

Japan tries to recover from 'horrendous' storms that left more than 200 dead



Tokyo, July 16 (RHC)-- Japan's death toll climbed to more than 200 after rains, floods, and landslides devastated parts of the country. High humidity, lack of water and electricity take a toll on the elderly. Volunteers and rescue workers in southwest Japan hoping to find those still missing from a week of torrential storms and landslides that have already killed at least 209 people.

"The critical 72 hours have passed, but we will continue our search believing there are still survivors." Mitsunari Imawaka, an official with Okayama prefecture told AFP news agency. The deluge, which dumped as much as 10 centimeters of rain per hour in the heaviest hit southwestern parts of the country, has left 240,000 without running water and displaced some two million people.

High temperatures and lack of electricity for thousands have hampered rescue missions and created a health risk for those who can't handle the sweltering humidity. Some survivors are suffering from dehydration, insomnia, and loss of appetite especially the elderly, and water and energy shortages at hospitals has forced some patients to be transferred to other hospitals and surgeries to be postponed.

While some try to clean up their weather-damaged homes, residents of the 700 destroyed homes are

being forced to stay in school gymnasiums doubling as emergency temporary shelters.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at a disaster response meeting recalled seeing "horrendous" damage during his visit to Kurashiki where a river had broken its bank and flooded the city. "After seeing that, I even feel more strongly about doing whatever it takes so that the people who were affected could live safely again as soon as possible," said Abe.

It's still unclear how long the cleanup across 29 prefectures will take. Organizations in the coastal city of Saka, Hiroshima are saying they're still in desperate need of help and supplies from the rains they weren't prepared to handle.

"The affected areas are in dire need of rescuers and financial assistance," Junji Ide, chief director of Lohas Minami Aso Tasukeai, an NGO of volunteers in Saka, told Al Jazeera. "We need all the help we can get. The situation is quite severe. In Saka, there are still 10 people missing. The municipalities and volunteer centers are playing catch-up. They weren't prepared for all of this. ... We need more resources here."

The weeklong rains and their effects have devastated Japan's agricultural and fishing sectors with some \$97.8 million in damages.

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