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Dozens killed in powerful Ishikawa quake

Aftershocks and damaged roads hamper rescue operations amid race to find survivors

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TOKYO/KANAZAWA, ISHIKAWA PREF.
STAFF WRITERS

Authorities in Japan on Tuesday rushed to assess the damage the day after a powerful earthquake left at least 48 dead, led to landslides and the collapse of multiple buildings, sparked a large-scale fire in a popular tourist area, and triggered a tsunami warning for the length of the nation's west coast.

Continuing aftershocks, rubble on roadways and damaged roads were hampering rescue operations amid a race to find survivors.

Footage taken by the broadcaster NHK on Tuesday morning showed a seven-story building toppled over sideways and smoke rising in a central area of Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, known for its morning market, where a large blaze broke out Monday.

Images on social media showed cars, houses and bridges in Ishikawa wobbling violently as terrified people cowered in shops and train stations. Houses collapsed and huge cracks appeared in roads while others were hit by landslides.

Fires engulfed over 200 structures in the central Wajima area but have been brought under control, Ishikawa officials said.

Ishikawa Gov. Hiroshi Hase wrote on X that roads have been cut in widespread areas by landslides or cracking, while in the port of Suwa, "multiple" vessels had capsized.

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake, which at its center was rated the highest-level 7 on Japan's *shindo* intensity scale, struck Ishikawa Prefecture's Noto Peninsula on Monday afternoon, as the nation was marking New Year's Day — when families generally gather at home and many shops are closed.

The quake was centered around 30 kilometers east-northeast of Wajima with a provisional depth of 16 km.

The quake triggered a rare major tsunami warning and forecasts that waves of up to 5 meters could strike, but by 10 a.m. Tuesday, all warnings and advisories had been lifted. The highest tsunami recorded was said to be over 1.2 meters at Wajima Port in Ishikawa.

The Meteorological Agency said on Tuesday that while waves are not likely to grow larger, sea level changes were still being

observed, encouraging people in areas that had been under tsunami warnings to refrain from marine-based work.

While fears of a major tsunami — reminiscent of the deadly waves that struck Japan's northeast coast following the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster in March 2011 — did not materialize, the quake itself appears to have caused widespread damage, with the death toll likely to rise as rescuers move through the disaster area.

"It was such a powerful jolt," said Tsugumasa Mihara, 73, as he lined up with hundreds of others for water in the shellshocked town of Shika.

"What a terrible way to start the year."

In the city of Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture, the quake was fairly strong, but the damage was not widespread aside from a residential area in the Tagami-shinmachi district, where houses at the top of a hill were hit by a landslide — leading three to collapse. No deaths were reported due to the landslide. The area was also cut off from water and gas services.

Hiroko Aoki, a woman in her 70s from the area, recalled that she felt a strong jolt when she was reaching out to drink from a cup, followed by an even stronger shaking. She quickly went outside after the shaking subsided to check the situation, discovering that her windows were shattered. She was then prompted by the authorities to evacuate.

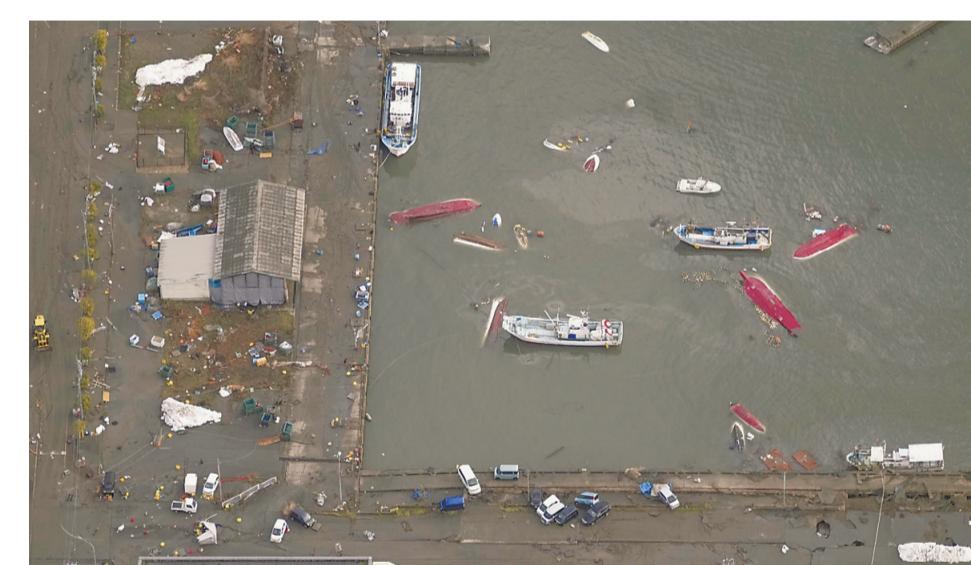
"I was really scared," Aoki said, recalling that there were around 40 people at an elementary school that became an evacuation site. "Since it's a gym, it was very cold and there was no radio or TV, so I had no idea what was going on."

Toshiko Oshima, 75, also a resident who is currently taking refuge at Kanazawa Tagami Community Center, told The Japan Times that she knew a family member who lived in one of the houses that had collapsed.

The family member — an architect — felt a shaking he had "never felt before." Acting on instinct, he scooped up his dog and fled the house along with his wife, holding a key in his hand. When he took a quick glance back, the house "had already disappeared," Oshima said.

"He was so caring, reaching out to others and letting everyone know of the situation even though he is a victim. He probably did

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Top: A collapsed building in Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, on Tuesday following an earthquake a day earlier, which caused widespread damage in the prefecture. Above left: Smoke rises from the site of a fire in Wajima on Tuesday. Above right: Capsized vessels in the harbor in Suwa, Ishikawa Prefecture, on Tuesday. KYODO

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Who might succeed Kishida in 2024?

Several names emerge as potential candidates should the ax fall

Focus

ERIC JOHNSTON
STAFF WRITER

As 2024 begins, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party find themselves grappling with the political fallout of an investigation by Tokyo prosecutors into allegations of unrecorded kickbacks to lawmakers from the sale of fundraising party tickets. The investigation, though centered on members of the faction once led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has raised questions about Kishida's own future.

A number of potential rivals to Kishida have emerged, with recent media polls ranking who the public wants to see as the next prime minister, despite the fact that it is the LDP that will make that choice, with the next general election not required until 2025. Here



are some of the names mentioned as possible successors should the ax fall on Kishida.

Shigeru Ishiba

Former LDP Secretary-General and Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who led his own smaller faction until he dissolved it in December 2021 and it became an informal group of supporters, has been a top choice to replace Kishida in a number of polls.

The 12-term Lower House member from Tottori Prefecture has run for LDP president four times — in 2008, 2012, 2018 and 2020. He came closest to winning the position in 2012, finishing in the top position during the first round of voting, where he gained a lot of support from local LDP chapters.

But Ishiba lost the 2012 runoff election to Abe in a contest where only LDP members of the Diet — Japan's parliament — cast votes. In the 2018 presidential election, where Diet members and non-Diet LDP members could vote, the results were more lopsided. Abe won more than twice the number of votes as Ishiba overall, including more than four times the number of votes among Diet members.

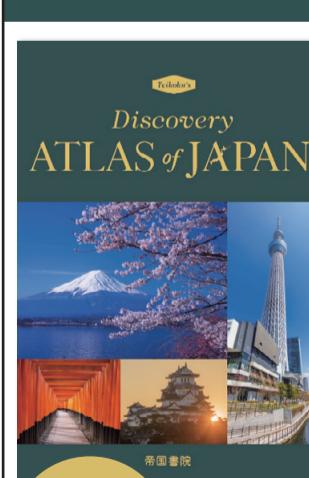
Abe and Ishiba had long been rivals, and with the political funds kickback scandal now engulfing the Abe faction, Ishiba has been appearing regularly in media outlets to

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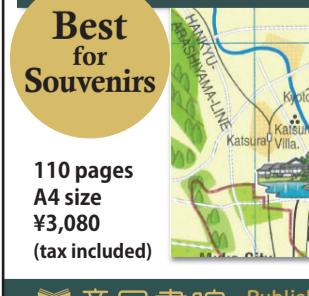
Unpacking the LDP's expected messy leadership race

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