

Landslides kill thousands in Philippines

TACLOBAN, Philippines — Landslides unleashed by a tropical storm roared down mountains in the Philippines, sweeping screaming victims into the sea. More than 2,300 people died and 1,500 were missing and presumed dead, officials said Wednesday.

The landslides hit the central islands of Leyte and Negros on Tuesday, burying coastal shantytowns under mud, debris and flood waters.

"The water suddenly rose. Cars and trucks were being flushed into Ormoc Bay like toys," said Ruby Gemale, a Red Cross official in Ormoc, a city on Leyte that was hardest-hit by the furious landslides.

"People were being carried by the waters, crying out for help. But we were helpless," she said. "The current was so strong."

One horrific landslide that hit the Ormoc area swept over shantytowns, crumbling the flimsy shacks under the weight of mud and debris. Many of those killed were children, and workers were digging mass graves Wednesday for the victims.

The disaster came during Tropical Storm Thelma's sweep over the region, 450 miles southeast of Manila. The national government in Manila only became aware of the scope of the disaster on Wednesday, however, because of poor communications with the area.

It was the fourth major natural disaster to strike the Philippines since a devastating earthquake killed nearly 1,700 people on Luzon island in July 1990.

Aurora Ladoy of the Leyte Provincial Disaster Coordinating Center said

the death toll on Leyte, 250 miles south of Manila, stood at 2,337.

Officials said another 52 people died on the island of Negros.

Provincial officials in Tacloban said the death toll was based on body counts. But Vilma Tan, a regional civil defense worker, said authorities were so overwhelmed by the calamity that they were having problems compiling complete, accurate casualty figures.

The storm forced former first lady Imelda Marcos, whose hometown is on Leyte, to cancel a planned trip to the island Wednesday. It was not known whether Marcos, who pledged to visit victims of previous disasters following her return from exile earlier this week, would reschedule the visit.

Thelma, a relatively weak storm, struck Samar island on Tuesday with

winds gusting to 46 mph before passing over Leyte and Negros. There were no reports from Samar, third largest of the 7,100 Philippine islands but among the most primitive.

Most of the dead were in Ormoc, the coastal city of about 160,000, which is about 45 miles southwest of Tacloban, the provincial capital. Ladoy said the death toll in Ormoc stood at 2,002, many of them children.

The disaster occurred five months after the devastating eruptions of the Mount Pinatubo volcano, which caused the deaths of about 700 people, left more than 300,000 homeless and forced the U.S. Air Force to abandon Clark Air Base, a few miles east of the slopes.

In November 1990, Typhoon Mike passed through the central Philippines, killing at least 335 people and sinking more than 30 ships in Cebu harbor.

Tropical Storm Thelma



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Interest rate hits 18-year low as Fed tries to buoy economy

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve pushed a key interest rate to an 18-year low on Wednesday in a fresh effort to jump-start the national economy and keep it from sliding back into recession.

Major banks followed immediately with a cut in their prime lending rates to a five-year low of 7.5 percent. Analysts questioned whether the moves would be enough.

President Bush said he was concerned about slipping consumer confidence but suggested hopefully that

Americans "will suddenly wake up," notice rates are down and go out and buy cars and houses.

Private economists were far more pessimistic as they surveyed a glut of weak economic statistics showing rising unemployment and plummeting confidence.

The Federal Reserve announced that it was slashing its discount rate from 5 percent to 4.5 percent, the lowest level since January 1973.

Later in the day, the central bank signaled that it was lowering its target

for the federal funds rate by a quarter-point to 4.75 percent.

It marked the 13th time the Fed has nudged the funds rate lower and the fifth time it has cut the discount rate since the recession began in July 1990.

Many analysts said they doubted that the latest round of rate cuts would do much to get jittery consumers spending again, given the huge overhang of consumer debt from the 1980s and fears about further job layoffs.

"After I plugged it in, everything clicked for me."



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CURTAIN RISES ON NEW NATO

Alliance leaders formally end Cold War standoff

ROME — NATO leaders will herald the end of the Cold War today by formally calling a halt to decades of enmity with the Soviet Union and its one-time satellites and offering them an unprecedented voice in alliance affairs.

President Bush and other leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, convening their 11th summit, will open the post-Cold War era with a new military strategy based on fewer soldiers and a spare nuclear arsenal.

"I'm going to be meeting with the NATO leaders in Rome to talk about the challenges of security in the post-Cold War world and the opportunity for partnership with former adversaries," Bush said in a pre-departure news conference.

The NATO meeting will acknowledge the virtual disappearance of the Soviet military threat but will caution about risks posed by upheavals in Eastern Europe and instability in the Middle East and North Africa.

In doing so, the 16 leaders will try to justify the continued existence of an alliance formed in 1949 to thwart the military threat from Josef

Stalin's expansionist Soviet Union.

The giant superpower, undergoing enormous political turmoil, no longer is the feared foe of the past. But it's still a powerful military might.

Indeed, the United States has suggested that the leaders urge Moscow to guard against the spread of its nuclear weapons. American officials are worried the weapons might be used by the various republics as political bargaining tools in their efforts to gain power from the Kremlin.

NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner insisted in a recent interview that the alliance "will be the main pillar of stability (in Europe)."

"Nobody could replace it," he said. "It is the only functioning collective security organization."

Instead of shutting down, the alliance will undergo a revamping to give it a more political, less military, look.

The centerpiece of the efforts will be a new cooperation council with the Soviet Union and eight nations in Eastern Europe, making formal their recent, casual ties.

Democrats bask in Pennsylvania win

Democrats savored Sen. Harris Wofford's smashing victory in Pennsylvania on Wednesday as evidence of increasing strength heading into the 1992 campaigns for the White House and Congress. A chastened President Bush said "we'll try even harder" to repair the economy and expand health insurance.

The sensitive issue of race vied with pocket-book concerns in post-mortems on the off-year elections. Bush hailed the surprise victory of Republican Kirk Fordice in the Mississippi governor's race after a campaign that stressed opposition to racial quotas.

At the same time, the president sharply attacked Republican David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klansman running in next week's gubernatorial runoff in Louisiana. Bush said he'd vote for the Democrat in the race if he had

to choose.

Sponsors of term limitations for members of Congress licked their wounds after suffering a surprising defeat in Washington state, but vowed that the issue would re-emerge in a dozen states or more next year.

"Mark another one up for the ruling class of career politicians," said Ann Best, executive director of Citizens for Congressional Reform.

Said seven-term Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif.: "I don't think any of us should underestimate the frustration and anger that people feel."

While the term-limitation measure failed in Washington, incumbents were turned out of office in striking numbers — Gov. Ray Mabus in Mississippi and Mayor Kathy Whitmire in Houston among them.