

Japan quake claims 41 lives

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Tokyo: At least 41 people were killed in a strong earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter Scale that struck the island of Kyushu in southwestern Japan.

The quake on Saturday came after a sizable foreshock hit Kumamoto prefecture on Thursday. Thousands of people were injured due to the quakes and aftershocks in the region, Xinhua news agency reported.

Both the government and the weather agency here warned on Sunday that strong winds and heavy rain is expected to continue throughout the day. Japan's Meteorological Agency forecast aftershocks and landslides in the region.

They said the adverse weather conditions are likely to compound an already disastrous situation, which has seen widespread devastation throughout the prefecture and beyond.

The toll is expected to further rise as scores still remain trapped beneath rubble and debris and unaccounted for.

More than 2,000 people have received treatment in hospital for injuries, public broadcaster NHK said on Sunday.

About 90,000 people were evacuated to shelters overnight in hardest-hit Kumamoto prefecture.

The magnitude 7.3 quake on Saturday is now believed to be the main quake, according to the meteorological agency, with an earlier magnitude 6.5 quake hitting on Thursday night, which registered a maximum 7 on the Japanese seismic scale in some areas, now believed to be the main quake's foreshock.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday said he is being updated constantly by rescue services and the self-defence forces. Both of them continue to "work tirelessly on life-saving and rescue activities as there are still people unaccounted for."

"The victims spent a difficult night in shelters last night and we will make sure that enough food, medical care and water is made available," Abe said, adding that the government intends to improve the living conditions of the evacuees while ensuring their stay in emergency accommodation is not prolonged.

As noted by Abe, extensive damage had been caused by the multiple quakes in the region, with some 450,000 households left without power as the mercury dropped overnight and heavy wind and rain further added to the misery.

Japan's Infrastructure Minister Keiichi Ishii said he will implement measures to ensure that enough temporary housing units are built in response to local government's request to more suitably accommodate the growing number of those displaced by the quake.

Flights in and out of Kumamoto Airport have been suspended as has the Shinkansen bullet train service in the Kyushu area.

Major portions of arterial routes and expressways in the region have also been closed due to significant cracks in the road caused by the quakes or the roads crumbling.

- IANS