THOUSANDS EVACUATED AS MONSTER CYCLONE BOWS DOWN ON AUSTRALIA

Cyclone Debbie causes largest evacuation

TP: Storm clouds gather in the town of Ayr in north Queensland as Cyclone Debbie approaches yesterday.—AFP

AYR, AUSTRALIA: Thousands of people including toursits were evacuating yesterday as north-east Australia braced for a “monster” cyclone packing destructive winds, with warnings of major structural damage and dangerous totals.

The Philippines described the storm as one of the most powerful to hit its territory in a decade, warning that the cyclone could cause a tsunami. The storm was also forecast to hit Indonesia.

President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday declared a state of disaster in areas affected by the monster typhoon, ordering the deployment of a major rescue mission after the cyclone made landfall.

“We are doing our best to do the utmost to save those who are in danger. We will do our best to save those who are injured. For those who die, we are also doing our best to give them justice,” Duterte said.

He said that the storm had already claimed the lives of several people in the southern Mindanao region.

“On behalf of the Philippines, I offer our deepest sympathy to the families of those who lost their lives and to the injured people,” Duterte said.

He added that the government had activated its disaster response plan and was sending rescue teams to the affected areas.

“Let everybody know that the government is ready and willing to respond to the needs of those affected by this monster typhoon,” Duterte said.

The storm is expected to be one of the strongest recorded in the Philippines, packing winds of up to 300 km per hour and waves of up to 15 meters.

In other news,

Three Malaysian hostages recovered in Philippines

MANILA: Three Malaysian hostages held in a Muslim rebel camp in the southern Philippines were rescued yesterday in what officials said was the latest in a string of rescue operations.

The Malay Peninsula-based Abu Sayyaf group, which has been involved in a decades-long conflict with the Philippine government, had been holding the hostages since they were captured in November last year.

The group was known for its violent tactics, including the beheading of hostages.

The hostages, including two Filipinos and a Malaysian, had been held in a remote area in the southern Philippines.

Amnesty International said that the group had been responsible for carrying out brutal killings and other human rights abuses.

The group’s leader, Isnilon Hapilon, had been killed in a recent operation by the Philippine military.

The group denies involvement in the hostage crisis and said that it was responding to a request from the Philippine government.

Meanwhile, the group has been under pressure from the Philippine government to release the hostages.

The Philippines has a long history of conflict with Muslim rebels, who have been fighting for autonomy in the southern region of Mindanao.

The group has been involved in a string of kidnappings and other violent attacks, prompting the Philippine government to launch a campaign against it.

The group has also been linked to other militant groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

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