Philippine rescuers battle floodwaters to reach stranded

AFP — Rescuers in the northern Philippines raced Saturday to reach people still stranded in areas made inaccessible by flooding from Tropical Storm Trami, which has displaced nearly half a million people and killed at least 87.
In the hard-hit Bicol region, residents trapped on the roofs and upper floors of their homes were still awaiting desperately needed assistance, officials told AFP.

“The floods have yet to subside. Calls asking for help are still pouring here,” regional police director Andre Dizon told AFP.

“We need to rescue them as soon as possible because starvation can be a problem. We’re hearing reports that children are already getting sick.”

In the region’s Camarines Sur province, food and drinking water was in increasingly short supply as some areas remained completely submerged and difficult to access, he added.

President Ferdinand Marcos visited the area Saturday to inspect the damage before meeting with provincial officials.

Trami’s death toll, meanwhile, inched higher, with Bicol and Batangas province south of Manila accounting for the majority of fatalities.

Police have recorded 31 deaths in Bicol, most due to drowning.

The number of confirmed dead in Batangas stood at 51, provincial police chief Jacinto Malinao told AFP on Saturday, with at least 22 people missing.

Five more deaths have been confirmed in other provinces, bringing the total to 87, according to an AFP tally based on

official police and disaster agency sources.

In Batangas, two hours south of the capital, rescuers were using backhoes and shovels to dig through mud as high as high as three metres (10 feet) in a desperate search for the missing in areas hit by landslides.

AFP reporters who visited the province on Friday saw roads blocked by felled trees, vehicles half-submerged in mud and homes severely damaged by flash flooding.

“We are desperate to find people in safe condition. Deep inside, I am hoping that many of those reported missing are not under the mud and boulders, but simply went somewhere without telling others,” Malinao, the police chief, said.

The National Disaster Agency reported Saturday that about 495,000 people have been displaced by the flooding, which has submerged hundreds of villages in swathes of the northern Philippines.

About 20 big storms and typhoons hit the archipelago nation or its surrounding waters each year, damaging homes and infrastructure and killing dozens of people.

A recent study showed that storms in the Asia-Pacific region are increasingly forming closer to coastlines, intensifying more rapidly and lasting longer over land due to climate change.

AFP