

Landslide warnings as Japan digs through rain devastation

Desperate relatives braced for bad news on Monday as rescuers dug through landslides in the wake of severe floods that have killed more than 100 people and left swathes of central and western Japan under water.

With the toll mounting, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe cancelled a four-country foreign trip, the government's top spokesman said. Abe had been expected to visit Belgium, France, Saudi Arabia and Egypt from Wednesday.

As the floods receded, emergency workers reached previously cut-off places where authorities fear they could find more bodies in the wreckage of homes devastated by rivers of mud and debris.

"I have asked my family to prepare for the worst," said Kosuke Kiyohara, 38, as he waited for word of his sister and her two young sons.

"I can't reach her phone," he told *AFP*, sitting across from a house that had been ripped apart and tossed on its side by a huge landslide.

Rescue workers said it was still possible that survivors could be found, but acknowledged the odds were getting longer.

"It has been three days... It's possible that survivors will be found, but as the days pass the likelihood becomes slimmer,



At the end of last week rivers engorged by more than a metre (three feet) as rain burst their banks, engulfing entire villages and forcing people on to rooftops to await evacuation by helicopter.

Hillsides gave way under the weight of water, with deadly landslides crushing wooden houses and erasing roads.

The government said at least 103 people had been killed, and with many people still missing, the tally was expected to rise further.

Search for survivors

Government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said 73,000 police, firemen and troops were taking part in the rescue effort, with 700 helicopters deployed to help.

In Kumano, soldiers and other emergency workers were using diggers to clear crushed cars and mangled homes and chainsaws to cut up tree trunks.

But they were moving carefully, looking as they went for survivors, or the remains of those killed in the disaster.