

At least 44 killed by flash floods and landslides in Indonesia

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People inspect damaged buildings at a village hit by flash flood in East Flores, Indonesia [Photo: Ola Adonara/AP]

Jakarta, April 5 (RHC)-- At least 44 people have been killed after flash floods and landslides swept an island in Indonesia's easternmost province on Sunday morning. Hours before people woke up to celebrate Easter Sunday, torrential rain resulted in flash floods in the Catholic-majority Flores Island.

Mud inundated homes, while bridges and roads in the eastern end of the island were destroyed. "There are 44 people dead with nine injured" in East Flores regency, and "many ... are still under the mud", National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesperson Raditya Jati told AFP news agency.

Rescue officials expect the death toll to rise as they are struggling to reach the remote and worst-hit area in East Flores regency because of rains and strong waves. Jati added that extreme weather is expected to continue in the coming week.

Separately on Sunday, flooding killed two people in Bima city in the neighboring province of West Nusa Tenggara, according to the disaster control agency. Dams in four subdistricts also overflowed, submerging nearly 10,000 houses following a nine-hour downpour, said Jati.

Indonesia's weather agency said a tropical cyclone nearing the Savu Straits, between the southern part of Nusa Tenggara province and East Timor's north coast, could be bringing more rain, waves and winds.

Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the Indonesian archipelago during the rainy season.

In January, flash floods hit the Indonesian town of Sumedang in West Java, killing 40 people. And last September, at least 11 people were killed in landslides on Borneo while a few months earlier dozens died in a similar disaster in Sulawesi. Deforestation is often a cause of landslides, according to environmentalists.

The country's disaster agency has estimated that 125 million Indonesians – nearly half of the country's population – live in areas at risk of landslides.

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