

Japan snowfall leaves thousands without power, vehicles stranded

- Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga called an emergency meeting after 10,000 households lost electricity and 1,000 vehicles got stuck on roads
- The heavy snowfall was centred on Niigata and Gunma prefectures, which have had about 2 metres of snow over three days



Trucks are stranded on a major road in Kitakami, Iwate Prefecture, after heavy snow in Japan. Photo: Kyodo

Heavy snowfall in central Japan and along the northern coast isolated communities and cut off power to about 10,000 households, prompting the government to call an emergency meeting on Thursday to address the fallout. The heavy snowfall was centred on Niigata and Gunma prefectures, which saw about 2 metres (6.6 feet) of snow over three days, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was set to attend the emergency meeting with relevant ministries and agencies on Thursday afternoon, his office said.

The snow has disrupted multiple road and train services since Wednesday and is expected to continue to fall heavily through Friday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. It warned of further traffic disruptions and slippery roads, as well as avalanches.

About 1,000 vehicles were stranded overnight on highways.

According to the police, some 300 vehicles were stranded at one point on the Joshinetsu expressway, which connects Niigata and Gunma prefectures, after a truck became unable to move due to the snow on Wednesday night. The gridlock lasted until around 10 am on Thursday.

In Niigata Prefecture, a line of vehicles stretched for about 15km on the Kanetsu expressway. The congestion was caused after a trailer got stuck in the snow near an interchange in the city of Minamiuonuma on Wednesday night.

One driver told broadcaster NHK that he and his colleague in the car had been stranded in heavy snow for nine hours.

“The problem is we cannot go to toilet,” he told NHK.



People try to remove snow from the roof of a house in Minakami, Gunma Prefecture. Photo: Kyodo

Some areas in the country have seen record levels of snow.

Minakami in Gunma Prefecture had about 190cm over a 48-hour period to Thursday morning, while Yuzawa in Niigata Prefecture saw over 180cm and the city of Uonuma had 88cm.

Additional reporting by Reuters, DPA

Source:

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3114310/japan-snowfall-leaves-thousands-without-power-vehicles-stranded>

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