Powerful Typhoon Nanmadol tears through Japan

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A powerful typhoon struck southern Japan Sunday night and continued to cause damage through Monday, creating widespread devastation and leading to the evacuation of millions of people. The storm, one of the strongest of the year, is the latest in deadly and intense weather patterns that have taken place around the globe this year.

At least two people have been killed and 115 people injured from floods and landslides caused by the storm. Approximately 9.7 million people were told to evacuate to shelters or move to sturdy buildings during the storm, with tens of thousands staying in emergency shelters. At least seven prefectures were without electricity Sunday night, impacting at least 337,520 households, according to Kyushu Electric Power Company. As of Monday afternoon, an estimated 286,000 households remained without power.

Typhoon Nanmadol, or Typhoon Number 14 as it is known in Japan, made landfall Sunday around 7 p.m. near the city of Kagoshima on Kyushu, the southernmost of the four main islands of Japan. The typhoon had winds reaching as high as 234 kilometers per hour (145 mph) as it reached the Japanese coast, and was classified as a "violent typhoon," the highest Japanese category, similar to a Category 5 hurricane.

The storm weakened slightly over Sunday night and into Monday morning with sustained wind speeds reaching 126 kilometers per hour and gusts as high as 180 kilometers per hour. It continued up the western coast of Honshu, bringing hundreds of millimeters of rain to different parts of the country. As of Tuesday morning, maximum wind speeds continued to reach 144 kilometers per hour in the central Hokuriku region.

The storm has brought as much as 900 millimeters (3 feet) of rain to Kyushu, more than the average for the entire month of September. The Chugoku region on Honshu and the island of Shikoku also experienced heavy winds and huge amounts of rain. On Monday, officials continued to urge people on Kyushu to evacuate, citing the potential for additional floods or landslides.

As the typhoon approached, Japan's Meteorological Agency issued a rare "special warning," indicating an imminent large-scale disaster and unprecedented danger from high winds, torrential rains, and storm surges. The warning had never been issued in Japan outside of Okinawa Prefecture. The agency stated on Sunday, "The southern part of the Kyushu region may see the sort of violent wind, high waves and high tides that have never been experienced before."

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida gave orders to officials "to take all possible measures to ensure the safety and security of the people with a sense of urgency." These phrases are repeated almost ad nauseum by world leaders in times of disasters to distract and cover up their lack of preparations before crises occur.

The prime minister also delayed his departure by one day for New York, where he is planning to give an address to the UN General Assembly meeting. He is now scheduled to leave Tuesday.

Flood advisories were issued for regions farther north like Tokyo and neighboring Kanagawa Prefecture. Japan's two main airlines, All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines, canceled at least 800 flights, while trains to the most affected regions were also canceled.

Other areas impacted by Nanmadol include South Korea, where the government issued typhoon advisories for Jeju Island and the southeastern Gyeongsang region. At least one person was injured during the storm, while at least 772 people from North Gyeongsang Province along the east coast evacuated,

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according to Yonhap News Agency.

The typhoon is the latest example of increasingly intense and violent weather patterns around the world, which are being brought on by climate change. Warming temperatures, which are being created by human activity, generate more moisture in the air, fueling the intensity of storms and leading to more category 4 and 5 typhoons and hurricanes.

Furthermore, a study published in May by scientists at the University of Oxford and Imperial College London found that at the time of another major storm in Japan, the 2019 Hagibis typhoon which killed 124 people, climate change had increased the probability of extreme rainfall by approximately 67 percent.

The latest typhoon comes after Typhoon Hinnamnor, another Category 5 storm, struck South Korea earlier this month. The storm landed in southeastern South Korea on September 6, killing 12 people and bringing widespread flooding.

In addition, floods in Pakistan caused by an early monsoon season and rainfall far exceeding the average have killed at least 1,545 people, although this is likely an underestimate. Intense heatwaves in China and Europe are further indications of the impact of climate change.

While storms and severe weather cannot be prevented, the tools exist to mitigate their impact, both by taking the steps to address climate change and by having infrastructure in place to carry out the necessary evacuations to keep people safe.

Capitalist governments have shown that there is no willingness on the part of the ruling class to address these issues that threatens the future of the planet. Climate change and other threats to humanity cannot be dealt with on an individual, national level, but requires an international, and therefore socialist, response.

Nowhere is it clearer that Tokyo does not take this approach to disasters than in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to run rampant throughout Japan. The country has led the world for several weeks in new, official cases, with hundreds of thousands falling sick and hundreds dying each week. In a one-week period as of September 19, there were 563,880 new COVID-19 cases and 1,162 deaths.

With millions forced to evacuate in the latest storm, and countless unable to socially distance, undoubtedly many more people will get sick as they seek safety in shelters and in large groups with family and friends. By refusing to address the pandemic, the government therefore compounds the dangers from natural disasters like Typhoon Nanmadol.

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