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Quake knocks industrial wind out of prosperous Gujarat

AFP, New Delhi
Industry in Gujarat, India's most prosperous state, will take months to recover from the damaging effects of an earthquake in which 20,000 people are feared to have died.

Although most of the large industries have withstood the shock of the earthquake, power and telecom lines have snapped resulting in a freeze in industrial production.

"It will also take a long time before the emotional scars heal and people get back to normal work," said K.K. Jain, president of the Federation of Indian Exporter's Organisation (FIEO).

Industry officials said the damage could dent India's exports by four to five per cent in the financial year ending March.

Tens of thousands of people have been rendered homeless in Gujarat and almost as many have lost relatives in the earthquake, which measured up to 7.9 on the Richter scale.

The state's famous diamond trade - one of India's main exports - is likely to suffer as a large number of skilled artisans who are migrants from other states are expected to leave Gujarat.

Officials said industries such as pharmaceuticals, garments and cotton would also be severely affected.

"Even though there has not been much damage to the major industrial units in Gujarat, the lives lost would impact the units as many employees would have been a victim of the tragedy," the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said in a statement.

CII said several corporate buildings had also been damaged.

Gujarat's business-friendly policies have attracted a number of multinational companies, drawn by an excellent road network, which exceeds 72,000 kilometres (45,000 miles), uninterrupted power and incentives.

They include big names such as Sumitomo, Matsushita, General

Electric, General Motors, Glaxo, Siemens, AT and T and Unilever.

Reliance Industries, which owns the country's largest petrochemical refinery in Jamnagar in Gujarat, said the unit was undamaged but production could only be resumed in phases.

Cargo traffic to the nearby Kandla port, which is one of India's main ports, has also been severely disrupted, displacing the movement of commodities such as rice, vegetable oil and chemicals.

Merchant ships from other countries coming in to India have reportedly not been able to offload cargo due to the partial shutdown of Kandla.



Japan's electronics giant Matsushita unveils the new 3-CCD digital video camcorder Digicam NV-MX2000 at the company's head office in Tokyo yesterday. The Digicam features a set of three 380,000-pixel CCDs on its image sensor and a 2.85-28.5mm/F1.6 Leica Digicam zoom lens equipped with an optical image stabiliser system. Matsushita will put it on the domestic market on February 1 with a price of 2,000 USD.



DCCI Director Matlur Rahman addresses the inaugural ceremony of the training course on "Building an Import & Export Business" organised by the DCCI Business Institute (DBI) with the technical and financial support of German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) Saturday. Concerned DCCI officials were also present on the occasion.

Satellite seen a tool to bridge digital divide

AFP, Kothmale, Sri Lanka
Broadcasters from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean ended a seminar on bridging the digital divide by winning technical support for their community efforts, organisers said Sunday.

A US non-governmental agency, Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA), agreed to allocate ground stations on a priority basis to UNESCO-supported networks of community radios, the seminar organisers said.

They said VITA will provide these community radio stations with earth stations to exchange up to 50 pages of information a day via low-orbiting satellites. The cost of the project was not immediately known.

UNESCO selected this rural farming region in central Sri Lanka for the seminar because a local radio has successfully used the Internet to take the worldwide web to the local farming community with impressive results.

The seminar won pledges from the United Nations Development Programme to give "policy and technical assistance" to community projects in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, East Timor, Bhutan and Pacific islands.

The Canadian International Development Agency and the International Development Research Centre of Canada also promised support to expand community multi-media centres, the UNESCO organisers of the seminar said.

India's software export tops \$4b in '00

BSS, United Nations
UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has acknowledge India's phenomenal success in the field of information technology (IT) and the giant strides the country has made in high-tech exports.

India's software exports, he says, exceeded 4 billion dollars last year, and are projected to reach a staggering 50 billion dollars by 2000.

With over a billion people, In-

dia's international reserves have risen more than threefold over the last six years.

Arguing that "our future depends on technology-especially new information technology," Annan says that unlike earlier technologies, this one does not require vast amounts of hardware financial capital or even energy.

"What it does require is brain power - the one commodity that is equally distributed among the world's peoples."

So, for a relatively small investment - mainly investment in basic education for girls and boys alike - we can bring all kinds of knowledge within reach of poor people, and enable poor countries to 'leapfrog' some of the long and painful stages of development that others had to go through," he adds.

Annan also cites the success story from a much smaller country - Costa Rica - whose rising 8.3 per cent growth rate last year has been

attributed to the development of its microchip industry, and whose high-tech products find a ready market in other countries.

In its World Employment Report 2001 released in Geneva Wednesday, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) said that given the different speed of diffusion in rich and poor countries, the information and communications technology revolution (ICT) is resulting in a widening global "digital divide."

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