

Thousands evacuated as typhoon pummels southern China and Vietnam

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Beijing, July 19 (RHC)-- A quarter million people were evacuated in southern China and Vietnam before a major typhoon roared ashore late Monday, bringing fierce winds and rain, and forcing the cancellation of hundreds of flights and trains.

The China Meteorological Administration said typhoon Talim, the fourth typhoon of the year, made landfall on the coast of Guangdong province at around 10:20 p.m. local time (1420 GMT), bearing maximum winds of 136.8 kilometers (85 miles) per hour.

Storm surges and lashing rains also hammered the southern coastline from Guangdong to Hainan provinces on Monday night, it said. The forecaster had issued an orange alert, the second-highest warning in a four-tier color-coded system.

Nearly 230,000 people in Guangdong were evacuated to safety before the storm's landfall, including more than 8,000 fish-farm workers who were brought ashore, according to state news agency, Xinhua. Local authorities also ordered the closure of dozens of coastal tourist destinations.

The meteorological administration said the storm was moving to the northwest at a speed of about 20 kilometers per hour and could rake across the Guangxi region early Tuesday. Talim could lose speed by Tuesday morning and "weaken and dissipate over northern Vietnam" on Wednesday, it said.

Authorities in Vietnam said they were preparing to evacuate about 30,000 people from the areas forecast to be hardest hit in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong provinces from Monday afternoon.

Talim "might be one of the biggest to hit the Gulf of Tonkin in recent years," Vietnam's top disaster response committee said in an online statement. Tourists have been advised to leave outlying islands and airlines have rescheduled services to avoid the storm.

Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh directed disaster response teams to prepare for "immediate rescue and relief works" late Sunday, warning of possible floods.

At least 1,000 people were evacuated in Yunfu city in China's Guangdong province, the Southern Daily reported. Trading on Hong Kong's USD5.2 trillion stock market was cancelled Monday as the Asian financial hub came to a standstill.

The Hong Kong Observatory has warned of possible flooding in low-lying areas due to a storm surge, while ferries and most bus services in the city were suspended.

More than 1,000 travelers were affected by flight cancellations and delays, the Hong Kong Airport Authority said. Hundreds of trains in Guangdong and Hainan, including high-speed trains between Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the metropolis adjacent to Hong Kong, were suspended Monday as the typhoon bore down on the region.

Hainan island authorities asked ships in nearby waters to return to port after the local marine forecasting station warned of waves of up to six meters (20 feet), Xinhua reported.

Meilan International Airport and Qionghai Boao Airport, both on Hainan island, have cancelled all flights, with FlightAware, the international flight-tracking website, putting the figure at more than 160 cancellations of flights into and out of the island Monday. Zhuhai Jinwan Airport in Guangdong near Macau also cancelled more than 80 flights.

Scientists have warned that typhoons are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer with climate change.

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