

Japan struggles with flood woes

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Small comfort: A woman cleaning some of her belongings after her home was damaged in the floods in Mabi. — AFP



Devastating loss: A man comforting his friend as they survey the ruins of homes in Uwajima, Ehime prefecture. — AP



Holding out hope: Firefighters using rescue dogs to search for missing people in Kumano town, Hiroshima prefecture. — AP

Survivors face health risks as search for missing people goes on

KURASHIKI: Japan struggled to restore utilities after its worst weather disaster in 36 years killed at least 155 people, with survivors facing health risks from broiling temperatures and a lack of water, while rescuers kept up a grim search for victims.

Torrential rain unleashed floods and landslides in western Japan last week, bringing death and destruction, especially to neighbourhoods built decades ago near steep slopes.

About 67 people were missing, the government said yesterday.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe cancelled an overseas trip to cope with the disaster, which at one point forced several million people from

with temperatures hitting 33°C in some of the hardest hit areas such as the city of Kurashiki.

“There have been requests to set up air-conditioners due to rising temperatures, and at the same time we need to restore lifelines,” Finance Minister Taro Aso said.

Stunned survivors recounted narrow escapes.

“It was close. If we had been five minutes later, we would not have made it,” said Yusuke Suwa, who fled by car with his wife early on Saturday when an evacuation order came after midnight.

“It was dark and we could not see clearly what was happening, although we knew water was run-

after a levee crumbled under the force of the torrent.

The government has set aside 70 billion yen (RM2.5bil) in infrastructure funds with 350 billion yen (RM12.7bil) in reserve, Aso said, adding that an extra budget would be considered if needed.

Japan issues weather warnings early, but its dense population means that almost every bit of usable land, including some flood plains, is built on in the mostly mountainous country, leaving it prone to disasters.

Some residents of Mabi had shrugged off the warnings, given the area’s history of floods.

“We had evacuation orders before and nothing happened, so I just

boat had to pluck them from the second floor of their house, where they had taken refuge.

Most of the deaths in Hiroshima, one of the hardest hit prefectures, were from landslides in areas where homes had been built up against steep slopes starting in the 1970s, said Takashi Tsuchida, a civil engineering professor at Hiroshima University. Though the weather has cleared up, the disaster goes on.

A new evacuation order went out yesterday in a part of Hiroshima after a river blocked by debris overflowed its banks, affecting 23,000 people.

Another storm, Typhoon Maria, was bearing down on outlying