

‘This is hell’: 1,500 rescuers search mud for Japan missing



Some 1,500 rescuers combed through crumbled houses and buried roads in Japan on Monday in an enormous effort to find some 40 people believed still missing two days after a series of landslides tore through the mountain city of Aomori, the first in a string of deadly rain during the weekend. There have been 14 deaths and 24 missing, with the latest being a 75-year-old woman and her husband, who were swept away and the couple that lived there was unsuccessful.

“This is hell,” he said. By Monday, the number of rescuers at the site had risen to 1,500, officials said, and could increase. “We want to rescue as many victims as possible,” said a spokesman for the Japanese Red Cross, which is coordinating the rescue efforts. “The situation is unpredictable,” he said.

Blast at Thai factory kills one, mass evacuation underway

A massive explosion and a fire at a factory on the outskirts of Bangkok on Monday killed at least one person and wounded 29 others, according to officials. The blast occurred at around 10:30 am on Monday (09:00 GMT Sunday) at a farm and plastic pellet manufacturing factory just outside Bangkok near the city's main Suvarnabhumi international airport. It could be heard for kilometers and surveillance footage from a nearby house captured the bright flash and boom, followed by the damage to the home and the one next door from the shockwaves. “At first it felt like lightning. After that, I heard something dropping loudly, and for a while the house started shaking like there was an earthquake,” said Boonrat Nisarat, a resident. Local disaster authorities said 19 homes were damaged and the blast was still being fought in two hours after the explosion. Firefighters could be seen in photos from Thai media climbing through twisted metal wreckage of the Ming Da company's warehouse to get their hoses close enough to the flames as they fought to control the blaze. The charred body of the only fatality identified so far – a male volunteer rescue worker – lay face down among the wreckage. Other photos showed people being blown into the air by debris, with black smoke billowing over the area even hours later. The cause of the blast had not yet been determined.

Pope Francis recovering in hospital after intestinal surgery

Pope Francis was spending his first morning recovering in a Rome hospital following intestinal surgery. The Vatican has given scant details about the operation Sunday evening in Gemelli, a major Catholic hospital in the Italian capital. Pope Francis is staying in special 10th floor suite that the hospital keeps available for use by a pontiff, after Pope John Paul II stayed there several times for various medical problems. Twice daily updates on Pope Francis' condition are expected to be issued by the Vatican, with the first coming later Monday morning. The Vatican said late Sunday that Francis, 88, responded well to the surgery on the lower part of his colon. Francis had developed a diverticular abscess, or swelling, of the sigmoid portion of the large intestine. The Vatican has said the surgery was planned, although it only announced the hospitalization after Francis had declined his doctors' advice. Doctors not connected to the pope's hospitalization have said it is common to perform a resection of the affected part of the bowel in such cases. But the Vatican didn't immediately describe what the surgery entailed or say how long it lasted. Recovery from such surgery usually requires several days in the hospital.

Miami collapse: Remaining structure demolished over safety fears

The remaining section of a partially collapsed apartment block near Miami has been demolished over safety fears, officials said on Tuesday. On Sunday night, explosive charges were used to bring down the last standing part of Champlain Towers South, which had been evacuated. On 24 June, part of the block suddenly collapsed. Twenty-four people were known to have died and 121 are still missing. Construction workers searched for victims within a few hours of the collapse. They are now hoping to be able to get into the apartment block's underground parking, which they could not access safely by foot and got a crane to place a crane and close their windows until at least two hours after the demolition. No survivors have been pulled from the rubble of the site but since the first few hours after the structure's collapse. Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and the county's chief of public safety, “planned” the demolition operation was brought forward after concerns were raised over the approaching Tropical Storm Dorian, which could reach Florida on Tuesday. On Sunday, the tower's Mayor Charles Buckett said there was a danger that strong winds could bring down additional debris and endanger the lives of nearby residents. He said demolition experts would be able to control how the structure fell, and that the explosion could “potentially open a third of the pile [of rubble]” for emergency workers to access. The existing public marketplace, which is covered with a tarp, was covered with a tarp and debris caused by the collapse. While another building in the area was evacuated, nearby residents were allowed to stay in their homes and close their windows until at least two hours after the demolition. Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and the county's chief of public safety, “planned” the demolition operation was brought forward after concerns were raised over the approaching Tropical Storm Dorian, which could reach Florida on Tuesday. On Sunday, the tower's Mayor Charles Buckett said there was a danger that strong winds could bring down additional debris and endanger the lives of nearby residents. He said demolition experts would be able to control how the structure fell, and that the explosion could “potentially open a third of the pile [of rubble]” for emergency workers to access. The existing public marketplace, which is covered with a tarp, was covered with a tarp and debris caused by the collapse. While another building in the area was evacuated, nearby residents were allowed to stay in their homes and close their windows until at least two hours after the demolition. No survivors have been pulled from the rubble of the site but since the first few hours after the structure's collapse.



UK set to remove final COVID curbs, despite delta variant surge

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce a further relaxation in coronavirus restrictions in England later on Monday, despite a surge in daily cases linked to the Delta variant, saying people must learn to live with the virus and “exercise judgement” as they go about their daily lives. Johnson is expected to move ahead with the final stage of the long-term plan to get lockdown and “re-open” people's lives, which he expects to announce at a press conference on Monday. Step into effect on July 19 will mean the removal of mask-wearing rules, the end of social distancing and the return of large-scale events. “Thanks to the successful rollout of our vaccination programme, we are progressing cautiously through our roadmap,” Johnson said in a statement ahead of the announcement on Sunday. “Today we will set out how we can restore people's freedoms, when we reach step 4.” “But I must stress that the pandemic is not over and that cases will continue to rise over the coming weeks, so we begin to learn to live with this virus, we must all continue to carefully manage the risks from COVID and exercise judgement when going about our lives.” The move is to relax the rules on masks and social distancing, which have been in place since the start of the pandemic. The number of daily cases reached 24,468 on Sunday with 15 deaths. As of July 4, more than 78 million doses of the vaccine had been administered across the UK, with 14.4 percent of adults receiving two doses, the government said.

Indonesia faces oxygen crisis amid worsening Covid surge

Indonesia's government has ordered producers to prioritize medical oxygen amid a Covid surge and a shortage of oxygen in some parts of the country. Hospitals say they have almost exhausted supplies, with one reporting that 43 patients died as a result of oxygen shortages. Indonesia is recording more than 2,000 new cases every day. Increased travel and the high death toll have exacerbated the crisis. Indonesia has had the worst Covid outbreak in South East Asia, with about 2.1 million positive cases and more than 60,000 deaths so far. However, experts warn that the overall numbers are potentially much higher because of severely inadequate testing outside the capital Jakarta. A lockdown was announced in the country's third largest city, Surabaya, as well as in the worst-hit island of Sumatra. A health official said that Monday, two hospitals in the city of Bandung announced that they had run out of oxygen, and had to expect new patients seeking emergency treatment. Over the weekend, emergency services and intensive care units at public hospitals in the cities of Bandung, Surakarta, and Pekanbaru said they were struggling with an influx of people seeking admission with some having to turn away patients. Others have set up tents outside.

