

Typhoon Hagibis: Tokyo braced for battering as ‘worst storm in 60 years’ roars in

The threat of widespread flooding and landslides compounded by an earthquake in nearby Chiba prefecture.



Damaged caused by typhoon Hagibis in Chiba Prefecture, east of Tokyo.
Photograph: Jiji Press/EPA

Evacuation orders were issued to more than 800,000 households in Tokyo on Saturday as super-typhoon Hagibis threatened power cuts and widespread flooding.

Storm surges and high waves have raised sea levels by more than a meter along some stretches of the coast, and waters in Tokyo Bay are up by 50cm, increasing the danger of severe flooding in the city center.

On Saturday the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a level-five warning, its

highest level, and urged more than 45 million residents of Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Gunma, Yamanashi and Nagano prefectures to find a secure building or move to higher floors.

The warning came as it was reported that nine people were missing after a landslide in Gunma and flooding in Shizuoka. More than 80 have been reported injured.

Authorities have said they are planning to release water from the Shiroyama dam, 50km west of Tokyo, to reduce the risk of it bursting. They have urged residents of six nearby towns to protect themselves as discharging water into an area already experiencing torrential rain is expected to cause severe flooding. About 17,000 military personnel have been placed on standby for rescue operations.

The giant storm, which is 1,400km across and capable of producing 200km-an-hour gusts of wind, is being compared to 1958's typhoon Ida, which wrought destruction across the Greater Tokyo area and eastern Shizuoka prefecture, killing 1,200 people.

However, the death toll is unlikely to be anywhere near as high this time thanks to Japan's stringent building safety standards and comprehensive disaster warning systems.

Emergency alerts accompanied by loud chimes are being sent directly to tens of millions of smartphone users in the affected areas.

By Saturday morning roofs had been ripped off houses in Chiba prefecture. This area, immediately east and south of Tokyo, is still recovering from last month's typhoon Faxai, which killed three people, injured more than 40, and left hundreds of thousands of homes without power.

On Saturday a 50-year-old man was killed in Chiba when his car was flipped over by the storm, while another person died after being washed away in a car, public broadcaster NHK said.

"When the winds suddenly hit, they blew the roof off my house," a resident told NHK. "The noise was awful. One of my three children was injured and is now in a hospital."

Adding to the danger of landslides, an earthquake measuring four in Chiba on the

Japanese seismic intensity scale, whose highest grading is seven, hit the Pacific Ocean at 6:22 pm local time on Saturday.

Up to 60cm of rain is expected to fall in some areas by Sunday morning. Tokyo Disney Resort shut down on Saturday for the first time since the earthquake and resulting deadly tsunami in 2011 that killed nearly 20,000 people, while all bullet trains and most flights in and out of the greater Tokyo area and its surrounding prefectures were canceled.

The Tokyo metropolitan government has opened an evacuation center in Tokyo's Ueno district for foreign tourists stranded by the shutdown. Organizers canceled Saturday's qualifying session for the Suzuka grand prix, although the race is expected to take place on Sunday afternoon.

The England v France World Cup Rugby game, due to having been played in Yokohama on 12 October, was canceled the previous day. A decision on Sunday's match between Japan and Scotland was due following an inspection scheduled late on Saturday night.

Scotland, who will be eliminated from the World Cup if the match is canceled, want the game to be switched to Monday.

"Right from the get-go, we said we would play any place, anywhere, behind closed doors, in full stadiums," said Scottish Rugby's chief executive, Mark Dodson.

Source:

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