

Pacific island chain asks Donald Trump to declare emergency as Typhoon Mangkhut strikes

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Guam: The governor of the Northern Mariana Islands has urged US President Donald Trump to declare a state of emergency as a typhoon struck the US Western Pacific territories overnight and caused blackouts and damaged buildings.

Typhoon Mangkhut passed through the US Pacific archipelago with speeds of over 100mph (160kph) and a team from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was on Tuesday carrying out an initial damage assessment. There were no immediate reports of casualties there, nor near Guam, where a US military spokesman said forces were ready to help local authorities and FEMA on the chain of 15 islands, located between Hawaii and the Philippines.

Guam is home to US air force and naval bases and an estimated 7,000 troops. A two-week exercise "Valiant Shield" involving thousands of US personnel based in the Western Pacific region had been due to start on Monday. Navy vessels were moved out of the path of Mangkhut, which was strengthening on Tuesday and headed towards the northern part of the Philippines, its weather agency PAGASA said.

The United States is facing severe storms on several fronts, with a tropical storm headed towards Hawaii and a million people evacuated North Carolina in preparation of its worst hurricane in three decades. Northern Mariana Islands governor, Ralph Torres, sent a letter to Trump on Monday requesting he declare a state of emergency to free up disaster funds, in anticipation of a typhoon with an impact that he said could be "catastrophic".

Torres was on Tuesday with a FEMA team heading to Rota, the worst hit among the 15 islands, a spokesman said over phone. Authorities on Guam were also assessing damage after Mangkhut pulled down trees and downed power lines. Hundreds of people stayed in packed emergency shelters and schools overnight.

Mangkhut could arrive close to the Philippines in the coming days, with maximum sustained winds of 215 kph, and develop into a super typhoon, PAGASA said.

- Reuters