Myanmar junta makes rare request for foreign aid to cope with deadly floods

AFP – Myanmar's junta chief made a rare request Saturday for foreign aid to cope with deadly floods that have displaced hundreds of thousands of people who have endured three years of war.
Floods and landslides have killed almost 300 people in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, which dumped a colossal deluge of rain when it hit the region last weekend.

In Myanmar more than 235,000 people have been forced from their homes by floods, the junta said Friday, piling further misery on the country where war has raged since the military seized power in 2021.

"Officials from the government need to contact foreign countries to receive rescue and relief aid to be provided to the victims," Min Aung Hlaing said on Friday, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

"It is necessary to manage rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures as quickly as possible," he was quoted as saying.

The junta gave a death toll on Friday of 33, while earlier in the day the country's fire department said rescuers had recovered 36 bodies.

A military spokesman said it had lost contact with some areas of the country and was investigating reports that dozens had been buried in landslides in a gold-mining area in the central Mandalay region.

– Aid restrictions –

Myanmar’s military has previously blocked or frustrated humanitarian assistance from abroad.

Last year it suspended travel authorisations for aid groups trying to reach around a million victims of powerful Cyclone Mocha that hit the west of the country.

At the time the United Nations slammed that decision as “unfathomable.”

AFP has contacted a spokesperson for the UN in Myanmar for comment.

After cyclone Nargis killed at least 138,000 people in Myanmar in 2008, the then-junta was accused of blocking emergency aid and initially refusing to grant access to humanitarian workers and supplies.

Military trucks carried small rescue boats to flood-hit areas around the military-built capital Naypyidaw on Saturday, AFP reporters said.

On Friday hundreds of villagers waded or swam through chin-high waters to safety following floods around the capital.

Some told AFP they had sheltered in trees overnight to escape the raging flood waters below.

State media said flooding in the area around the capital had caused landslides and destroyed electricity towers, buildings, roads, bridges and houses.

More than 2.7 million people were already displaced in Myanmar by conflict triggered by the junta’s 2021 coup.

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