Taiwan battens down for Super Typhoon Kong-rey

AFP- Taiwan suspended work and classes on some outlying islands and fishers secured their boats Wednesday as authorities warned approaching Super Typhoon Kong-rey could trigger landslides.

Strong winds and heavy rains were expected to pound swathes of the island of 23 million people ahead of Kong-rey making landfall in the southeast on Thursday afternoon.

Kong-rey was packing maximum sustained wind speeds of 240 kilometres (150 miles) per hour as it neared Taiwan, the US Joint Typhoon Warning Center said in its latest update.

Fishers wearing raincoats tied down their boats in the harbour of Yilan county, southeast of Taipei, as rain fell.

“Of course I’m worried. All my assets are here,” a fisherman, who gave his name as Captain Chen, told AFP.

Kong-rey was expected to dump the heaviest rain over Taiwan’s eastern and northern coastal areas and the mountains in central and southern regions, said state forecaster the Central Weather Administration.

Yilan and the eastern county of Hualien were expected to be hardest hit, with accumulated rainfall from Tuesday to Friday reaching 800 millimetres to 1,200 millimetres (31 inches to 47 inches), forecaster Chang Chun-yao told AFP.

“Based on the projected path of the typhoon, we advise Yilan, Hualien, and Taitung to take precautions against potential landslides and debris flows in areas expected to receive heavy rainfall,” Chang said.

Classes and work were suspended on the two main islands of

Taitung county, where the typhoon looks set to make a direct hit based on the storm’s current trajectory.

Ferry services between Taiwan’s outlying island of Kinmen and the Chinese port city of Xiamen were also halted.

Taiwan is accustomed to frequent tropical storms from July to October, but Chang said it was unusual for such a powerful typhoon to hit the island this late in the year.

“It is very rare for a moderate or stronger typhoon to make landfall in late October. The last occurrence was the Typhoon Nock-ten in October 2004,” Chang told AFP.

Scientists have warned climate change is increasing the intensity of storms, leading to heavy rains, flash floods and strong gusts.

In July, Gaemi became the strongest typhoon to make landfall in Taiwan in eight years, killing at least 10 people, injuring hundreds and triggering widespread flooding in the southern seaport city of Kaohsiung.

That was followed in early October by Krathon, which killed at least four people and injured hundreds, as well as triggering mudslides, flooding and record-strong gusts.

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