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Heavy Snow Causes Spate of Accidents

By Kim Rahn

Heavy snowfalls battered the country's central regions on Friday, forcing the closure of schools and some sections of expressways in Chungchong and North Kyongsang Provinces.

A total of 49 centimeters of snow was recorded at 4:00 p.m. in Taejon and Chungchong Province, the heaviest snowfall in March since the region's weather agency began forecasting in 1968.

Due to heavy snowfall in the Taejon area, the Ministry of Construction and Transportation temporarily shut down a section of the Kyongbu or the Seoul-Pusan Expressway while also closing down the Chungbu or the Chunchon-Taegu Expressway at 2:00 p.m.

It was the first time heavy snowfalls forced the closure of the two highways since they opened to traffic in 1970 and 1987, respectively.

The ministry said it shut down a 47.9 kilometer section of the Kyongbu Expressway from Mokchon, south of Chonan in South Chungchong Province to Shintanjin in Taejon.

More than 23 kilometers of the Chungbu Expressway from Ochang to Shintanjin was also completely closed to traffic.

The heavy snowfalls forced 466 schools in the Taejon area to close early for the day, officials said.

More than 2,500 kindergartens and elementary, middle and high schools in Taejon and North and South Chungchong provincial areas area will stay closed on Saturday.

Hundreds of facilities such as green houses were also destroyed, causing property damages worth more than 26 billion won.

The snow will continue until Saturday morning in Kangwon, North Kyongsang, Cholla Provinces and Cheju Island, the Korea Meteorological Administration said. Temperatures will also plummet to minus 8 to minus 1 degree Celsius nationwide, with minus 6 degrees in Seoul.

On Thursday, a total of 18.5 centimeters of snow fell in Seoul, marking the heaviest snowfall in March since the weather administration started forecasting in 1904. The previous record was 12.8 centimeters set in 1991.

As Korea Meteorological Administration had predicted only a light snowfall of about 1 to 5 cm, the unusually heavy snowfall, accompanied by thunder and lightning, caught many people off guard on their way home and work and created severe traffic congestion in key city areas.

Slippery roads caused car crashes, with more than 1,000 accidents alone in Seoul on Thursday night, and insurance companies had a rush of calls for help from drivers struggling with broken engines and car failure.

However, traffic was relatively light during the morning and evening rush hours as many people chose to use public transport instead of driving their cars. The traffic decreased by 70 percent, while subway trains were crowded with passengers, with many people late for work.



Cars are stranded in a street in Taejon, some 200km south of Seoul, as heavy snow hit the central part of the nation, Friday. Yonhap

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