

Myanmar cyclone tragedy's scope widens

by UPI

YANGON, Myanmar -- Revised U.N. estimates indicate 2.5 million people were severely affected by the cyclone in Myanmar and the Red Cross says the death toll may top 120,000. As international agencies struggled to bring relief to the desperate survivors in the secretive military-led country, estimates of the dead and surviving victims continued to soar. The new numbers compare with those from the Myanmar government, which put the death toll at nearly 38,500 with about 27,800 missing. Aid, including that brought by U.S. planes, has begun to flow in but various agencies say it is not nearly enough to cope with the enormity of the situation. Several heads of relief organizations in Myanmar also say some of the international aid is being stolen, diverted or warehoused by the country's army, The New York Times reported. They, however, did not want to be quoted directly, fearing adverse reaction from the junta, the report said. The U.N. News Center said about 2.5 million people are now estimated to have been severely hit by the cyclone with the Irrawaddy delta area being the worst affected area. Responding to international pressure, the junta has invited about 160 aid workers from neighboring India, China, Bangladesh and Thailand, John Holmes, head of the U.N. humanitarian affairs, said. Holmes also said about 550,000 people had now gathered in rudimentary camps scattered through the delta area where supplies are inadequate.

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