



Two women sit under tents erected inside a graveyard in Yogyakarta yesterday. Countries across the world dispatched aid for tens of thousands of earthquake victims in Indonesia as the United Nations issued an urgent call for field hospitals, medical supplies and tents. The death toll from the Indonesian earthquake reaches 5,700.

Survivors cry for aid

AFP, Bantul

Thousands of desperate Indonesian quake survivors were still waiting for aid yesterday as they prepared for a fourth night under makeshift tents, despite pledges help would come quickly.

The death toll from Saturday's powerful earthquake rose past 5,698 but the most urgent task was to get help to the remainder of the 200,000 displaced persons who had yet to receive medical aid or food.

As the world rallied by providing aid, emergency relief teams and cash pledges, the United Nations said the relief effort on Indonesia's main island of Java was largely under control -- but cautioned that problems remained.

Despite the ramped-up aid effort involving troops, volunteers and overseas medics, pockets of victims in the worst-hit areas south and east of the ancient city of Yogyakarta said they had not yet received badly-

needed supplies.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited survivors camping out near the damaged Prambanan Hindu temple complex early Tuesday and pledged that food and medical aid would reach them soon.

"We are giving priority to the victims -- those who are injured, the sick, those who need surgery and also refugees who lost their homes and other belongings," he told reporters at the compound, a Unesco heritage site.

"We are prioritising the medical treatments to save as many lives as possible," the president added later as he toured a makeshift camp in hard-hit Klaten district east of Yogyakarta.

Doctors at a Singapore army field hospital set up in a devastated rural area of Bantul, the district south of Yogyakarta, began receiving patients as medical relief efforts intensified.

"We have seen about 50 patients so far," said Major Adrian Tan.

"We're talking about fractures,

soft-tissue injuries after the rubble has fallen," he added, saying a few patients had suspected infections of their wounds.

The Indonesian army deployed at least 2,000 soldiers to assist with relief efforts, Army Chief General Joko Santoso said, while dozens of United States military doctors and nurses arrived in the area.

Australia ordered more than 80 disaster experts and medical personnel to the worst-hit areas, in what Foreign Minister Alexander Downer characterised as part of "a hugely expanded emergency response".

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) ferried in more than 40 tons of supplies, including emergency rations, tents, blankets, portable water treatment units and generators.

The UN set up a coordination centre at Yogyakarta airport to organise the flow of help.

But some victims grumbled that relief was too slow and too meagre.

In Klaten and Bantul districts, beggars

held cardboard boxes daubed with the words, "Asking for aid".

"If we don't, how do we get money?" asked Budi, 18, whose box was empty as he waited for donations with a handful of other young men.

"Yesterday we got 40,000 rupiah (4.35 US dollars)," which villagers spent on cooking oil and food, said Wawan, 28, adding that government aid of three packets of instant noodles per family was far from sufficient.

But the beggars slowed relief efforts as they put chairs, oil drums and stones in the road to slow drivers and ask for money.

A stream of aid trucks was caught in a major traffic jam stretching some 10km on the main highway, the Detikcom online news service reported.

Hospitals were anxiously awaiting the arrival of additional medical staff and supplies to treat the injured who overflowed from their wards, raising fears of the spread of disease in the wet and poor sanitary conditions.

Quake may awaken nearby volcano

AFP, Jakarta

Geologists warned yesterday that simmering Mount Merapi volcano could blow its top in the wake of the powerful quake that devastated swathes of Indonesia's main island of Java.

"Theoretically as well as statistically, there is a very large possibility that tectonic activities trigger or increase volcanic activities," said Syamsulrizal, who works at Indonesia's national vulcanology office.

Quake activity near a dormant volcano may "switch it on," while already active volcanoes could see more intense rumblings, said the head of the office's department for disaster risk evaluation.

Since Saturday's 6.3-magnitude earthquake, seismologists have noted increased flows of lava and heat clouds at Merapi, just north of the temblor's epicentre.

Iran ready to restart talks with EU-3

EU offer will be test for Tehran's real intentions

AFP, Putrajaya, Brussels

Iran is willing to restart immediately negotiations with the European Union over its nuclear enrichment programme, its Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said yesterday.

"I announce that Iran is ready to respond positively in resuming negotiations on Iran's nuclear enrichment program without any preconditions," he told a press conference at the end of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) talks here.

"I would like to announce our readiness to restart immediately negotiations with the EU Three."

Britain, France and Germany are currently putting together a package

of trade and other incentives they hope will coax Iran into agreeing to halt uranium enrichment -- work which can be extended to making nuclear weapons.

Mottaki however ruled out the prospect of negotiations with the United States, which suspects Iran is working secretly toward building its own nuclear weapons under cover of a civilian drive for atomic power.

"Because of the bad temperament of the Americans, for the time being we have suspended these direct talks which means that after changing of their behaviour we may consider again," he said.

Mottaki said earlier Tuesday that

the United States would not be able to launch military strikes on Iran over its nuclear programme -- which it insists is for peaceful purposes -- because it is overstretched on too many fronts.

Meanwhile, European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said yesterday that an EU offer aimed at persuading Iran to curb its atomic plans will "prove" Tehran's true intentions on enriching uranium.

The so-called EU-3 -- Britain, France and Germany, as well as Solana -- are preparing to make an offer to the Islamic republic offering trade and other incentives in return for guarantees over its nuclear programme.

Mobs torch homes as Timor violence rages

AP, Dili

Machete-wielding mobs torched homes and ransacked buildings yesterday as desperate residents scuffled over scarce food and the government showed the first signs of unravelling.

What started with sporadic clashes between former soldiers and government troops has spiralled into open gang warfare. Violence has engulfed the capital, killing at least 27 people and wounding 100 others in the past week.

Aid workers expressed frustration at the insecurity despite the presence of more than 1,300 foreign troops from Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia. The troops seemed unable to stop the machete-wielding gangs that have terrorized the capital.

President Xanana Gusmao said he was assuming "sole responsibility"

for the country's national security to "prevent violence and avoid further fatalities."

The announcement came shortly after Cabinet officials said the defence and interior ministers had been fired. Gusmao said the emergency measures would take effect immediately and be valid for 30 days.

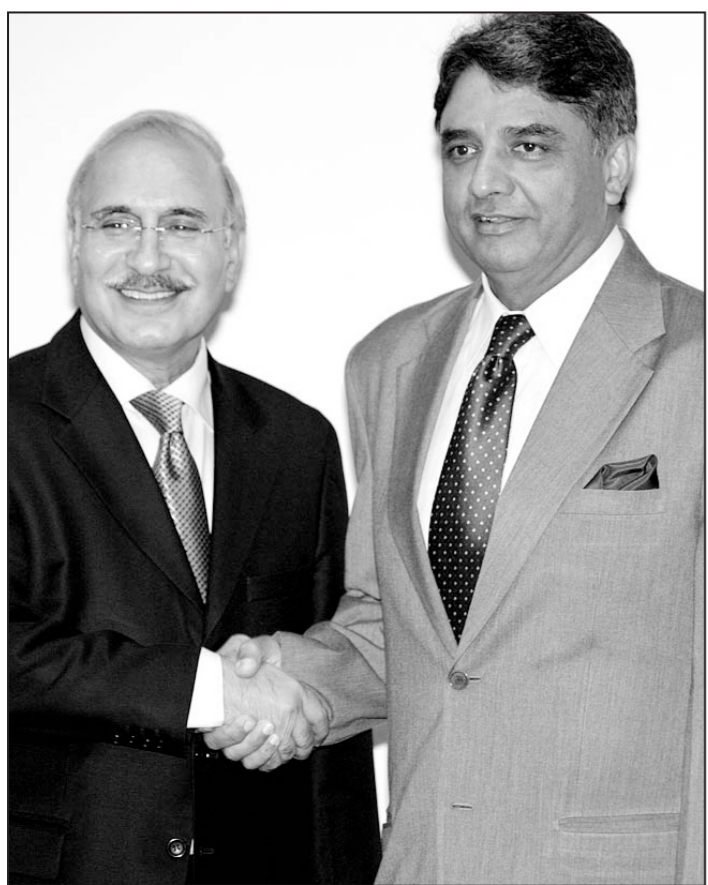
The East Timorese government said it was authorizing foreign troops to detain suspects for 72 hours, not just disarm them.

Earlier, Jose Ramos Horta, the country's Nobel peace prize-winning foreign minister, acknowledged the government had "failed miserably" to prevent the unrest, provoked by a military rebellion.

He directed the blame toward Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, though officials present at Tuesday's meeting told The Associated Press Alkatiri would be staying for the time being.



An Australian soldier looks for gang members who have set several houses on fire in Dili yesterday. Tensions run high as one of the world's poorest and tiniest countries has descended into chaos with gangs clashing in the streets using machetes, slingshots and bows and arrows.



Indian Home Secretary V K Duggal (R) shakes hands with Pakistani counterpart Syed Kamal Shah prior to a meeting in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan and India opened two-day talks on combating terrorism and drugs trafficking as well as modalities for exchange of civilian prisoners.

Gunmen kill 4 Afghan staff of aid group

AFP, Kabul

Armed men shot dead yesterday an Afghan man and three women working with international aid group ActionAid, police said.

The aid workers were on their way to a district office in northern Jawzjan province when armed men opened fire on their vehicle and killed them, provincial police chief Juma Khan Hamdard told AFP.

"Unidentified armed men today killed three women and one man working for the NGO ActionAid in Mingajik district," Hamdard said.

Police had appointed a delegation to go to the district to investigate, he said.

The group's Kabul-based programme manager, Jawed Yousufi, told AFP there had been an attack on an ActionAid vehicle in Jawzjan the but he did not know the condition of the staff.

There have been several attacks on aid workers in Afghanistan but they have been rare in the north of the country which is relatively free of the Taliban-linked violence that sees regular violence in the south.

The Islamist Taliban movement launched an insurgency after it was removed from government in November 2001 by a coalition led by the United States.

Israeli troops kill 7 in Gaza, WB raids

REUTERS, AFP, Gaza

Israeli soldiers killed at least seven Palestinian militants in overnight raids on Tuesday in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, fighting a gun battle inside Gaza for the first time since quitting the territory last year.

The brief operation just across the frontier in the northern Gaza Strip marked a new Israeli military response to the frequent Palestinian rocket launches at southern Israel.

Witnesses said Israeli commandos backed by a helicopter gunship killed four members of a Palestinian rocket squad as they were about to fire.

At least three of the dead were

identified as members of the militant Islamic Jihad group and the fourth man belonged to the Force 17 presidential guard, who witnesses said rushed to the scene with medics to offer aid.

"The fighters were firing rockets into Israel in retaliation for the continued Israeli crimes and the assassination of Abu Hamza al-Majzoub in Lebanon," an Islamic Jihad statement said, referring to a car bombing that killed a senior official of the group in south Lebanon on Friday.

An Israeli government source said at the time that Israel had nothing to do with the killing.

End violence or risk aid

Donors warn both Lanka and Tigers

AFP, Tokyo

Sri Lanka's foreign donors warned the government and Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday that their conflict was unwinnable and urged them to end mounting violence or risk losing international support.

Donors led by Japan pledged 4.5 billion dollars in 2003 as an incentive for the island to end three decades of ethnic conflict, but more than 600 people have died since December in defiance of a ceasefire.

Japan, the European Union, Norway and the United States called on both Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to "take

immediate steps to reverse the deteriorating situation and put the country back on the road to peace."

"The solutions to the problem cannot be brought through conflict -- the history of Sri Lanka shows that war is not winnable for either side and simply causes immense suffering to citizens," they said a statement after talks here.

"The international community remains committed to its supporting role agreed three years ago, but it turns to the government and the LTTE to deliver on their side of the bargain if war is to be avoided."

Yasushi Akashi, Japan's peace envoy to Sri Lanka, said the donors

wanted to employ a "carrot and stick" approach to jumpstart the peace process.

"Our message is clear," Akashi told AFP. "If they do a good thing, the international community will respond to it favourably and they can benefit. If they disturb the peace, we will respond severely."

Four previous attempts to broker peace have collapsed in Sri Lanka, where more than 60,000 people have died in the conflict since 1972.

Scandinavians monitoring the Norwegian-brokered 2002 ceasefire said more than half of the people killed since December have been civilians.