

Global rescue teams rush to Haiti



Survivors stand on the roof of a demolished house after a massive earthquake in Port-au-Prince on Wednesday while an injured woman is helped after being rescued (Inset). More than 100,000 people were feared dead in Haiti Wednesday after a calamitous earthquake razed homes, hotels, and hospitals, leaving the capital in ruins and bodies strewn on the streets.



Organisations unlock relief funds, despatched experts to claw thru' debris

AFP, Washington

Rescue teams, doctors and soldiers rushed by land, sea and air yesterday to bring life-saving food and medicines to the survivors of Haiti's devastating earthquake.

From all corners of the world, a vast relief operation swung into top gear as hundreds of thousands of homeless, injured and traumatized spent a second night on the corpse-strewn streets and sidewalks of Port-au-Prince.

Planes began arriving at the capital's still-functioning airport bringing surgeons, field hospitals, water and emergency medical supplies, while search and rescue teams with sniffer dogs readied to pick through the debris.

Governments and aid organisations unlocked millions of dollars and launched appeals for more to aid survivors and help reconstruct ruined homes, schools and hospitals in help one of the world's poorest nations.

Haiti's prime minister said Tuesday's 7.0-magnitude quake, which flattened Port-au-Prince, may have killed more than 100,000 people.

Planeloads of rescue teams and relief supplies were quickly dispatched from countries including Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and Spain.

As a wealthy neighbour with the world's most powerful military, the United States was well-placed to lead the effort, mobilising an array of specialists, ships, planes and helicopters.

"I have directed my administration to respond with a swift, coordinated and aggressive effort to save lives," Obama said.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton returned from a trip to help coordinate the US operation, with forward teams of civilian and military experts already landing at the scene.

More rescuers and equipment were on their way by sea and overland from the neighbouring Dominican Republic.

The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier was set to arrive later Thursday with destroyers and more Coast Guard ships, and 5,000 troops were on stand-by.

Former US president Bill Clinton, now UN special envoy in Haiti, appealed for funds, saying even a dollar or two would help alleviate "one of the great humanitarian emergencies in the history of the Americas."

"What Haiti needs most is money for water, food, shelter and basic medical supplies to bring immediate relief to those who are homeless, hungry and hurt," he wrote in a commentary for the Washington Post.

The Red Cross launched a 10-million dollar appeal for donations, the World Food Programme offered 15,000 tonnes of food and the World Bank vowed an extra 100 million dollars in aid.

"We are entering a critical period. There must be massive humanitarian aid arriving this evening," said Olivier Bernard, president of the medical relief agency organisation Medecins du Monde.

He told AFP: "To save lives, surgery must be available ideally within the first 48 hours."

A British flight carrying some 75 officials and rescue specialists arrived in the Dominican Republic en route to Haiti. They were accompanied by sniffer dogs and 10 tonnes of equipment.

International development minister Douglas Alexander said London would put up nearly 10 million dollars.

Panic, looting and triage after killer quake

AP, Port-au-Prince

The tiny bodies of children lay in piles next to the ruins of their collapsed school. People with faces covered by white dust and the blood of open wounds roamed the streets. Frantic doctors wrapped heads and stitched up sliced limbs in a hotel parking lot.

The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, still struggling to recover from the relentless strikes of four catastrophic storms in 2008, was a picture of heartbreaking devastation Wednesday after a magnitude-7 earthquake.

Tuesday's quake left a landscape of collapsed buildings hospitals, schools, churches, ramshackle homes, even the gleaming national palace the rubble sending up a white cloud that shrouded the entire capital.

On Wednesday, ambulances weaved in and out of crowds, swerving to miss the bodies lying in street and the men on foot who lugged stretchers bearing some of the injured.

Shocked survivors wandered about in a daze, some wailing the names of loved ones, praying or calling for help. Others with injuries fast growing into infections sat by the roadside, waiting for doctors who were not sure to come.

Search-and-rescue helicopters buzzed over the bodies of partially clothed victims who lay face-down in mounds of rubble and twisted steel.

Everywhere, there was panic, urgency, pleas for help. "Thousands of people poured out into the streets, crying, carrying bloody bodies, looking for anyone who could help them," Bob Poff, divisional director of disaster services in Haiti for the Salvation Army, said in a posting on the agency's Web site.

'President alive but nowhere to live'

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE

The President of the quake-hit Haiti is alive but has nowhere to live, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said, following the devastating tremor that flattened buildings and also caused severe damage to the presidential palace.

"The government buildings in Haiti were severely damaged. The President is alive but has nowhere to live. There is no communications system," Hillary told reporters at Honolulu in Hawaii, before heading towards Washington.

Quake is devastating blow to UN

16 killed, over 100 staff still missing

AFP, United Nations

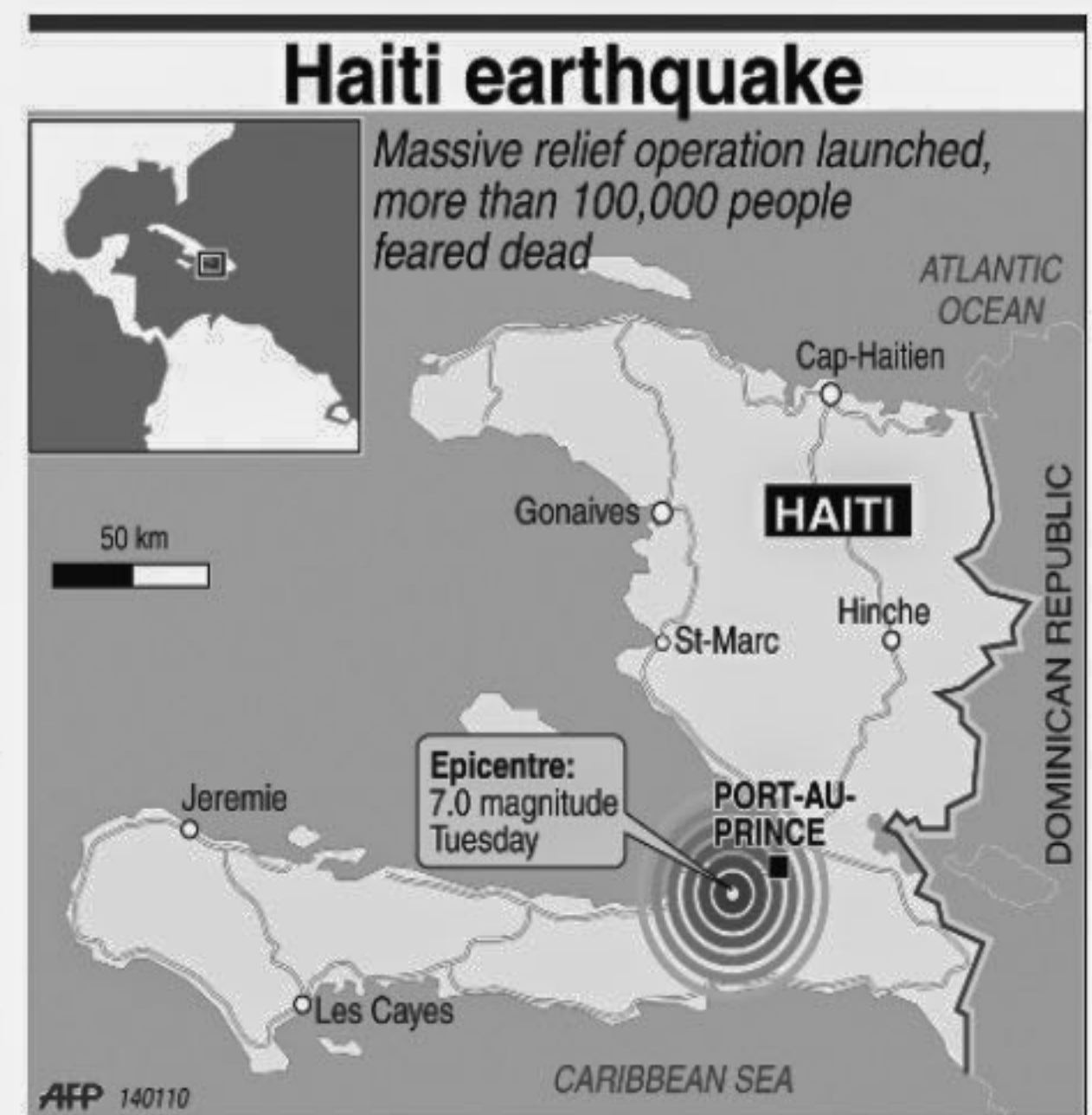
The huge earthquake that hit impoverished Haiti also dealt a crippling blow to the local UN mission, which lost dozens of staff, including apparently its civilian head, UN officials said Wednesday.

At least 16 UN peacekeeping staff were killed and more than 100 expatriate UN staff members are still missing two days after a deadly earthquake damaged much of Haiti's capital, a United Nations spokeswoman said yesterday.

"Over 100 people are unaccounted for," said Elisabeth Byrs, spokeswoman of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was hit particularly hard, with its main headquarters building in Port-au-Prince flattened and dozens of staff missing, including its civilian head, Hedi Annabi of Tunisia, and his deputy.

Haitian President Rene Preval insisted that Annabi, who was in the building along with dozens of his staff when the quake struck Tuesday, was killed.



An Indian Hindu devotee holds his child as they bathe on the banks of the river Ganges in Haridwar yesterday during the Kumbh Mela (Pitcher festival), on one of the festival's main bathing days, Makar Sankranti. Hundreds of thousands of Hindu devotees took a ritual bath in India's holy Ganges before daybreak as one of the world's largest religious gatherings got underway.

Largest religious festival on Earth underway in India

AFP, Haridwar/Kolkata

Hundreds of thousands of Hindu devotees took a ritual bath in India's holy Ganges river before daybreak yesterday as the world's largest religious gathering got underway.

Braving chilly weather, hordes of pilgrims rose before sunrise in and around the northern town of Haridwar and made their way in darkness to the banks of the river to immerse themselves in the sacred waters.

They have come from all over India: families and couples, wealthy and poor, businessmen and farmhands, and itinerant "sadhus" (holy men) draped in saffron-coloured robes.

Smaller bathing rituals were held along the entire length of the Ganges.

In the eastern state of West Bengal, seven pilgrims, including one child, were crushed to death in a stampede when hundreds of devotees rushed for places on a ferry to take them to a bathing site on Gangasagar island -- where the Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal.

The crush happened as hundreds of devotees rushed for places on a ferry to take them to the pilgrimage site on Gangasagar island -- where the holy waters of the Ganges flow into the Bay of Bengal.

"The rush became a stampede and seven people were killed," Surojit Kar Purokayastha, inspector general of the West Bengal police, told AFP.

Seventeen people were injured, four of them seriously.

For Hindu devotees, the three-month Kumbh Mela festival offers them the chance to wash away their sins and break the karmic cycle of life and rebirth.

Preparation for Ijtema

FROM PAGE 16 the spiritual adulation, exaltation and welfare of the Muslim community.

The program will conclude with the Akheri Munajat (final prayer) on the last day in January 24.

Visiting the Ijtema ground yesterday, The Daily Star correspondent found that thousands of volunteers were erecting long stretch of tents and setting up electricity lines. Officials concerned were seen working to ensure water, sanitation and other necessary works.

"The preparation is going on in full swing. Everyone is working unitedly to hold the gathering smoothly," Abdul Quddus, a member of Ijtema organising committee, told this correspondent.

Farhad Hossain, chief engineer of Public Health and Engineering Department of

Gazipur, said apart from existing eight deep tube-wells, five more deep tube-wells have been installed on the ground to ensure water supply to the devotees.

Around 1,768 sanitary latrines, 25,000 semi-paka latrine and 3,000 temporary toilets have been set up around the ground, he said adding that construction of 416 sanitary latrines are under process of construction for using those in next year.

At least 10,000 sanitary latrines are needed to ensure sanitation in the event, he said.

A three-storey building has been set up this year for the first time to ensure sanitation and bath facilities to the devotees. Last year, the government had built seven two-storey buildings for the purpose.

Several special trains and a number of BRTC shuttle bus services will be arranged to ease the transportation.

Around 50 medical teams will work for providing treatment to the devotees free of cost while the number of seats in Tongi General Hospital has also been increased this time.

Engineering Corps members of Bangladesh Army will set up several floating bridges over the Turag to facilitate movement of the devotees, Kamal Uddin Talukder, deputy commissioner of Gazipur district, told The Daily Star.

Around 12,000 police and Rab personnel will be deployed to ensure security in and around the Ijtema ground while several hundred members of various intelligence agencies will be put in place.

Close-circuit television (CCTV) and video cameras will also be installed at different strategic points, he added.

Lanka govt helped India's ruling party in election

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka stopped using heavy weapons against Tamil Tiger rebels to help the re-election bid of neighbouring India's ruling party, a top official in Colombo said yesterday.

Lalith Weeraratna, senior aide to President Mahinda Rajapakse, said New Delhi requested the complete halt in the offensive against the Tamil Tigers because it affected the Tamil vote in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Weeraratna said Rajapakse did not want to stop the offensive against Tamil separatists, but was ready for a compromise to help Congress retain power.

"OK, what do you want me to do to ensure victory of the Congress Party?", the president had asked, Weeraratna said in a video interview with Colombo's Daily Mirror website.

Mechanised stone extraction

FROM PAGE 16

In the judgement, the HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui stressed the need for protecting environment and natural eco-system of the country.

It observed that the forest and environment ministry and the directorate of environment are the sole authority for protecting environment and eco-system of the country.

If the forest and environment ministry, and the directorate of environment feel necessity of formulating any guideline for extraction of stones from any area, they may do so keeping the ecological system intact and that no other ministries shall have any say in this regard, it said.

The HC delivered the verdict upon a public interest litigation filed by the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA). Bela's lawyer Iqbal Kabir Liton told The Daily Star that unscrupulous traders now cannot collect stones from the three rivers in Sylhet by using excavators following this judgement.

He, however, said the stone of the river areas can be quarried from the rivers in traditional way without using mechanised excavators.

In July last year, Bela filed the writ petition with the HC, stating that unscrupulous people are quarrying stones from the rivers of Plain, Dwaki and Dhala damaging land and natural eco-system of the rivers, and lives, property and livelihoods of people living in those areas.

The petition also sought directions from the HC upon the government to stop the operation of the mechanised excavators and also remove the same from the rivers.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud and advocate Subrata Chowdhury argued for the petitioner, while Deputy Attorney General Razak Al Jalil stood for the government.

Responding to lawmaker Shahiduzzaman's remark, he said the government has not imposed any restriction on running deep tube-well for irrigation.

"But we want to encourage farmers to operate deep tube-well according to our plan to help ensure uninterrupted power supply for irrigation," he said.

AL lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury said the government has plans to increase power generation but doesn't have any specific scheme to raise gas production.

In response, the state minister said the current shortfall of gas is 25 cubic feet a day. An additional 60 million cubic feet gas will be added to the national grid in next one year, he added.

AL lawmakers Tofail Ahmed, AKM Fazlul Haq, Nazrul Islam Babu, Mohammad Tajul Islam and Junaid Ahmed demanded uninterrupted power and gas supply in their constituencies.

Meanwhile, Industries Minister Dilip Barua said Atlas Bangladesh has manufactured environment-friendly three wheelers, which will be marketed next year.

BNP turns to like-minded parties

FROM PAGE 1 make public her formal reaction to the outcome of the prime minister's visit to India.

She is also expected to announce some protest programmes like demonstrations including rallies and human chains at the briefing, demanding cancellation of the signed treaties and MoUs, which her party thinks do not protect the country's interest.

A number of party leaders said they are even planning to return to the House to build a greater movement in and outside the parliament.

Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star last evening that they reject the joint communiqué of Bangladesh and India after thorough discussion on it in the committee.

The chairperson will clear the party's position on the bilateral deals and might also announce the protest programmes, he said adding that the people of the country have got nothing other than added frustrations from the premier's visit to India.

Other party insiders said as a part of the initiative to form the greater alliance, a pro-BNP intellectual already talked to well known left leaning politicians, and that a number of senior BNP leaders and allied intellectuals will talk to many other such organisations and personalities in a bid to bring them to a common platform, which would be led by BNP.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star that they intend to create a national consensus to protect the country's greater interest.

"The chairperson in her address will give the nation a direction, and we will work to implement that by taking all into confidence," he said.

Responding to lawmaker Shahiduzzaman's remark, he said the government has not imposed any restriction on running deep tube-well for irrigation.

"But we want to encourage farmers to operate deep tube-well according to our plan to help ensure uninterrupted power supply for irrigation," he said.

MPs press for power

FROM PAGE 16

Urging the government to cancel the decision, the lawmaker said, "Power supply for only six hours from 11:00pm to 5:00am will not be enough for farmers in my locality."

State Minister for Energy, Power and Mineral Resources Brig Gen (ret'd) Enamul Haq said the government is trying hard to improve power and gas supply.

"We have taken some short-term and long-term plans to improve the situation. Besides, we are trying to cut down wastage of gas and power," the state minister said.

KATALYST Partners in Business Innovation. RSG/2010/Jute/EoI\_1 Expression of Interest (EOI). Katalyst, a market development project under the Ministry of Commerce and funded by a consortium of donors, requests proposal from interested individual for short term brand consultant to design an Integrated Strategic Promotion Plan for the Jute Sector of Bangladesh including an Execution Plan covering both national and international markets.