

Scenes of loss play out across Japan's western coastline after quake kills 92, dozens still missing

January 5 2024, by HIRO KOMAE, AYAKA MCGILL and YURI KAGEYAMA



A truck is stuck on a destroyed road in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

His face hidden under a humble straw hat, the man silently watched as several helmeted rescue workers carefully lifted from the rubble his wife's body, wrapped in blue plastic on a stretcher.

He wiped his weary face with a rag. His eyes were red.

This scene in the city of Suzu was tragically repeated across Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions on the western coastline of Japan after Monday's [7.6 magnitude](#) temblor that decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings.

The [death toll](#) stood at 92 as of early Friday.

Ishikawa officials said 55 of those who died were in the city of Wajima and 23 were in Suzu. The 13 others were reported in five neighboring towns. More than 460 people have been injured, at least 26 seriously.

Officials said 242 people still missing, releasing a list of names that has grown by the day. Many of them are elderly and from the hard-hit cities of Wajima and Suzu.

What exacerbated matters was people visiting to ring in the new year with their loved ones when the quake hit.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reinforced rescue operations with about 3,600 soldiers in addition to the initial 1,000. Their mission is to provide those affected with fresh water and hot meals, as well as set up bathing facilities for the 34,000 who lost their homes and are now staying at evacuation facilities.



A resident checks her destroyed house in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Although Japan is reputed for relatively reliable disaster relief, essential supplies such as water, food and blankets have been running short.

"All we got was a couple of rice balls," said elderly Yasuo Kobatake cupping his hand in a tiny ball to show how small the meal was. He has been staying with his wife at an elementary school, an impromptu evacuation center. He was only given a tiny paper cup, half-filled with water that "vanished in a sip."

When the earth trembled, Kobatake was about to wear his shoes to head out. He ran out of the house wearing just one sock. That first tremblor was followed by the main more destructive quake which flung him to the ground. A concrete wall came crashing down, barely missing him.

Kobatake can no longer access his destroyed house.

"So here I am with my wife sleeping beside all the others (taking shelter at the school). We talk to each other and we try to encourage each other," he said.



This aerial photo shows heavy equipment, left bottom, being unloaded from

landing crafts of Japanese Self Defense Force in the earthquake-hit city, Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Kobatake hoped help was on the way.

However, many roads have been blocked by landslides or suffered cracks because of the strong quake, making it difficult for trucks delivering water and food supplies to reach those in need. The hardest hit spots were on the Noto Peninsula, the center of the quake, connected by a narrow land strip to the rest of the main island of Honshu, making alternative routes scarce.

Snow is expected over the weekend, so finding those trapped under the rubble has become even more critical.

Three days after Monday's quake, rescuers are still pulling out people alive from under debris. But time is running out. Experts categorize the first 72 hours as crucial to finding survivors.

Authorities warned more quakes and tsunamis could follow, stressing extra caution over the coming few days. Plans are also underway to fly some evacuated people out to safer areas.



A person advances near some collapsed houses damaged by powerful earthquake in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae

Aftershocks continued to rock the coastal areas, near the epicenter in Noto, about 300 kilometers (185 miles) from Tokyo on the opposite coast, hit Monday.

The quake set off [tsunami warnings](#), followed by waves measuring more than 1 meter (3 feet) in some places. The warnings have since been lifted.

The usual pastoral landscape of Ishikawa was replaced by gray stretches of ash and charred walls, where a fire broke out in Wajima city.

Cars were perched crooked on roads scarred with deep giant cracks. Lopsided houses missing rooftop tiles sat sadly beside a home the quake flattened to the ground, reducing it to a pile of wood. Boats floated belly-up in the bay.

The first day of trading on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, usually a celebratory affair with the ringing of a big bell and throngs of kimono-clad women, was marked with a moment of silence, as people bowed their heads, to mourn the dead.



An evacuee from Monday's deadly earthquake cleans a pot at an evacuation center in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of

Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



This aerial photo shows a national road is blocked by landslides caused by earthquakes in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Rescue workers search collapsed houses damaged by powerful earthquake in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



A collapsed house damaged by powerful earthquake are seen in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



This aerial photo shows houses are collapsed by landslides caused by earthquakes in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A man stands in front of a fallen house caused by earthquakes in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



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A shop owner comes to see his burnt-out restaurant for the first time since a large fire caused by earthquakes in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



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Rescue workers check the area damaged by powerful earthquake in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



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Collapsed houses damaged by powerful earthquake are seen in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



A person calls on a mobile phone near a landslide triggered by powerful earthquake in Anamizu in the Noto peninsula facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. More soldiers have been ordered to bolster the rescue operations Thursday, providing those in need with drinking water, hot meals and setting up bathing facilities after a magnitude 7.6 quake hit Ishikawa Prefecture and nearby regions Monday. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae

"I would like to express my heartfelt prayers for the souls of those who lost their lives, and my deepest sympathies to all those suffering from the disaster," said Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki.

Japan is prone to earthquakes, with many fault lines and volcanoes. A massive [quake](#), tsunami and [nuclear disaster](#) in 2011 caused widespread damage in northeastern Japan.

So far, no major issues have been reported at nuclear plants following this week's earthquake and aftershocks.

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