

Typhoon forces evacuation of 1 million Chinese

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TAIPEI, Taiwan – Typhoon Morakot churned toward China forcing the evacuation of nearly 1 million people Sunday, a day after lashing Taiwan with torrential rains that caused the worst flooding on the island in 50 years.

Twenty-nine people were missing in southern Taiwan, the Disaster Relief Center said, and a woman was killed when her vehicle plunged into a ditch in Kaohsiung county in heavy rain Friday.

Morakot was centered 42 miles (70 kilometers) off China's southeastern Fujian province Sunday morning. Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau said the storm had winds of up to 67 miles per hour (108 kilometers per hour) and was headed northwest toward China at a speed of 7 mph (11 kph).

About 1 million people were evacuated from China's eastern coastal provinces by early Sunday — more than 470,000 people in Zhejiang and 485,000 others in neighboring Fujian. Authorities in Fujian called 48,000 boats back to harbor.

The meteorological station in eastern Zhejiang issued a typhoon alert and said the storm was likely to make landfall sometime between noon and nighttime, bringing heavy rain to coastal areas.

Morakot hit Taiwan late Friday but traversed the island Saturday and weakened to a tropical storm in the Taiwan Strait. Morakot smashed into the northern Philippines early Friday, triggering floods and landslides that killed at least 12 people.

Several southern Taiwan counties recorded more than 80 inches (200 centimeters) of rain on Friday and Saturday, the worst flooding to hit the area in half a century, the Central Weather Bureau reported.

The Disaster Relief Center reported Sunday that flash flooding had washed away a makeshift home in southern Kaohsiung, leaving 16 people missing. Three others were swept away in southeastern Taitung county, including two policemen helping to evacuate villagers.

Ten others were missing, including three fishermen from a capsized boat and three others whose cars fell into a swelling river, it said.

In southern Pingtung county, 4,000 people were stranded in inundated villages waiting for police boats to rescue them, news media reported.

Morakot is the first typhoon to hit Taiwan this year. Typhoons frequently move in between July and September, often causing injuries and deaths in mountainous regions prone to landslides and flash floods.

Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Goni — which made landfall in Guangdong on Wednesday and hit the coastal areas of Hainan Thursday and Friday — weakened into a tropical depression by Sunday, said an official who would give only his surname Lin.

Rescue helicopters and ships were still searching for about 10 crew whose ships were caught in Goni's gusts Saturday, according to a duty officer at the Hainan provincial government who refused to give his name.

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090809/ap_on_re_as/as_asia_storm