

# Typhoon kills six people, spoils Christmas festivities in Philippines

By Bullit Marquez  
The Associated Press

**B**ATANGAS, The Philippines — A powerful typhoon blew out of the northern Philippines after killing at least six people and spoiling Christmas in several provinces, where more than 380,000 people abandoned celebrations at home to reach emergency shelters and other safer grounds.

Typhoon Nock-Ten cut power to five entire provinces due to toppled electric posts and trees, dimming Christmas revelries in Asia's largest Catholic nation. More than 300 flights were delayed or rescheduled and ferries were barred from sailing, stranding more than 12,000 holiday travellers.

Six people died from drowning or by being pinned by fallen trees, poles, and a collapsed concrete wall in the provinces of Quezon and Albay, southeast of Manila, after the typhoon made landfall in Catanduanes province, officials said.

Many military camps and outposts in Catanduanes and outlying provinces were damaged and some troops were injured, the military said.

Nock-Ten, locally known as Nina, then blew westward across mountainous and island provinces, damaging homes, uprooting trees, and knocking down communications.

After weakening on landfall, the typhoon had sustained winds of up to 74 miles per hour (mph) and gusts of 111 mph when it blew into the South China Sea after battering the congested provinces of Batangas and Cavite, south of Manila, government forecasters said.

A cargo ship with about two dozen crewmen radioed for help when the vessel started to list off Batangas. It later ran aground and turned on its side in Mabini town, the coast guard said.



**CHRISTMAS CURTAILED.** The M/V Shuttle RORO 5 is seen after it drifted near the shore in Mabini, Batangas province, south of Manila, the Philippines, as Typhoon Nock-Ten roared over the congested region last month. The powerful typhoon spoiled Christmas Day in parts of the Philippines, then blew over an area near Manila with slightly weaker, but still fierce winds, according to officials. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

The storm was one of the strongest to hit the Philippines since Typhoon Haiyan left more than 7,300 people dead or missing and displaced more than 5 million in 2014. But officials in some provinces found it difficult to convince people to abandon their Christmas celebrations and head for shelters before the storm hit. Some officials said they had to impose forced evacuations.

"Some residents just refused to leave their homes even when I warned them that you can face what amounts to a death penalty," Cedric Daep, a top disaster-response official in Albay, said by phone.

Shopping malls and stores were ordered to close early on Christmas Day to encourage people to remain indoors, "but at the height of the typhoon, many cars were still being driven around and people were out walking," Daep said. "We warned them enough, but we just can't control their mind."

Officials in Albay, where more than

150,000 villagers were displaced by the typhoon, declared a "state of calamity" to allow faster disbursement of emergency funds.

About 20 typhoons and storms lash the Philippines each year. In the past 65 years, seven typhoons have struck the country on Christmas Day, according to the government's weather agency.

Tens of thousands of villagers, forced to spend Christmas in crowded and powerless emergency shelters, returned home the next day to deal with the damage.

"They left the evacuation centers and we're seeing the sun again," Ann Ongjoco, mayor of the town of Guinobatan in Albay, one of five provinces that lost electricity, said by phone.

More than 17,600 villagers fled to shelters in schools. "Many houses made of light materials were destroyed," she said.

Associated Press writer Jim Gomez in Manila contributed to this report.

## North China cities choked by smog shut factories & stopped cars

By Helene Franchineau  
The Associated Press

**B**EIJING — Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories to reduce air pollution during a national "red alert" last month.

More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing and traffic police restricted drivers by monitoring their license plate numbers, state media reported. Dozens of cities closed schools and took other emergency measures after the "red alert" was issued for much of northern China.

"The smog has serious repercussions on the lungs and the respiratory system, and it also influences the health of future generations, so under a red alert, it is safer to stay at home rather than go to school," said Li Jingren, a 15-year-old high school student in Beijing.

Authorities in the northern province of Hebei ordered coal and cement plants to temporarily shut down or reduce production. Elsewhere, hospitals prepared teams of doctors to handle an expected surge in cases of pollution-related illnesses.

China's air pollution is blamed on its reliance on coal and emissions from older cars.

"If you are tracking back to the first



**RED ALERT.** People, some wearing masks for protection against air pollution, walk on a pedestrian overhead bridge in Beijing while the Chinese capital is shrouded by heavy smog. Engulfed in choking smog, some northern Chinese cities limited the number of cars on roads and temporarily shut down factories to cut down on pollution during a national "red alert." More than 700 companies stopped production in Beijing, state media reported. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

day of this episode, you can see that the layer of the smog (in Beijing) is moving slowly from the south to the urban area in Beijing and then to the north," said Dong Liansai, a climate campaigner with Greenpeace in Beijing. "You can easily find the large deployment (of smog) in the regions south of Beijing."

Dong said emissions from factories in nearby provinces were the main cause of the smog choking the capital.

The smog had earlier grounded flights in some cities and closed highways due to low visibility.

News websites said the number of children taken to Beijing hospitals with breathing trouble soared. Photos showed waiting rooms crowded with parents carrying children who wore face masks.

Members of the public closely watch levels of PM2.5, particles measuring 2.5 microns across that are easily inhaled and damage lung tissue.

Red is the highest level on the four-tier system prescribing actions taken to reduce the smog.

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