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Flights, high-speed trains cancelled as tropical storm hits South Korea

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Rescue workers take part in a rescue operation at a town submerged by typhoon Khanun in Daegu, South Korea. - REUTERS PIC

BUSAN: Hundreds of flights and high-speed trains were cancelled and businesses shut in the South Korean port town of Busan after a tropical storm made landfall Thursday, bringing heavy rain and high winds.

Tropical Storm Khanun, which battered Japan before taking a circuitous route towards the Korean peninsula, made landfall at around 9:20 am local time (0020 GMT) in the south and is set to travel northwards, spreading heavy rain nationwide, South Korea's meteorological agency said.

More than 10,000 people have been evacuated and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo urged local governments to "verify whether residents in high-risk areas have failed to evacuate" and to ensure that they do.

Typhoon warnings have been issued nationwide, with downpours of up to 500 millimetres forecast in northeastern coastal areas and 100-200 millimetres in Seoul and its surrounding areas until early Friday.

The capital was hit by heavy rain and southern Busan was battered by strong winds, with pedestrians struggling to walk in gusts blowing as fast as around 145 kilometres per hour (90 miles per hour). Many stores and cafes were closed.



A park is submerged due to typhoon Khanun in Busan, South Korea. - REUTERS

At least 330 flights were cancelled by Thursday and sea routes and railways closed, officials said.

More than 1,500 kindergartens and schools were closed or had delayed their class hours or moved lessons online due to the typhoon, according to the education ministry.

The typhoon had already prompted the evacuation of tens of thousands of scouts from their jamboree campsite in the south earlier this week.

All their activities have been shifted to remain strictly indoors, interior minister Lee Sang-min said, adding police and fire authorities were patrolling to prevent any accidents from the typhoon.

There were no reports of casualties from the typhoon by Thursday afternoon but a handful of people were rescued by emergency workers in North Gyeongsang province, some trapped in an underground tunnel and others stuck in a barn, according to Yonhap news agency.

Photos carried by Yonhap showed cars parked on flooded roads as a lone woman waded through rainwater coming up to her knees in the southern coastal city of Changwon, which received more than 110 millimetres of rain in just three hours.



Waves caused by tropical storm Khanun crash along the coast of the southeastern port city of Busan. - AFP PIC

In Japan, the storm prompted some districts in southern Miyazaki region to issue its highest-level alert overnight, urging residents to "protect their lives immediately" as the risk of rain-triggered mudslides increased.

Lower-level evacuation advisories were also issued in parts of Ehime, Kochi and Oita regions, according to broadcaster NHK.

More than 10,000 households on the island of Kyushu remained without power due to the storm at 9 am on Thursday.

Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways cancelled about 80 flights in total for Thursday, spokeswomen told AFP.

The South Korean government has asked the public to "refrain from going outside and remain safely inside until the typhoon passes", according to the interior ministry.

More than 40 people have been killed by flooding and landslides in South Korea during monsoon rains this year, including one incident where vehicles were trapped in an underground tunnel by flash floods.

South Korea also endured record-breaking rains and flooding last year that killed more than 11 people.

They included three people who were trapped in a Seoul basement apartment of the kind that became internationally known because of the Oscar-winning Korean film "Parasite."

The government said at the time the 2022 flooding was the heaviest rainfall since records began 115 years ago, blaming climate change for the extreme weather.--AFP