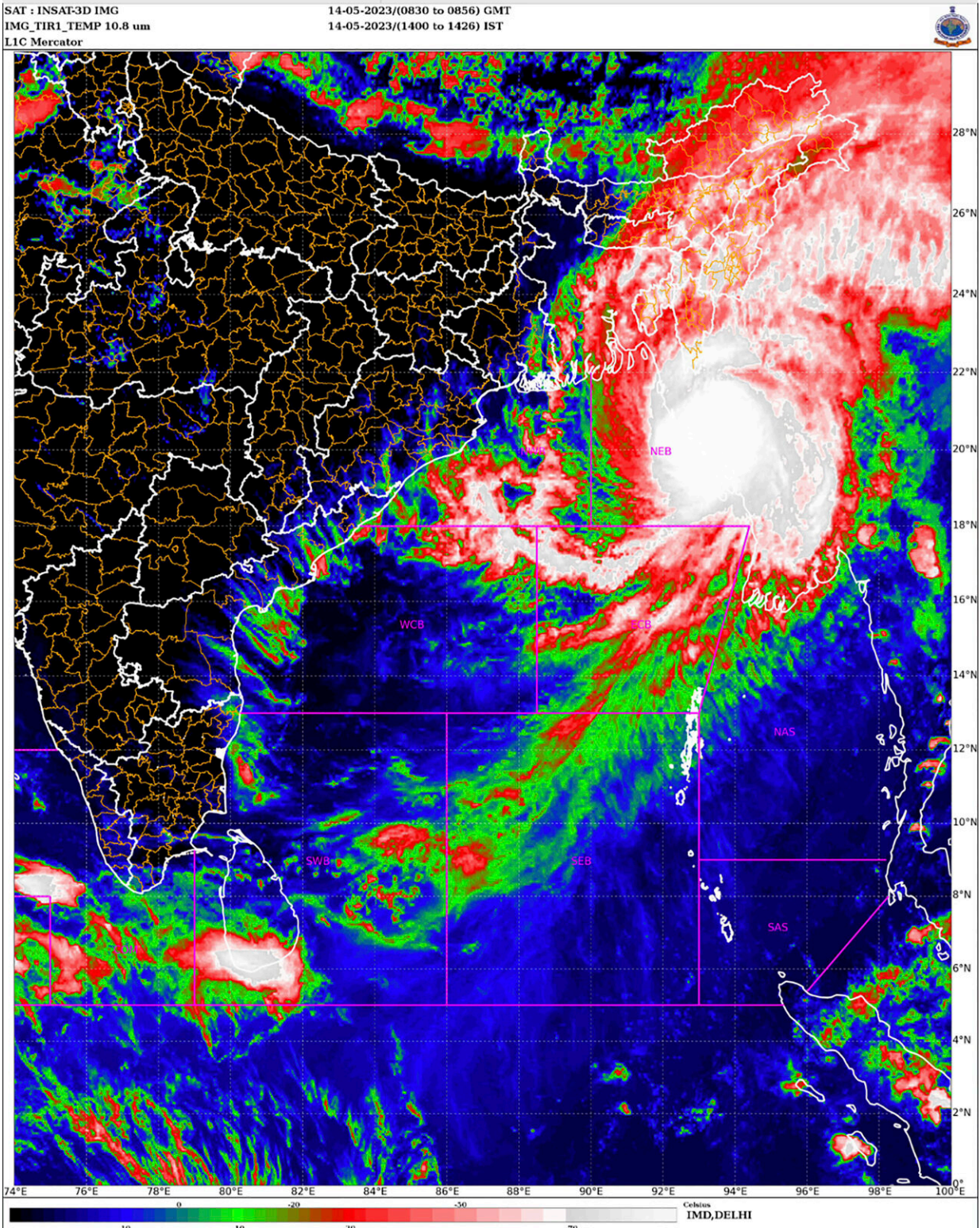
Women sit inside a room at a makeshift shelter set up for residents of coastal areas, in Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



Boats are parked along a road near the coast in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, May 14, 2023. Bangladesh and Myanmar are bracing as an extremely severe cyclone starts to hit their coastal areas, and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: AP Photo/Al-emrun Garjon



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, a lamppost attached with electrical transformer damaged by Cyclone Mocha lines on a street in Gwa township, Rakhine State. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP



This satellite image provided by India Meteorological Department shows storm Mocha intensify into a severe cyclonic storm. Bangladesh and Myanmar braced

Sunday as a severe cyclone started to hit coastal areas and authorities urged thousands of people in both countries to seek shelter. Credit: India Meteorological Department via AP



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, a lamppost attached with electrical transformer damaged by Cyclone Mocha lines on a street in Gwa township, Rakhine State. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, buildings damaged by Cyclone Mocha is seen in Kyauk Phyu township, Rakhine State. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, roofs of a stadium damaged by Cyclone Mocha is seen in Coco Island, Yangon Division. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP



In this photo provided by Myanmar Military True News Information Team on Sunday, May 14, 2023, a cell phone tower damaged by Cyclone Mocha is seen in Sittwe township, Rakhine State. Credit: Military True News Information Team via AP

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar with a storm surge that devastated populated areas around the Irrawaddy River delta. At least 138,000 people died and tens of thousands of homes and other buildings were washed away.

Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune city, said cyclones in the Bay of Bengal are becoming more intense more quickly, in part because of climate change.

Climate scientists say cyclones can now retain their energy for many days. Cyclone Amphan in eastern India in 2020 continued to travel over land as a strong cyclone and caused extensive devastation.

"As long as oceans are warm and winds are favorable, cyclones will retain their intensity for a longer period," Koll said.

Tropical cyclones, which are called hurricanes or typhoons in other regions, are among the world's most devastating natural disasters when they hit densely populated coastal areas.

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