

# Thousands evacuated as record rains pound northern Japan

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A house with collapsed foundations in Nikaho City, Akita prefecture.

Record heavy rain forced the evacuation of thousands of people across parts of northern Japan and killed at least two, as rivers burst their banks washing away bridges and cars, officials and media reports said Friday.

A rescuer is among the dead after the downpours in Yamagata and Akita prefectures on the main island of Honshu. Two other people, including another rescuer, are missing.

In Yamagata, where two rivers burst their banks, one police officer in his 20s who had been searching for a missing person was found "submerged" and later confirmed dead, a local police spokesman told AFP.

Another police officer also tasked with a search operation, remains unaccounted for, the spokesman said.

In northern Akita region, one body was also found, media reports said, with police trying to ascertain whether it was that of an 86-year-old man earlier reported missing.

A man in his 60s also remains missing after a landslide at roadworks in Akita's Yuzawa city, according to media.

Two parts of Yamagata prefecture recorded the most rain in 24 hours since records began in 1976, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said Friday.

Shinjo recorded 389 millimeters (15 inches) and Sakata 289 millimeters.

Footage showed raging brown waters sweeping away several vehicles including a police car.

Authorities issued evacuation advisories to more than 200,000 people, the fire and disaster management agency said.

At least 2,000 people evacuated to shelters in Yamagata as of Friday afternoon, public broadcaster NHK reported.

About 3,060 households were without power, 1,100 had no running water.

Some motorways were closed in the area and Shinkansen bullet trains suspended operations, government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters.

The military was sent to Yamagata to join rescue activities carried out by police and fire department officials, he said.

Japan's weather agency this week issued its highest emergency alert for heavy rain for Sakata and Yuza in Yamagata prefecture.

It later downgraded the warning by one notch in the country's five-tier warning system, but called for the public to stay vigilant for potential landslides and flooding.

The JMA forecasts 100 to 200 millimeters of rain per day will continue for the next three days.

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