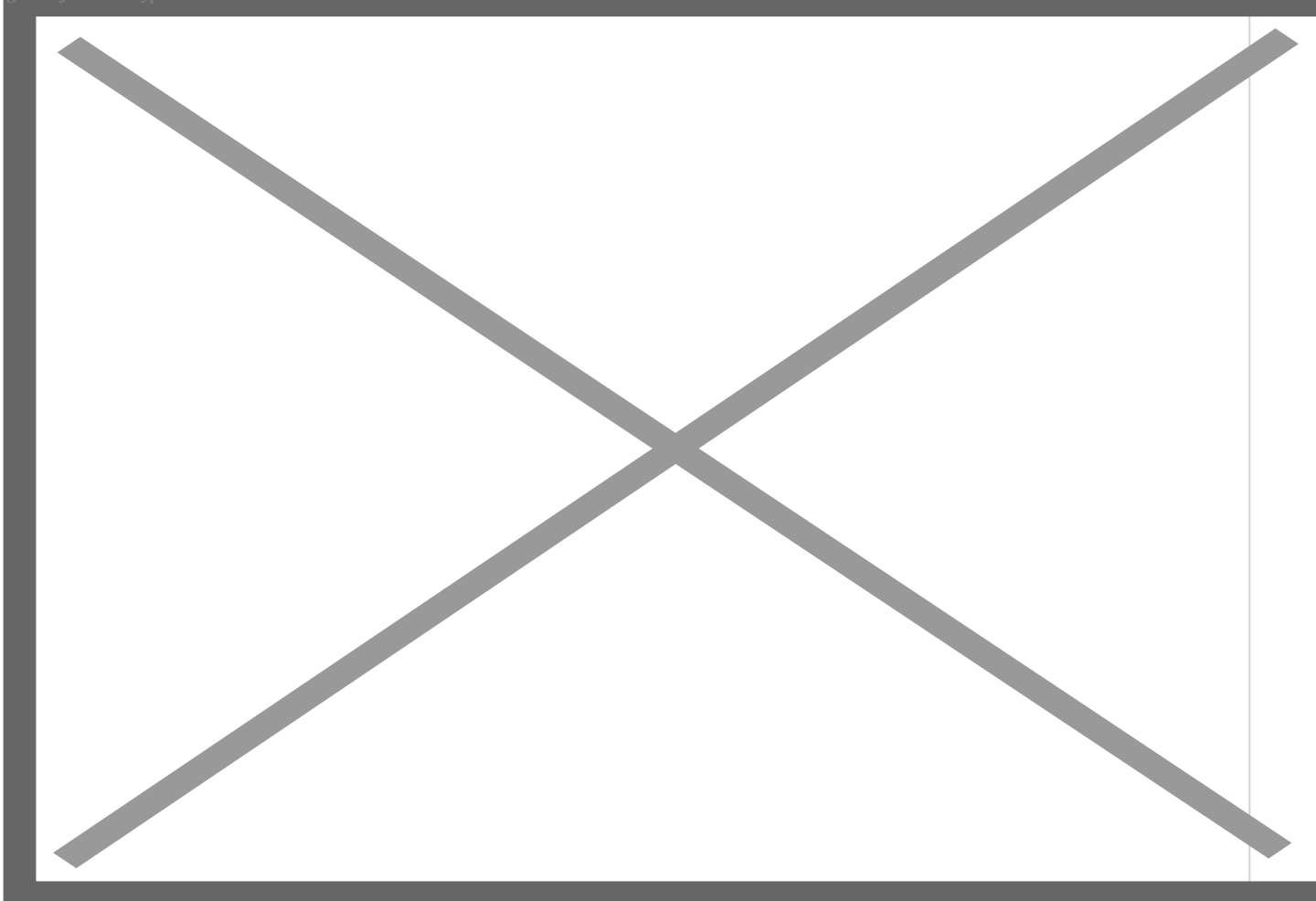


Japan urges nearly 2 million to seek shelter from Typhoon Nanmadol

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Satellite imagery shows Typhoon Nanmadol located near the southern remote islands of Japan [Japan Meteorological Agency handout via AFP]

Tokyo, September 17 (RHC)-- Nearly two million people in Japan have been asked to seek shelter before Typhoon Nanmadol, national broadcaster NHK said, as the weather agency issued a rare "special

warning” about the powerful storm, which is expected to make landfall on Sunday.

NHK, which compiles alerts issued by local authorities, said on Saturday that level four evacuation instructions – the second highest – were in place for people in Kagoshima, Kumamoto and Miyazaki in the southern Kyushu region.

This is the first typhoon-linked special warning issued outside of the Okinawa region since the current system began in 2013. On Saturday evening, Typhoon Nanmadol was classed at the agency’s top category of “violent”, and was packing gusts of up to 270km/hour (168mph) as it hovered about 200km (124 miles) north-northeast of Minami Daito island, part of a string of remote isles that form the Okinawa region.

The typhoon is expected to approach or make landfall on Sunday in Kagoshima prefecture, then move north the following day before heading towards Japan’s main island.

“There are risks of unprecedented storms, high waves, storm surges, and record rainfall,” Ryuta Kurora, the head of the Japan Meteorological Agency’s forecast unit, told reporters. “Maximum caution is required,” he said, urging residents to evacuate early. “It’s a very dangerous typhoon.”

“The wind will be so fierce that some houses might collapse,” Kurora told reporters, also warning of flooding and landslides.

The evacuation warnings call on people to move to shelters or alternative accommodations that can withstand extreme weather. But they are not mandatory, and during past extreme weather events, authorities have struggled to convince residents to take shelter quickly enough.

Kurora said even inside strong buildings, residents should take precautions. “Please move into sturdy buildings before violent winds start to blow and stay away from windows even inside sturdy buildings,” he told a late-night news conference.

Japan is currently in typhoon season and faces about 20 such storms a year, routinely seeing heavy rains that cause landslides or flash floods.

In 2019, Typhoon Hagibis smashed into Japan as it hosted the Rugby World Cup, killing more than 100 people. A year earlier, Typhoon Jebi shut down Kansai Airport in Osaka, while 14 people were killed. And in 2018, floods and landslides killed more than 200 people in western Japan during the country’s annual rainy season.

Before Typhoon Nanmadol’s arrival, flight cancellations began to affect regional airports, including those in Kagoshima, Miyazaki and Kumamoto, according to the websites of Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways.

Scientists say climate change is increasing the severity of storms and causing extreme weather such as heatwaves, droughts and flash floods to become more frequent and intense.

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