

Tokyo suffers under worst heatwave in Japan since 1875

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A woman walks by a cooling mist spot in Tokyo as Japan's government issued a warning for possible power crunch in the capital area [Eugene Hoshiko/ AP]

Tokyo, June 28 (RHC)-- Japan is baking under scorching heat as temperatures in the country's capital, Tokyo, broke 150-year-old records for June.

A high of 34 degrees Celcius (93 Fahrenheit) was predicted for Tokyo on Tuesday, after three successive days of temperatures topping 35 Celcius (95 Fahrenheit) – the worst streak of hot weather in June since records began in 1875.

More than 250 people were taken to hospitals in Tokyo on Saturday and Sunday for treatment of heat stroke, according to the Mainichi newspaper. Another 13 had been hospitalised by 9 am local time on Tuesday (00:00 GMT), Fuji News Network said.

Much of Japan would normally be experiencing the rainy season at this time of year, but the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) on Monday declared the season over in the Kanto region, home to Tokyo, and the neighbouring Koshin area. It was the earliest end to the season since records began in 1951 – a full 22 days earlier than usual.

The JMA also declared an end to the rainy season in central Japan's Tokai and part of southern Kyushu, saying this year's rainy season in these areas and Kanto-Koshin was the shortest on record.

Amid the extreme heat, the Japanese government has issued a warning about a power crunch, with authorities asking consumers in the Tokyo area on Tuesday to conserve electricity for a second day. But they added that residents should do what was needed to stay cool and avoid heatstroke.

“Apparently there are some elderly people who have turned off their air conditioners because we are asking people to save energy, but please – it's this hot – don't hesitate about cooling off,” trade and industry minister Koichi Hagiuda told a news conference.

The heatwave comes less than two weeks before a national election in which prices, including the cost of electricity, are among key issues picked by voters in opinion polls that show slipping approval rates for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government.

The Kishida cabinet's approval was 50 percent in a voter survey conducted by public broadcaster NHK on June 24-26, down from 55 percent last week.

Natsuo Yamaguchi, head of the junior partner in Kishida's coalition government, warned on Monday in a campaign speech that citizens were risking heatstroke by trying to economise on power. “What I would really like is for the government to tell power companies to lower costs,” he was quoted by the Kyodo news agency as saying.

“I'd like to contact the prime minister, who's currently visiting Europe,” he added – a reference to Kishida's attendance at the G7 summit, a significant departure from usual practice as it puts the premier out of the country during an election campaign period.

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