

Rescuers pull survivors, dead from Pak flats

REUTERS, Islamabad

Rescuers worked through the night in the ruins of an apartment complex in the Pakistani capital after a major earthquake brought two blocks of flats crashing down on scores of residents.

Twenty-three bodies had been found by Sunday morning but about 90 people were pulled alive from the Margala Towers blocks where expatriate workers and middle-class Pakistanis lived.

One woman was rescued overnight but her hand had to be amputated to pull her free while a Pakistani man survivor had his leg amputated, a military official involved in the rescue effort said. He said about 50 people might still be in the ruins.

Three badly mutilated bodies were recovered on Sunday morning as rescue workers tried to tunnel into a huge mound of debris in their search for survivors, one worker said.

"We heard screams of people last night but we haven't heard anything today," said rescue worker Liqat Ali Khan, who used to work as a plumber at the apartments.

'Shallow depth of quake caused devastation'

AFP, Srinagar

Kashmir is well known to be a high-risk area for earthquakes and Saturday's massive tremor was all the more devastating because it's epicentre was at a shallow depth, experts said.

"Generally speaking, shallow earthquakes tend to cause greater damage than deep earthquakes," Yasuo Sekita, a seismic specialist at the Japan Meteorological Agency, told AFP.

Saturday's quake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, was centred on the Kashmir region with a focus some 10km (six miles) beneath the Earth's surface, according to the US Geological Survey and other seismic institutes.

The quake caused damage to widespread areas because of its shallow depth, agreed Issei Ohara, a seismologist at Japan's National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Prevention.

Kashmir is prone to large earthquakes because it lies at the collision point of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates, which created the Himalayas 50 million years ago.

World cranks into gear to help quake victims

Musharraf seeks int'l aid

AFP, Islamabad

Rescue experts, medical teams, sniffer dogs and supplies were being mobilised yesterday as a worldwide effort cranked into gear to bring aid to victims of a massive earthquake that struck South Asia.

Japan, the United States and the European Union were among the first to offer manpower and financial aid to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan following Saturday's quake, which is believed to have killed more than 19,000 people.

Pakistan was worst hit and President Pervez Musharraf called for

international assistance.

"Right now we are facing the biggest tragedy of our history. I am sure that the entire nation will face it steadfastly," he said ahead of a planned visit to the quake-hit region.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry said Tokyo had sent a 50-strong emergency relief team to the Islamic republic.

In Britain, which has a large South Asian community, the government said it was sending an initial allocation of 100,000 pounds (176,000 dollars) to Pakistani authorities.

Search and rescue teams from four firefighting forces across Britain were

also headed to the region and Defence Secretary John Reid said British troops in Afghanistan were "ready to assist if required".

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said the dispatch of up to 60 staff was an initial offering. British Muslim charities have also pledged hundreds of thousands of pounds in aid.

Additional search and rescue teams were also being sent from France, Turkey -- which itself is prone to violent earthquakes -- Greece and Switzerland.

The Japanese team included police, disaster management and coast guard specialists whose skills

have been honed dealing with the country's regular tremors.

They would be engaged in search and rescue operations as well as information gathering, the ministry said in a statement.

The Japanese Red Cross was also sending four medical specialists to Islamabad as an advance team to investigate the extent of the damage caused by the quake, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale.

Shortly after news of the tragedy began filtering out of the region, European ministers offered financial aid as well as rescue teams.

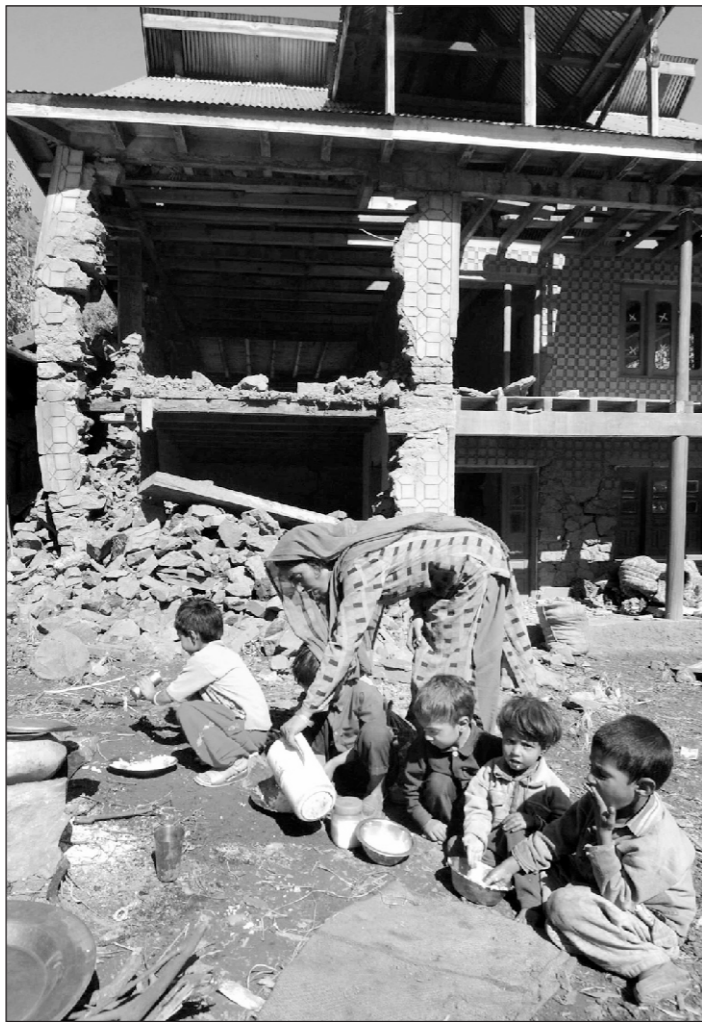


PHOTO: AFP

An Indian Kashmiri family prepares for a meal outside their damaged home after an earthquake in Jabla, some 110km north of Srinagar yesterday. The confirmed earthquake death toll climbed to 583 in Indian Kashmir, the state's senior civil servant told AFP, warning the figure would probably rise further.

Military leads relief efforts in Kashmir

Sonia comforts quake survivors

AFP, Uri

Troops spearheaded rescue and relief operations yesterday in Indian Kashmir, some sifting through rubble with bare hands, as ruling Congress Party chief Sonia Gandhi toured the devastated region where nearly 600 people died.

As the air force flew in aid, doctors and engineers, thousands of soldiers joined forces with local people in a desperate search for loved ones feared trapped under the rubble.

"I've come to share your grief," Sonia told the crowds in Uri, one of the worst-hit spots close to the de facto border with Pakistan which has been rattled by a dozen aftershocks since Saturday's massive earthquake.

"Whatever help you need to rebuild your homes and shops, the central and

state governments will provide," she said after flying in by helicopter.

"The entire nation is with the people who have suffered."

Some 300 people died in Uri alone out of a provisional state-wide death toll of 583, Jammu and Kashmir government chief secretary Vijaya Bakaya told AFP.

Some 1,500 houses were destroyed in Uri by the quake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale. About 90 percent of the families living in the town, which has a population of 30,000, were affected by the quake.

Sonia Gandhi, accompanied by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, army chief Joginder Jaswant Singh and state chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayed, visited the injured in a makeshift medical camp as well as what remains of the town's main market.

'Quake tragedy to spur Indo-Pak peace'

AFP, New Delhi

The shared tragedy confronting India and Pakistan in disputed Kashmir could pay dividends for the fragile peace process, experts said yesterday after a massive earthquake left thousands dead there.

"It will certainly help in furthering the peace process," former Indian foreign secretary and ambassador to Washington Lalit Mansingh told AFP.

Joint relief efforts could boost confidence, Mansingh said, noting that Indian and Pakistani civilians as

well as the troops that face off across the Kashmiri border had lost their lives in Saturday morning's massive quake.

"This is a common tragedy. There is nothing political about this. It can help bring people together," Mansingh added.

The nuclear-armed rivals are engaged in a peace process that has seen two major rounds of talks since January 2004 focused on divided Kashmir -- the trigger for two of their three wars since 1947.



PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani paramedic member treats an injured victim at a hospital following a massive earthquake in Abbottabad yesterday. A massive earthquake left more than 20,000 people dead in Pakistan.

Frantic parents search for trapped children

REUTERS, Balakot

With hands, picks and shovels, desperate parents struggled yesterday to reach more than 850 children trapped in the rubble of two schools flattened by the weekend's massive earthquake in northern Pakistan.

The frightened voices of trapped children and the anguished wails of parents accompanied the frantic work in the Balakot valley in the mountains of Northwest Frontier Province, one of the areas worst hit by Saturday morning's devastating quake.

"Save me, call my mother, call my father," came the faint voice of a boy, again and again, from the rubble of a government school in which residents said about 200 children were trapped.

"Bring out my child, bring out my child," his mother wailed, beating her chest as other parents and relatives pulled out the bodies of four children, bringing Sunday morning's toll to eight.

Residents of the scenic resort town of about 20,000 people estimated 2,500 people may have been killed there and in seven surrounding

villages. They complained they had received no support from police and emergency services.

Thousands were injured, mostly women and children who were in their homes at the time of the disaster while their men worked in the open. Almost every second woman or child bore an injury.

Prime Minister Saikat Aziz said more than 18,000 people had been killed across northern Pakistan. President Pervez Musharraf appealed to Pakistanis to contribute to relief efforts.