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Floods in Far East See Volunteer Turnout

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Sailors in a boat on the Amur River evacuating people from a flooded village in the Khabarovsk region on Sunday.

Up to 100,000 people in Russia's Far East face evacuation after one of the worst floods in history swept up five different regions, causing significant damage to people's homes and public infrastructure.

The flood erupted after weeks of heavy rain filled the water reservoirs feeding two hydroelectric power plants in the Amur and Khabarovsk regions, triggering fears that the natural disaster would have similar consequences to the 2012 floods in the Krasnodar region, which claimed the lives of 171 people and affected tens of thousands.

The state-run weather center has warned that weather conditions will likely worsen by next weekend, when more rain is expected to increase the water level in Khabarovsk to more than 7 meters. On Monday, it stood at 6.5 meters.

Yet despite the Amur River's water level being the highest in more than a century and the

engulfment of at least 90 villages in the Amur region and more than 10 houses in the Khabarovsk region, no casualties have been reported so far.

On Saturday, President Vladimir Putin spoke to top government officials, including Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov and Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova, via video conference from Sochi to discuss the crisis, which the ministers were already dealing with on the ground.

And volunteers joined the government effort in fighting the disaster, with many in the Khabarovsk region using social networks to form groups and coordinate efforts.

At least 50 people, most of them young, spent Monday building dams and doing other work in the city of Khabarovsk.

"Don't worry, everything is fine here with us," Anton Plusnin, a coordinator of a local group of volunteers, said by phone. "I can't say that the situation is critical yet."

The government has provided volunteers with sandbags for building walls to protect against flooding, as well as raincoats, hot tea and sandwiches. The acting governor of the Khabarovsk region, Vyacheslav Shport, visited volunteers building a dam around a local kindergarten on Monday.

And in another display of altruism, rescuers in the Amur region airlifted two adult brown bears from a flooded resort near the region's capital. The bears were given tranquilizer shots to calm them down before being transferred to a safer spot.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, said Sunday that local churches had registered an increased flow of people wishing to convert to Orthodox Christianity following the floods.

"In the midst of all this water destroying everything, there is also water that creates something new with God's grace. In the toughest of times, our people, by taking communion with this water, find hope and salvation," Patriarch Kirill said after a church service in the northern town of Solovki on Sunday.

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