



Tremor kills 800 in Algeria

Nearly 6,000 wounded, cities lie ravaged

REUTERS, Rouiba
Rescue workers dug into mounds of rubble Thursday in hopes of finding survivors of an earthquake in the Algerian capital and nearby towns that killed almost 800 people and injured nearly 6,000.

Measuring 6.7 on the open-ended Richter scale, the quake sent terrified residents running into the streets Wednesday evening in Algiers and towns to the east, along the populous Mediterranean coastal strip.

The tremor, felt as far away as Spain, was Algeria's worst in more than 20 years.

"It's an apocalyptic sight," said a radio reporter in Reghaia, east of Algiers. "One building with 10 floors and 100 apartments has

collapsed. Just this morning 30 bodies have been found. ... Families have lost everything down to their last shirt."

Hospitals in the capital and hardest-hit cities were finding it almost impossible to cope, medical staff said. In the worst affected province, Boumerdes, bodies were piled up outside hospitals and patients were treated in the open air.

State media said there were at least 770 dead and more than 5,600 injured. In Algiers at least 57 buildings were destroyed, among them the Training Center for the National Sporting Elite.

One of the most stricken places was Rouiba, a relatively prosperous city some 20 miles from the eastern edge of Algiers, where one building

after another was reduced to rubble.

"I have never seen such a disaster in my life. Everything has collapsed," said Yazid Khelfaoui, whose mother was killed. The rubble of his apartment building was all around him.

The earth shook at 7:44pm local time, when many families were gathered at home for dinner.

Algerian television showed dozens of bodies lined up under sheets and blankets, some clearly children. "There were so many wounded, we couldn't count them," one harassed doctor said.

In Boumerdes city on the coast, media spoke of people jumping from windows. State television said a small hospital had collapsed

there. In the town of Meftah, a 66-year-old woman died jumping from a balcony, the official APS news agency said.

"It's a tragic moment," Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia told state radio. "It's a misfortune that hits the whole of Algeria."

He said security forces were on alert to stop looting in a country ravaged by a decade of violence by Islamist rebels. The strife has cost more than 100,000 lives and burdened an economy potentially wealthy from natural gas and oil exports.

200 Terrible Aftershocks
Some 200 aftershocks hit northern Algeria in the first two hours after the quake and authorities said more would follow.

At Algiers' Mustapha hospital, families gathered to inquire about loved ones. Police forced back a growing crowd.

"I want to see my brother. I want to know if he is dead or still alive. Please let me inside," said a weeping Ahmed, 40, who had come to Algiers from Rouiba.

Algerian television showed President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, visibly moved, holding the hands of a middle-aged woman in hospital whose face and lips were shaking uncontrollably.

At the national sports center, a three-story building, at least four people died -- a Romanian gymnastics coach, a national swimmer.

PHOTO: AFP
Residents and rescuers search the debris yesterday after a powerful earthquake hit the Algiers region. About 800 people were killed and nearly 6,000 injured with the number of casualties set to rise further.

Dhaka shocked at quake

BSS, Dhaka
President Iajuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia have expressed their profound shock at the loss of lives and damages of properties caused by earthquake in Algeria.

The President in his message to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika expressed condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families. He also prayed for peace of the departed souls.

The Prime Minister in her message to Ali Benflis, Chief of Government of the Republic of Algeria also expressed her shock at the loss of lives in the earthquake.

Reshuffle sheds 7 ministers

Portfolios of 11 changed, BJP and IOJ left in the cold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday dropped seven ministers and changed portfolios of another 11 in the first major reshuffle of the council of 60 ministers.

With the resignation of three cabinet ministers and four state ministers, the council has been trimmed to a 53-member body. Yesterday's shake-up also reallocated portfolios of three cabinet

ministers, five state ministers and three deputy ministers.

The prime minister did not include any new face in the cabinet, although speculations were rife that some BNP stalwarts and leaders of the two alliance partners -- the Bangladesh Jatiya Party and the Islami Oikya Jote -- would come in.

However, Khaleda did not change the status of any ministers

whose portfolios have been changed. On March 11 last year, she brought minor changes to portfolios of four ministers.

The three ministers, dropped from the cabinet, are Water Resources Minister Engineer LK Siddiqi, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeque Hossain Khoka and Minister without portfolio Harunar Rashid Khan Monno.

The four state ministers the

prime minister shed are State Minister for Commerce Barkatullah Bulu, State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, State Minister for Post and Telecommunications Ahsanul Haque Mollah and State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Redwan Ahmed.

Barkatullah Bulu was appointed advisor to the commerce ministry

Dhaka, Delhi to fix free trade framework

India asks Bangladesh to draw list of products

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Bangladesh and India will exchange commerce delegations to set a framework for free trade.

India has asked Bangladesh to prepare a list of 1,000-1,200 products which can be considered under the free trade regime,

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday on his return from New Delhi, ending a four-day tour. "Similarly, India will also draw a list of products."

Saifur said if a free trade agreement can be signed, Dhaka's trade gap with Delhi will reduce. But at the same time, Bangladesh has to

find new export products to reap the benefit.

India has made it clear that Bangladesh has every right to decide what it wants to do with its gas resource, he said.

Saifur and Indian Finance Minister Jaswant Singh discussed

LDCs to seek end to West's protectionism

NAZMUL AHSAN
Trade ministers from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) at their upcoming Dhaka meeting will demand eradication of protectionist regimes imposed by industrialised nations on imports from the poorer nations.

They will also raise their voice for withdrawal of restrictions on temporary movement of natural persons, moratorium on imposi-

tion of anti-dumping and countervailing duties for products originating from the LDCs by the developed countries.

The draft declaration of the meeting, scheduled for May 31 - June 1, also demands fair share in international trade and duty- and quota-free access of LDC products to developed countries with a relaxed rules of origin.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will

48-hr transport strike in south western region begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
A 48-hour transport strike in south-western region and greater Faridpur began at 6:00 am yesterday.

The south-western zone unit of the Road Transport Owners' and Workers' Association enforced the strike to realise its nine-point demand.

The demands include withdrawal of cases filed against transport owners and workers, reduction of price of petroleum products, formation of workers' welfare fund, construction of truck and bus terminals in all districts across the country, stoppage of toll collection

Tangail road crash kills 15

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail
At least 15 people were killed and five others injured in a road accident at Mirzapur on the Tangail-Dhaka highway yesterday.

Police and witnesses said, the accident occurred when a Rajshahi-bound cement-loaded truck from Dhaka overturned in front of the upazila health complex and fell into a roadside ditch at around 5:30 am.

Police said 13 people died on the spot while two others on way to Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital.

The injured were also admitted to the hospital.

All the victims were day-labourers and were returning to their home district Natore by the truck.

The fate of the driver could not be known till filing of this report at 7pm yesterday.

Local people helped police in rescue operation. The dead and the injured could not be identified.

In Faridpur, three others were injured when the microbus from Khulna fell into a roadside ditch at Parikkhitpur under Madhukhali upazila, 21 kilometres off Faridpur town yesterday afternoon, accord

One gets life term for rape

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi
The special court for Women and Children Repression Prevention in Rajshahi convicted a person for raping his neighbour's wife and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

The convict is Jagabandhu Dutt, son of Jadu Gopal Dutt of Deul village in Taland union of Tanore Upazila.

Nurun Nahar, special court judge, passed the judgement yesterday about five years after the incident.

Special Public Prosecutor of the

Crackdown on outlaws in 4 districts from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
Joint forces led by BDR will crack down on outlaws in Khulna, Jessore, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts from tomorrow, reliable sources said.

Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts have been identified as most crime-prone and outlaw-dominated areas of south-western region.

Army will be called in if BDR-led

