



An Indonesian search and rescue team excavate the bodies of quake victims from underneath a collapsed building during an operation in Padang yesterday. Indonesian woman Umi mourns the death of her family members at the site where her family was buried alive in the Sumatran city of Tandiket (Inset).



World joins Sumatra quake rescue

BBC ONLINE

International aid is starting to arrive in Sumatra yesterday as concern grows that remote areas may have been devastated by Wednesday's powerful earthquake.

British, Australian and South Korean rescuers have arrived and the EU and Russia are also sending help.

More than 1,000 people are known to have died and up to 3,000 more are believed trapped beneath collapsed buildings in the city of Padang.

Widespread destruction has also been reported in surrounding areas.

Red Cross officials say remote village areas outside Padang appear to have suffered severe and widespread damage, and in some cases have been completely destroyed.

"We also need drinking water and clothes because many people's clothes were burnt in fires," one Red Cross worker, Testos, told Reuters news agency.

"We also need medicines to stop infection."

But access to these areas

remains difficult, and few details are known yet of the extent of the destruction or the loss of life.

Local TV stations have begun to reach some of the affected areas, broadcasting images of villages reduced to rubble and tales of villagers without access to clean water.

"We have not received a thing. We need food, clothes, blankets, milk. It seems like the government has forgotten about us," Reuters quoted one woman, Siti Armaini, as saying in Pariaman, 40km (25 miles) north of Padang.

In Padang, witnesses report that the stench of decomposing bodies now hangs over collapsed buildings as rescuers battle to reach survivors.

Food shortages are being reported in areas where the earthquake has damaged roads, while people who lost their homes are said to be sleeping in the streets.

At the collapsed wreckage of a hotel, rescuers were working frantically throughout Saturday to find any of eight people thought to have survived

Wednesday's earthquake.

One person trapped in the ruins of the Ambacang Hotel sent a text message to a relative on Friday asking for help, rescuers revealed.

The text message reportedly implored rescuers: "Be careful that the excavator doesn't cause the building to collapse on us."

Those trapped are believed to be on what was the 6th floor and rescue teams have been building a tunnel through the rubble to reach them.

But by mid-afternoon in Padang none of the eight had been located.

The BBC's Alastair Leithead, who is in Padang, says that as the hours pass, the rescue operation is turning into the recovery of bodies.

International efforts Specialist teams from around the world have begun arriving at co-ordination centres in Padang, waiting to be deployed to the field.

The Red Cross planned to hold a meeting in the city on Saturday to co-ordinate relief efforts.

The priority is to ensure injured survivors receive the medical attention they needed, Red Cross officials say.

Two Australian planes carrying medical personnel and rescue experts have arrived in Padang, with dozens of British firefighters due to join a 16-man deployment late on Saturday.

A Swiss sniffer-dog team is already on the ground, and Russian, Estonian and Japanese personnel have all been sent. Countries around the world have pledged relief funds.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has also called for \$10m (\$6.2m) in government aid to be distributed quickly.

"The... fund has to flow quickly, no more bureaucracy for this," he said. "This is an emergency, so speed is crucial."

Wednesday's 7.6-magnitude quake struck off the coast of Padang and caused devastation. A second quake of 6.8 struck nearby on Thursday causing panic but no reports of damage or casualties.

Pakistan army orders probe into video clip

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military has ordered an inquiry into a video clip apparently showing members of the security forces viciously beating suspected militants, the army spokesman said yesterday.

The 10-minute clip, widely circulated on the Internet, shows men in Pakistan army uniforms questioning at least four suspects in turn, before pushing them to the ground and kicking and whipping the cowering and screaming detainees.

Some of the civilians appear old and all wear the traditional Pakistani salwar kameez outfit.

Early returns show solid Irish 'yes' to EU treaty

AP, Dublin

Irish voters have decisively approved a 27-nation treaty that would reshape European Union institutions to make them more effective after a decade of eastward expansion, according to political leaders, analysts and partial results yesterday.

Electoral officials said "yes" votes were outnumbering "no" in 41 of Ireland's 43 constituencies - a total reversal from the country's stunning rejection of the Lisbon Treaty last year.

The Irish agreed to vote again Friday after EU leaders offered key assurances designed to undermine anti-treaty arguments. The EU dropped its plans

to prune the size of the European Commission, a move that would have cost Ireland its right to hold a seat continuously on the EU's key executive body. Brussels also reiterated, in formal declarations appended to the treaty, that it would have no control over Ireland's taxes, military neutrality or moral codes.

The pro-treaty camp also waged a stronger campaign the second time around, this time backed by key figures from sports, arts and most crucially the financial world. Business heavyweights Intel and Ryanair appealed for "yes" votes as the only way to ensure that Ireland remains a favored base for foreign companies.

5 US troops killed in Afghan attacks

AFP, AP, Kabul

Nato announced yesterday that two more US soldiers had been killed in an attack in Afghanistan, bringing to five the total American deaths in the conflict in the last 24 hours.

The Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) had already announced the deaths of three US soldiers Friday in bomb blasts in southern and eastern Afghanistan, where foreign military fatalities are at record levels.

"In another incident two US service members died of wounds sustained in a hostile attack in eastern Afghanistan," an Isaf statement said.

Wedding party dies in Indonesian landslide

AFP, Pulau Aie

The 30-strong wedding party was getting ready to travel to a ceremony in a nearby village when the earthquake struck, triggering a landslide that would sweep them to their death.

They were gathering outside a house when tonnes of earth began a deadly descent that killed an estimated 400 people in four villages in this outlying mountainous area of Indonesia's quake zone, rescue officials said.

"Ten of them were from my family, including my wife, my three children," said one dis-

traught man who was working outside the village when the tremors loosened part of an outcrop above in the hills.

"I rushed to get to the village and when I got here everything had been flattened... I'm trying to find my kids, but it's impossible with only my hands. We need heavy machinery."

The bride and groom were safe because they were in another village where the ceremony was to take place, a rescue official working at the scene said.

The landslide buried Pulau Aie as well as three neighbour-

ing hamlets of Lubuk Laweh, Cumanak and Gunung Tiga about 75 kilometres (46 miles) north west of the worst-hit city in the quake zone, Padang.

Many houses had completely vanished, while the roofs of others could be seen poking out above the mud.

Fragments of furniture and clothes were mixed up in the mud as coconut trees lay all around, toppled by the unstoppable force of tonnes of rock and earth.

"I was in the house when I felt the shaking," said Rosmi, a 55-year-old mother in Cumanak.

Tsunamis uproot centuries-old Samoan cultures

AP, Leone

The village of Leone is a picturesque enclave that has been a mainstay of the Samoans for centuries, a place where residents gather under beach meeting houses for rituals that are sacred to the local culture.

Today, much of the village is a bleak landscape of rubble.

An overturned van is jammed into the roof of a beach house. Four elderly villagers were killed while weaving Samoan mats and crafts on the shore. A 6-year-old boy and two sisters were swept away while on the way to school. The post office is gone. So is the grocery store.

3 die as typhoon tears into Philippines

Many houses destroyed, power cut off

AFP, Manila

At least three people died yesterday as Typhoon Parma tore roofs of houses and dumped heavy rain across the Philippines, piling further misery on the Southeast Asian nation after floods claimed 293 lives.

However the typhoon stayed away from Manila, sparing millions of people who were struggling to recover from more of the type of rains that submerged most of the capital a week earlier.

Parma, packing winds of 175 kilometres (110 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 210 kilometres per hour, made landfall in the northern province of Cagayan and sur-

rounding areas about midday (0400 GMT).

"The wind is very, very angry," Cagayan regional police chief Roberto Damian said in a radio interview from his headquarters, about 400 kilometres (250 miles) from the Philippine capital.

"I can see trees are being toppled inside our camp... One sturdy Narra tree was uprooted and smashed a car and a house. We cannot go out," he said in a radio interview before his line went dead.

Parma caused major damage in Tuguegarao, the capital of Cagayan with a population of 130,000, according to the city's mayor, Delfin Ting.

"There's massive destruction of rooftops, and trees

have been toppled," Ting said, while residents reported massive rainfalls.

"The whole province is virtually under water," said Aimar Raras, a local resident.

Other parts of the Philippines' main island of Luzon were hit with heavy wind and rain, and by early Saturday evening it was still pummeling the country before being forecast to make its way towards Taiwan.

Authorities reported that at least three people were killed and one was missing on Luzon, with one man washed away in a swollen river, another falling off a roof and a two-year-old boy drowning.

In Botolan town, in Zambales province, just

northwest of Manila, about 2,000 families sought refuge in evacuation centres as the typhoon caused rivers to overflow, covering the highway.

"Floodwater has expanded and is already near the city hall. Almost all areas are flooded," Botolan Mayor Roger Yap told AFP.

Tens of thousands of people had already been evacuated from coastal and low-lying towns across northern Luzon in preparation for Parma.

Parma had previously been forecast to strike further south and closer to Manila, which is still reeling from the massive floods brought on by tropical storm Ketsana last Saturday.



Residents use boats and rafts to travel along a still-flooded main thoroughfare on the outskirts of Manila yesterday. Typhoon Parma pummelled the northern Philippines yesterday, toppling trees and cutting off power and telephone lines.

Scientists make 'thermometer' to assess Earth's health

ANI, Washington

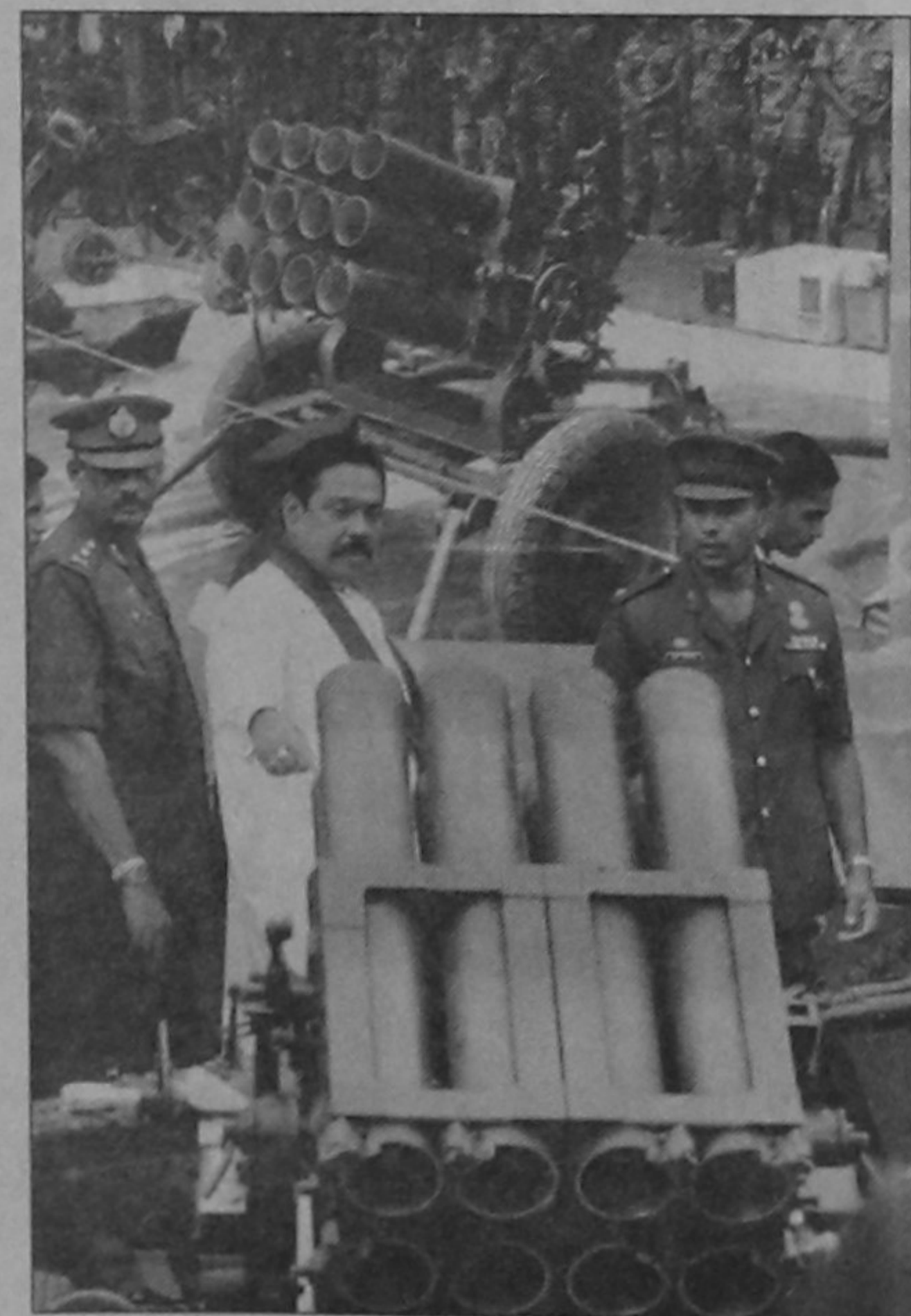
Scientists at Tel Aviv University (TAU) in Israel have developed what is literally a 'thermometer' for the Earth, which would assess the health of our planet.

Known as the "Optical Soil Dipstick" (OSD), the instrument has been developed by Professor Eyal Ben-Dor of TAU's Department of Geography, along with his team.

According to Prof. Eyal Ben-Dor, his soil dipstick will help scientists, urban planners and farmers understand the changing health of the soil, as well as its agricultural potential and other associated concerns.

"I was always attracted to drug development and diagnostics, which spurred the development of this OSD device," he said.

"It's like a diagnostic device that measures soil health. Through a small hole in the surface of the earth, we can assess what lies beneath it," he added.



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa (C) and Chief of Defence Staff Sarath Fonseka (L) look at weapons recovered from Tamil Tiger rebels in the capital Colombo yesterday.

Ahmadinejad defends disclosure of new nuclear site

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday defended Tehran's "honesty" in disclosing the building of a new nuclear plant, in his first comments on Iran's atomic work since the end of the high-profile Geneva talks.

"Iran's actions are based on honesty. We did not have any secret (nuclear) work because we gave information (about the new plant) ahead of time" to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Ahmadinejad said at a ceremony in Tehran.

"But the Western media keep following the policy that we are keeping secrets. They repeat it so much, until this campaign of lies seeps into people's heads."

The IAEA revealed earlier this month that Iran had informed it on September 21 of building a second uranium enrichment plant. The news triggered global outrage against Tehran, led by US

President Barack Obama.

Prior to the Geneva talks, IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei said Iran was "on the wrong side of the law" by not declaring its new site earlier.

During Thursday's Geneva talks between Iran and six world powers, it was decided that Tehran will offer UN inspectors access to the new site which is under construction near the holy city of Qom.

Ahmadinejad also criticised Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, adding Obama had made "a great mistake" in saying that Iran kept the construction of the new site secret.

"Mr Obama made a great mistake. We gave the information sooner... but his (Obama) information was wrong. He said incorrect words. When the IAEA was informed, the US knew about it," Ahmadinejad said.

MUMBAI ATTACK Pak court adjourns trial of accused till Oct 10

ANI, Rawalpindi

An anti-terrorism court on Saturday adjourned the hearing into the trial of seven Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants, including the outfit's operations commander Zakir Rehman Lakhvi, till October 10.

The trial, which is being conducted inside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi for security reasons, has so far been adjourned six times in the past two months.

During the last hearing on September 19, the trial was adjourned till October 3, as the prosecution lawyer and a judge had failed to appear.

Details about the proceedings were not available as a media gag has been put in place. The special Adiala Jail court has said the trial will take place in camera for security reasons.

UN 'damaged' by Afghan election bias claims

Says Abdullah

AFP, Kabul

The main rival for the Afghan presidency on Saturday said the United Nations' credibility had been "seriously damaged" by claims of bias levelled at the world body's special envoy in Kabul.

Abdullah Abdullah said there were "serious questions" about the role played by Kai Eide, a Norwegian, in the August 20 election, which has been marred by accusations of widespread fraud.

This week Eide's sacked former deputy, veteran US diplomat Peter Galbraith, accused his ex-boss of blocking the release of details of "very extensive" voter fraud.

Abdullah said Eide's actions gave the impression he supported Karzai, although the presidential candidate stopped short of calling for the envoy's resignation or dismissal.

"In normal circumstances accusations, claims and challenges as such by a senior UN official will call for an internal UN investigation. That has not hap-

pened," Abdullah told reporters.

"But as far as I am concerned, in my mind I have no doubt that it has seriously damaged the UN's credibility in Afghanistan."

"The UN's role has been respected all the time by most of the parties -- I don't include the Taliban -- in the country. But at this critical stage, the decision will be decided either by fraud or by the rule of law."

"At this stage, a biased attitude is not acceptable."

Karzai leads in preliminary results from the disputed election with about 55 percent of the vote, against Abdullah on just under 28 percent. The winner needs 50 percent plus one vote.

But an upcoming audit of ballots in 3,063 ballot boxes could see Karzai's lead drop below the required threshold, forcing a run-off with Abdullah.

Abdullah has said he will monitor the investigations to the end and not support the result if he is not satisfied with the transparency of the process.