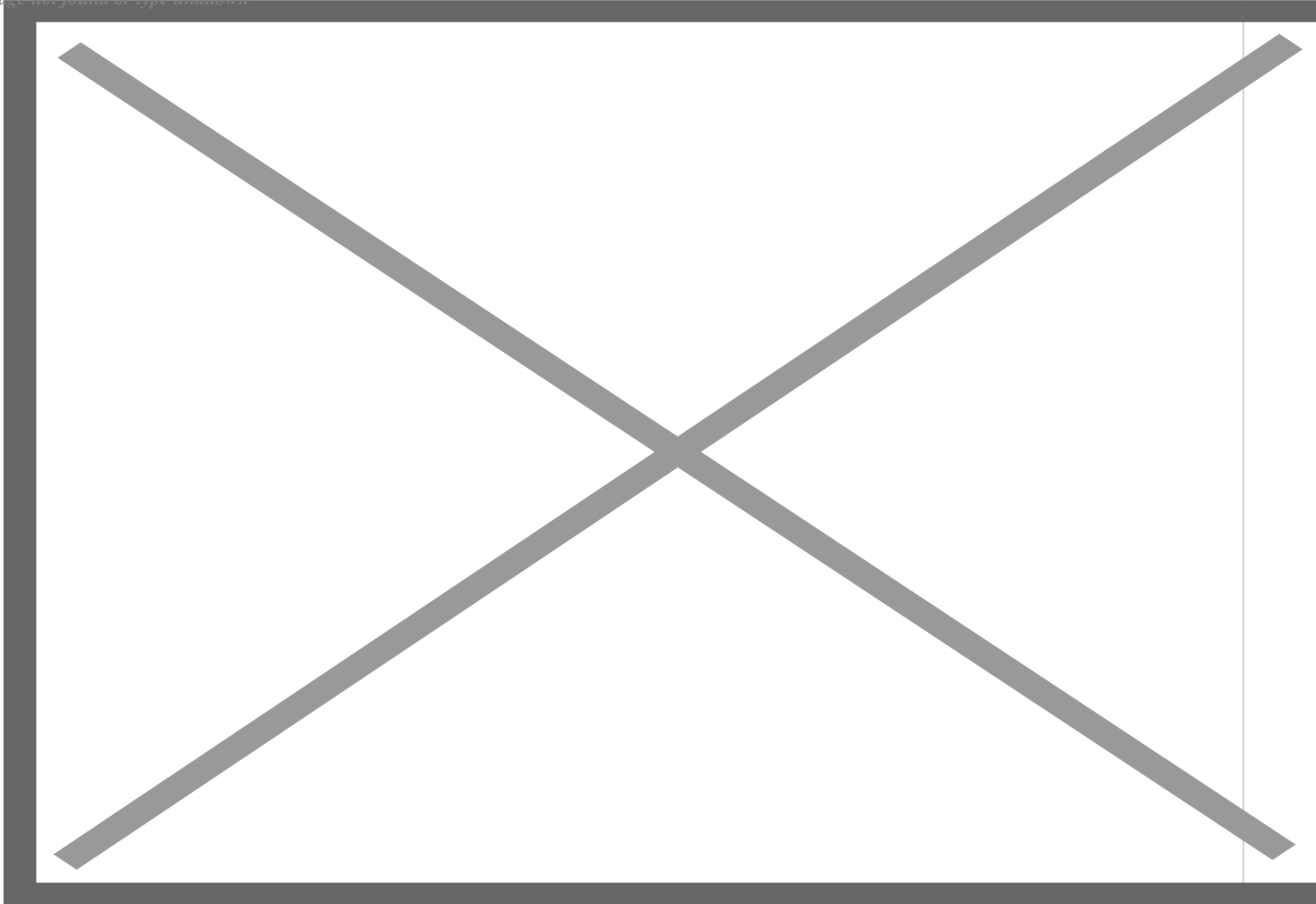


Rescuers search mud for missing in Japan

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Firefighters conduct search and rescue operations at a mudslide site in Atami. Some 1,500 people are combing the mud for survivors [Shizuoka City Fire Department - Fire and Disaster Management Agency via Reuters]

Tokyo, July 5 (RHC)-- Some 1,500 rescuers combed through crumbled houses and buried roads in Japan on Monday in an enormous effort to find some 80 people believed still missing two days after a series of landslides tore through the seaside city of Atami, not far from Tokyo.

Torrential rain during the weekend – more than a usual July’s worth in 24 hours some areas – touched off a succession of landslides, sending torrents of mud and rock through the streets of the city which is situated 90 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of Tokyo. Three people have been confirmed dead.

“My mother is still missing,” one man told NHK public television. “I never imagined something like this could happen here.” One 75-year-old evacuee said the house across from his had been swept away and the couple that lived there was unaccounted for. “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 ... buried in the rubble as soon as possible,” Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters, adding that police, firefighters and members of the military were doing all they could to aid the search.

Japan’s Kyodo news agency said the number of missing stood at 80 by about noon. Earlier, spokesperson Hiroki Onuma told the Reuters news agency that 113 people were believed to be missing. “We’re in touch with various groups and pushing forward with the searches,” Onuma said.

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