

Troops called out to halt looters after Chile quake

AFP, Concepcion

Troops fired teargas and imposed a curfew yesterday to stop looters running off with trolleys loads of goods from the wreckage of Chile's quake as rescuers scabbled through rubble for survivors.

As President Michelle Bachelet said she expected the death toll of 708 to rise, the scale of the devastation wrought by Saturday's 8.8-magnitude quake was becoming clear from seaside towns and villages engulfed by giant waves.

State television reported that more than 300 bodies had been found in the swamped fishing village of Constitucion alone, leaving survivors to stare in disbelief at the seaweed clinging to what was left of their livelihoods.

The mayor of Chile's worst-hit main city of Concepcion pleaded urgently for help as rescuers with heat detectors

hunted for dozens of people believed to be trapped in a 15-story apartment block toppled on its side by the quake.

The army was also called in to help the overwhelmed police force deal with looters, some of whom dragged shopping trolleys full of provisions while others made off with plasma TVs and electrical appliances.

Guillermo Ramirez, military commander of the central Maule region, sent soldiers with megaphones to warn the 500,000 inhabitants of Concepcion of the dusk-to-dawn curfew they had to observe.

"I would advise criminals not to mess with the armed forces. Our response will be severe, but within the context of the law," he told would-be looters.

As they struggled to keep order, the troops fired tear-gas and water cannons on residents, driven to desperation by a lack of water and electricity.

"We need food for the population. We are without supplies, and if we don't resolve that we are going to have serious security problems during the night," said mayor Jacqueline van Rysselberghe, warning of "social tension."

President-elect Sebastian Pinera said the situation in Concepcion was dangerous.

"When we have a catastrophe of this magnitude, when there is no electricity and no water, the population becomes preoccupied and starts losing the sense of public order," Pinera said.

Bachelet, who is due to hand over power to Pinera on March 11, said the air force was to begin flying in food and vital aid to badly hit areas, some of which were largely cut off by the quake.

The government admitted it had erred by failing to warn Chileans about the tsunami risk following Saturday's 8.8-magnitude quake.

Some scientists defend tsunami warnings

AP, Honolulu

The warning was ominous, its predictions dire: Oceanographers issued a bulletin telling Hawaii and other Pacific islands that a killer wave was heading their way with terrifying force and that "urgent action should be taken to protect lives and property."

But the devastating tidal surge predicted after Chile's magnitude 8.8-earthquake for areas far from the epicentre never materialised. And by Sunday, authorities had lifted the warning after waves half the predicted size tickled the shores of Hawaii and tourists once again jammed beaches and restaurants.

Scientists acknowledged they overstated the threat but many defended their actions, saying they took the proper steps and learned the lessons of the 2004 Indonesian tsunami that killed thousands of people who didn't get enough warning.

"It's a key point to remember that we cannot under-warn. Failure to warn is not an option for us," said Dai Lin Wang, an oceanographer at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii. "We cannot have a situation that we thought was no problem and then it's devastating. That just cannot happen."

Man, daughter survive 13 floors fall

AP, Concepcion

When their 13th-floor apartment began to shake, Alberto Rozas pulled his 7-year-old daughter into the bathroom doorway and waited for it to stop.

Instead, they fell.

Plummeting as their brand-new apartment building toppled like a felled tree, they hugged each other all the way down.

Rozas had no idea which way was up until he looked through his apartment's shattered window and spotted light "the light of the full moon."

Rozas and his daughter, Fernanda, clambered up and to safety with nothing more than a few cuts, scrapes and bruises.

"The earthquake and the fall were one single, horrible thing," Rozas told The Associated Press on Sunday. "I held onto her and she never let me go."

Rozas' neighbours who lived on the other side of the hall found themselves trapped beneath the structure, while rescuers painstakingly used electric saws and a generator-powered hammer to cut into the concrete.



Rescue workers look for victims into a wreckage country in Concepcion, Chile on Monday, a day after a huge 8.8-magnitude earthquake rocked the country killing at least 708 people. The South American nation has been hit by numerous aftershocks, some reaching over 6 points on the Richter scale, as well as heavy damages in coastal towns resulting from subsequent tsunamis.

British immigration laws discriminatory

Say experts

ANI, London

Participants attending an Oxford University seminar have termed Britain's immigration laws discriminatory and unjust for Pakistani students.

The seminar titled "New British immigration laws and their effects on Pakistani students," was held under the aegis of the Nawaz-i-Waq Group of Newspapers.

According to The National Union of Pakistani Students (NUPS), a representative body of Pakistani students in the UK, and the immigration experts termed the new immigration laws discriminatory while the members of the European and UK parliaments also expressed their reservations over these laws.

NUPS Director General and an Oxford student Qasim Raza declared the recent changes in immigration laws as an injustice to the Pakistanis.

He said he had received numerous complaints that undue delay was caused in the issuance of visas resulting in loss of an academic year of a number of students.

He demanded of the Pakistani government to set up a network on High Commission level so that Pakistanis coming to the UK for getting education might be protected from falling prey to fake challenges.

Hussain Nadeem, the co-chairman of the Internal Affairs of Pakistan Young Leaders Council, strongly criticised the foreign policy of Pakistan, saying that the foreign policy was under the influence of the Army owing to tensions in Pak-India relations and war on terror and it would take time to neutralise this influence.

At this stage, the students sitting in the hall strongly termed the army interference in the foreign policy as a fact.



A fireman carries a man on a flooded street in L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer, western France on Monday following hurricane-forced winds, surging seas and driving rain lashed western Europe on Sunday, leaving at least 47 people dead in France alone and more than a million households without power.

59 die as winter storm batters Europe

AFP, L'aiguillon-Sur-Mer

Rescue teams were out in force yesterday after the fiercest winter storm in years left at least 59 dead in western Europe, with France by far the worst hit.

France's Atlantic seaboard was pummeled by the storm dubbed Xynthia, which unleashed gale force winds and torrential rains on Sunday, prompting the government to declare a national emergency.

The toll in France rose to 47 dead and at least 30 missing on Monday and more than half a million homes were without power in the deadliest storm to have battered France since 1999, officials said.

At least four people died in neighbouring Germany, three in Spain, one in Portugal and one in Belgium.

More than 9,000 French firefighters and emergency workers backed by helicopters were deployed on Monday to try to reach stranded residents, mostly in the Vendee and Charente regions of western France.

Rescue teams took to boats to reach flooded houses whose residents were reported missing in the town of L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer. Hundreds of families slept overnight in shelters set up in schools and dance halls.

About 30 people were admitted to hospital, regional officials said.

President Nicolas Sarkozy was on Monday to visit the storm-battered coast, where eight-metre (26-foot) waves sent residents scurrying onto rooftops and the wind reached speeds of 150 kilometres per hour (93 mph).

Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux said the storm was particularly deadly because it hit at night.

"It's obvious that if this had happened during the day, the death toll would not have been disastrous, because people were taken by surprise during their sleep," Hortefeux said on France Info radio.

Resident Fabrice Petit du Bosquet said: "I managed with my girlfriend to climb on the roof, through the window because the water was rising fast. It was five o'clock in the morning."

"We tried to move our stuff up to the mezzanine but then I decided that we should go on the roof. We had been waiting on the roof for one hour when we spotted our landlord in a boat and he helped us get out."

The European Union said it was ready to offer support for the countries affected by the storm and France said it would seek help to pay for recovery operations.

French farms and fisheries were hard hit and Agriculture Minister Bruno Le Marie promised compensation from a national disaster relief fund.



Radovan Karadzic
Karadzic ends trial boycott, defends 'holy' Serb cause

AFP, The Hague

Wartime Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic ended a boycott of his genocide trial yesterday, defiantly declaring that a conflict which left 100,000 dead was "just and holy."

Addressing the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the 64-year-old said he would use his trial "to defend the greatness" of the Serb nation and defended its role in the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

"I will defend that nation of ours and their cause that is just and holy," said a confident and measured Karadzic as he made his opening statement from the dock in the courtroom in The Hague.

"We have a good case. We have good evidence and proof," he headed.

Karadzic stands charged as the "supreme commander" of an ethnic cleansing campaign of Croats and Muslims in the Bosnian war in which 100,000 people were killed and 2.2 million displaced.

Iran 'not cooperating' on nuclear issue: IAEA

Tehran tells nuke watchdog to remember past Western breaches

AFP, Vienna Tehran

Iran is not cooperating sufficiently with the UN atomic watchdog in its investigation into the Islamic republic's contested nuclear activities, agency chief Yukiya Amano said here yesterday.

"The agency continues... to verify the non-division of declared nuclear material in Iran, but we cannot confirm that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities because Iran has not provided the agency with the necessary cooperation," Amano said in his opening address to the IAEA's board of governors.

"The necessary cooperation includes,

among other things, implementation of relevant resolutions of the IAEA board of governors and the United Nations Security Council," Amano said.

It also means allowing IAEA inspectors to conduct snap inspections, notifying the agency of any plans to build nuclear plants "as well as clarification of issues related to possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme," the Japanese diplomat said.

"I request Iran to take steps towards the full implementation of its safeguards agreement and its other obligations as a matter of high priority."

Obama considers new US nuclear strategy

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama is making final decisions on a broad new nuclear strategy for the United States that will permanently reduce the US nuclear arsenal by thousands of weapons, The New York Times reported yesterday.

But citing unnamed senior presidential aides, the newspaper said the administration had rejected proposals that the United States declare it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons.

Obama's new strategy -- which would cancel or reverse several initiatives undertaken by the administration of former president George W. Bush -- will be contained in a nearly completed document called the Nuclear Posture Review, the report said.

Aides said Secretary of Defence Robert Gates will present Obama with several options on Monday.

Obama's critics argue that his embrace of a new movement to eliminate nuclear weapons around the world is naive and dangerous, especially at a time of new nuclear threats, particularly from Iran and North Korea, the paper said.

Palestinian cabinet meets in Hebron over holy sites row

AFP, Hebron

The Palestinian Authority held its weekly cabinet meeting in the West Bank town of Hebron yesterday to affirm its claim over a contested holy site at the centre of a growing row with Israel.

The meeting was called to "express that (the government) stands with the Palestinian people against the Israeli plan to Judaise the Islamic and Christian holy sites," cabinet director Naim Abulhumus said in a statement.

The town has seen near-daily clashes between stone-throwing Palestinians and Israeli troops since Israel announced that the Tomb of the Patriarchs, revered by Muslims and Jews, would likely be included in a national

heritage plan.

The plan has also drawn international criticism, with Israel's key ally the United States calling it a "provocative" act that could further complicate efforts to relaunch peace talks suspended during the 2008-2009 Gaza war.

The Islamist Hamas movement has also slammed the move and on Monday sought to hold a special meeting of Palestinian lawmakers in the West Bank town of Ramallah but was prevented from doing so by Palestinian security forces.

"We called this meeting to discuss Israeli threats against Islamic holy sites, but when we tried to enter the hall the door was locked," Hamas parliamentary speaker Aziz al-Dweik told reporters.

Global warming likely to impact rainfall patterns

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

Climate models project that the global average temperature will rise about 1 degree C by mid-century, if we continue with business as usual and emit greenhouse gases.

The global average, though, does not tell us anything about what will happen to regional climates.

Analysing global model warming projections in models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a team headed by meteorologist Shang-Ping Xie at the University of Hawaii finds that ocean temperature patterns in the tropics and sub-tropics will change in ways that will significantly alter rainfall patterns.

Scientists have mostly assumed that the surfaces of oceans will warm rather evenly in the tropics. This assumption has led to 'wetter-gets-wetter' and 'drier-gets-drier' regional rainfall projections.

Xie's team has gathered evidence that, although ocean surface temperatures can be expected to increase mostly everywhere by mid-century, the increase may differ by up to 1.5C depending upon the region.



British Charge d'Affairs Matthew Rous delivers a statement next to a poster calling for the release of jailed Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi outside the British Embassy in Jakarta on Monday. Rous delivered a statement denouncing Myanmar's February 26 Supreme Court decision rejecting an appeal by Suu Kyi against her extended house arrest, and demanding her unconditional release.

Russia, Georgia reopen border crossing

AFP, Darial Gorge

Bitter regional rivals Georgia and Russia reopened their only usable land border crossing Monday, restoring a vital transport route that had been closed since 2006.

The reopening of the crossing -- known as Verkhny Gorge in Russia and Darial Gorge in Georgia -- is expected primarily to benefit Armenia, which had relied on it for trade with Russia, its key economic partner.

The crossing reopened at 7:00 am (0300 GMT) with a brief, pre-dawn ceremony. Afterwards, border police sat in roadside booths waiting for travellers but more than three hours later, none had arrived.

The checkpoint runs through a narrow pass in the Caucasus Mountains, about 170 kilometres (105 miles) from the Georgian capital Tbilisi, amid craggy snow-covered peaks.