

## Quake toll crosses 20,000

### Desperate search on for survivors

AP, Balakot

Villagers desperate to find survivors dug with bare hands yesterday through the debris of a collapsed school where children had been heard crying beneath the rubble after a massive earthquake. Pakistani officials said the death toll ranged between nearly 20,000 and 30,000.

Pakistan's president called Saturday's magnitude-7.7 earthquake the country's worst on record and appealed for urgent help, particularly cargo helicopters to reach remote areas. Rival India, which reported more than 465 dead, offered assistance.

"I have been informed by my department that more than 30,000 people have died in Kashmir," Tariq Mahmood, communications minister for the Himalayan region, told The Associated Press.

In mountainous Kashmir, the quake flattened dozens of villages and towns, crushing schools and mud-brick houses. The dead included 250



A Pakistani rescuer approaches the hand of a victim of the earthquake in the debris of the high-rise Margella Tower in Islamabad yesterday.

girls at a school razed to the ground and more than 200 Pakistani soldiers on duty in the Himalayas.

The quake was felt across a wide swath of South Asia from central Afghanistan to western Bangladesh. It swayed buildings in the capitals of three nations, with the damage spanning at least 250 miles from Jalalabad in Afghanistan to Srinagar in northern Indian territory. In Islamabad, a 10-story building collapsed.

"We are handling the worst disaster in Pakistan's history," chief army spokesman Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan said.

Officials said Balakot was one of the hardest-hit areas. Near the ruins of one collapsed school, at least a dozen bodies were strewn on the streets of the devastated village of about 30,000. At least 250 pupils were feared trapped inside the rubble of the four-story school.

Dozens of villagers, some with sledgehammers but many without tools, pulled at the debris and carried away bodies. Faizan Farooq, a 19-year-

old business administration student, said he had heard children under the rubble crying for help immediately after Saturday's disaster.

"Now there's no sign of life," he said Sunday. "We can't do this without the army's help. Nobody has come here to help us."

Helicopters and C-130 transport planes took troops and supplies to damaged areas Sunday. However, landslides and rain hindered rescue efforts, blocking roads to some remote areas.

There was no sign of government help in Balakot, in the North West Frontier Province about 60 miles north of Islamabad. The quake leveled the village's main bazaar, crushing shoppers and strewn gas cylinders, bricks, tomatoes and onions on the streets.

Injured people covered by shawls lay in the street, waiting for medical care. Residents carried bodies on wooden planks. The corpses of four

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## Dhaka still sleeps on tremor threat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While a moderate tremor in Dhaka is likely to cause a disaster, costing thousands of lives, the authorities are yet to be prepared for such a situation.

In the wake of Saturday's devastating earthquake in India and Pakistan, the question of Dhaka's vulnerability to earthquakes has once again come to light.

Despite the experts' repeated urge to take steps for earthquake management in Dhaka city, the authorities did not respond well.

Dhaka stands on an earthquake zone, experts say.

In the case that a heavy tremor

shakes the city, there will be little scope to get help as Bangladesh Television, Zia International Airport and the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway, the main sources of direct and indirect assistance, will also be affected, urban planners said.

A recent study carried out by Dr ASM Maksud Kamal, a teacher of the geology department of Dhaka University, showed that only 35 per cent of Dhaka soil is resistant to earthquakes, while the remaining 65 per cent, which have been developed through earth-filling, remains at risk.

Dr Maksud's study also revealed that 9 to 14-storey buildings in the city are most vulnerable to

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## BCL-Shibir clash at DU, 20 hurt

DU CORRESPONDENT

At least 15 activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and five of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) were injured in a series of clashes between the two student organisations in Dhaka University and Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) areas yesterday.

Among the injured, ICS leaders Jahidur Rahman, Mashkur Rahman, Humayun Rashid, Mohiuddin, Mohammad Zakaria, Ferdousur Rahman Rumi, Zubair Islam Nahid, Mizanur Rahman and Mahfuzul Haque were admitted to DMCH.

Two BCL activists, Rahat Khan and Pradip Biswas Titu, were also admitted to the same hospital. They later fled

from DMCH fearing ICS attack. The other injured BCL activists are Maruf and Ujjal.

Witnesses said the clash erupted at the main gate of the arts building around 11:45am when some ICS men were distributing invitation cards among the teachers for an Iftar party. They engaged in an altercation when some BCL activists protested the distribution of the cards.

One of the BCL activists then rushed to Madhu's Canteen and informed fellow leaders about the incident. The BCL men who were gathered at the canteen rushed to the arts building and attacked the ICS men with bamboo sticks leaving

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## Four years of troubled time for coalition

### Price spiral, rise of militancy, corruption dwarf limited success; major pledges remain unfulfilled

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The alliance government observes the fourth anniversary of assuming power today at a time when prices of essentials have skyrocketed beyond common people's reach and an unexpected rise of militancy has posed a big threat to people's lives.

In addition to these, unbridled corruption in all spheres has overshadowed

some achievements of the four-party alliance government in the last four years.

As a whole, the performance of the BNP-led government, which came to office on this day in 2001, is very poor and it finds itself not in a comfortable position to tackle the overall situation.

The alliance government began its journey with a jumbo cabinet, ignoring its election pledge of a small one, and is

continuing in office without downsizing the cabinet despite severe criticism. Meanwhile, the other major pledges remain mired in uncertainty.

In the last four years, the government has fulfilled a number of its electoral pledges, but these have been tarnished by some major failures. However, the government policymakers have been repeatedly

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4 YRS OF ALLIANCE

### Govt to bask in successes

#### Opposition to observe black day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-Jamaat led coalition government steps into the final year of their five-year term today. The four-party alliance observes the day as their success in office while the mainstream opposition parties will observe it as a black day saying misrule and misdeeds mark the regime.

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POWER CRISIS

## Shopping malls to switch off lighting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shop owners in the Dhaka metropolitan area have decided to stop illuminating their shopping malls last night, responding to the prime minister's call to cut down on electricity.

"Since there is huge load-shedding everyday, we've decided not

to waste electricity by illuminating our shops," M Helaluddin, president of the Dhaka Metropolitan Shop Owners Association (DMSOA), told The Daily Star last night.

Leaders of the association, while attending a meeting on security with State Minister for Home Affairs

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### Sircar for counter intelligence to make security foolproof at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Speaker livid about the suspected and widely reported militant link of a parliament secretariat security official asked the state minister for home affairs yesterday to form a counter-intelligence agency commissioned to watch over the activities of security personnel

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## Militants hole up in CHT to evade arrest

### Bandarban border sealed off

STAR REPORT

The border near Bandarban has been sealed off since Friday while strict security measures are in force after the law enforcers came to know of militants' dens and training camps in the hilly district.

In Khulna, police have gathered

that 11 cadres of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) had been assigned to explode bombs at 11 points across Khulna city on August 17.

Identities of six of the bombers have been determined from the diary seized from Abdul Hakim Gazi, a teacher of Saint Joseph High School.

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