



Philippines hunkers down as typhoon nears

From correspondents in Manila

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TYPHOON Mitag intensified as it churned towards the Philippines today, triggering mass evacuations, flight cancellations and heavy rains and flooding.

In the central Bicol region, Philippines' typhoon alley, people sought refuge in churches, schools and town halls as more than 50,000 people fled their homes ahead of the typhoon's expected arrival tomorrow.

Disaster officials said 200,000 people would be evacuated from Bicol, where volcanic mud can trigger lethal landslides.

Mitag is expected to cut through Bicol before passing north of Manila and into the South China Sea.

It is a category 2 typhoon with winds of 160km/h and gusts of up to 195km/h and is expected to intensify to a category 4 typhoon tomorrow.

About 50 sailors were missing in the South China Sea after a Philippine fishing boat capsized in rough waters near the Nansha Islands yesterday morning.

Nearly 30,000 people have already been affected by flooding from storm Hagibis, which hit the Philippines earlier this week killing 13 people and which is heading for southern Vietnam.

Eight domestic flights to and from the central Philippines were cancelled ahead of Mitag and over 800 passengers were stranded in Bicol after ships were barred from leaving port.

In Bulacan, a province north of Manila, about 40 houses were submerged after officials released water from the Angat Dam to prevent it overflowing.

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