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Cuba ready to meet threat of powerful hurricane Matthew

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The Cuban government has taken active measures to prepare for the impact of hurricane Matthew, a Category 4 storm, in its eastern regions.

An initial hurricane watch for the island's eastern areas shows the region could be hit by Matthew on Monday evening, the office of Civil Defense said on Sunday.

Winds with speeds up to 230 kmph and heavy rains are expected, potentially causing large-scale massive flooding and landslides, it said.

Cuban President Raul Castro arrived in the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba on Saturday to oversee the measures being taken in the six provinces where a weather alert has been declared.

This alert recalls hurricane Sandy in 2012, which was weaker than Matthew yet caused major damage to property and killed 11 people.

Castro said that Matthew is stronger and called for better preparation to protect human lives and economic resources, said the daily Granma, the most widely read newspaper in Cuba.

"This is a hurricane for which we must be prepared twice as well as we were for Sandy. That is why I am very satisfied to see that all the necessary measures have been adopted," he said.

Authorities have undertaken massive evacuations particularly in coastal areas while opening shelters and organizing volunteer teams to clean storm drains and gather food stocks.

"Numerous measures to protect the state's assets, as well as human lives, are being taken in these six provinces of the eastern part of the country," said the Civil Defense in a statement on Saturday.

The hurricane has previously been classified as a Category 5 one, the strongest of its kind, with winds reaching speeds of 260 kmph and then died down to a Category 4 one. Enditem

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