

Almost 50 people missing after deadly Brazil cyclone

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Damage from the cyclone has affected more than 135,000 people across the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Brazilian rescue workers were on Friday searching for almost 50 people still missing after a devastating cyclone unleashed torrential rain and

flooding in the south of the country.

Five days after the cyclone, which left 41 dead, the country is taking stock of a rising toll, with at least 223 people injured and 11,000 forced from their homes, according to official statements.

More than 147,000 people were affected across the state of Rio Grande do Sul, civil defense authorities said in a statement.

It added that the number of missing had gone from 25 to 46.

Nearly a thousand emergency workers and a dozen helicopters have been deployed in the rescue efforts, which have been complicated by the destruction of two bridges and blocked roads.

Eight military aircraft and hundreds of soldiers are also taking part in search and rescue.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, in India for the G20 summit, is sending Vice President Geraldo Alckmin to the region, where he will arrive Sunday with a ministerial delegation.

"We are acting on all fronts," Lula wrote on social media.

Alckmin announced at a press conference in Brasilia that the federal government would send 20,000 food baskets and medicine kits for 15,000 people in Rio Grande do Sul, where authorities have declared a state of emergency.

In addition, the more than 3,000 people who lost their homes will receive 800 reais (\$167), he said.

The governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Eduardo Leite, has estimated

rebuilding road infrastructure will cost about 100 million reais (\$20 million).

Brazil is not used to cyclones, but it is becoming "more and more frequent" for them to make landfall in the country, according to Francis Lacerda, a researcher at the Pernambuco State Agronomy Institute's Climate Change Laboratory.

"This is all a result of climate change," Alckmin said.

Unchecked urbanization and irregular housing built on hillsides are also making weather disasters deadlier in Brazil, experts say.

In June, another cyclone left 13 dead in Rio Grande do Sul and forced thousands of people from their homes.

In February, 65 people died in landslides caused by record flooding in the southeastern resort town of Sao Sebastiao, on the coast of Sao Paulo state.

An estimated 9.5 million of Brazil's 203 million people live in areas at high risk of flooding or landslides.

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