**U.S. Burmese community ready to help**

Fundraisers planned to send cash, supplies to homeland

By Mariost Bello
USA TODAY

Across the USA, Burmese nationals anxious to help relatives hit by the devastating cyclone in Burma are raising cash, planning benefit concerts and holding prayer vigils.

Auto worker Ah Yu is hoping that a group of traditional Burmese, Thai and Chinese food will help the large Burmese community in Fort Wayne, Ind., raise money to send home. Ah Yu, a community activist, is organizing a weekend festival at a local park.

Like many Burmese living in the USA, Ah Yu has not heard any news about his family in Burma’s largest city, Rangoon, since Cyclone Nargis devastated communications when it came ashore Saturday.

The silence has been unusual and worrisome, says Ah Yu, his elderly father, his wife and three children. But the water has receded, and Ah Yu may be able to reach them soon. His mother is in Singapore, a few weeks ago, but he is accustomed to regular phone calls and e-mails.

"It isn’t normal," says Ah Yu, 55. "I have so many worries! I don’t know what their situation is."

The US Campaign for Burma, a Washington-based advocacy group, estimates there are 100,000 Burmese living in the USA. The first wave arrived in New York City, California, Texas, Florida and New Jersey, according to the group.

The US Census Bureau does not track the Burmese population in the USA separately because it is too small.

Concern in the US Burmese community has grown as the estimated death toll from the cyclone rises with each passing day. Burma’s military regime said Sunday that about 350 people had died; it now puts the official death toll at more than 22,000.

Phone service and electricity are still out in many parts of the country, and most foreign journalists have been barred from entering the country by the military junta. So those outside Burma are left to piecemeal together details of members of the community who have been able to contact family back home.

Many who have managed to reach relatives speak of those who are still missing, well as aid organizations are on the ground in Burma to help.

Food, fresh water needed: A family seeks shelter in a tent fashioned next to their destroyed home in the city of Bago, south of Rangoon. Wednesday. The country’s ruling military junta has approved four United Nations aid flights that were scheduled to arrive today.

Unrest builds as food, water supplies run low

The Associated Press

RANGOON, Burma — Hungry people swarmed the few open shops and fast food outlets. A few brave faces broke out over food and water Wednesday after the devastating cyclone that swamped Burma’s Irrawaddy delta.

A diplomat said the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, said the number of people could exceed 100,000 because food and water were scarce and aid organizations were widespread.

The situation is increasingly ignored," the diplomat said in a telephone call to reporters. "There is a very real risk of disease outbreaks."

A few United Nations aid workers were let into the Southeast Asian country also known as Myanmar, which the ruling military junta had kept isolated for decades. The United States and other countries promised aid, but most of it was being held outside Burma until additional aid was delivered to the Irrawaddy delta in a desperate bid to stop the suffering.

A spokesman for the U.N. Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said its staff members in Burma reported seeing many people huddled in shelters and children who had lost their parents.

"There’s widespread devastation. Buildings and health centers are washed away, and flooded dead animals are floating around, which is an alarm for spreading diseases," Patrick Cullinane, UNICEF’s representative in New York City, said.

Burma’s state media said Cyclone Nargis killed at least 22,000 people and left 421,119 homeless.

A few shops reopened in the Irrawaddy delta, but they were quickly overwhelmed by desperate people, said Paul Reilly, a spokesman for the U.N. World Food Program in Bangkok, quoting his agency’s workers in the area. "The situation is extremely bad, but they are doing their best to help the people."

Andrew Rutterford, of Save the Children in Rangoon said "there’s a lot of need for food and water. People are suffering from disease, the whole place is under water, and they can’t use tablets to purify water."