

New Zealand declares curfew after devastating 7.1 quake

BBC ONLINE
An overnight curfew has been imposed in Christchurch, New Zealand, following a powerful 7.1-magnitude earthquake.



Locals pose for photos in front of damaged buildings in central Christchurch after a 7.1-magnitude earthquake hit the city yesterday. Authorities declared a state of emergency after a major earthquake hit New Zealand's second biggest city early on Saturday, bringing down power lines, ripping up roads and wrecking building facades, but authorities reported no deaths.

Police said the curfew was intended to protect people from falling debris, as the quake caused significant damage. The mayor of the city, Bob Parker, described the scale of the damage as immense, and a state of emergency has been declared. There have been strong aftershocks, and

weather forecasters say gale force winds are expected within 24 hours.

The quake caused considerable infrastructure damage, but local officials say power has been largely restored and tankers will supply water.

There are thousands of earthquakes in New Zealand every year, but very few do any damage.

'UNSAFE'
The earthquake struck off New Zealand's South Island, the US Geological Survey has said, in the early hours of the morning when most people were asleep.

The epicentre was 44km (27 miles) west of Christchurch, at a depth of about 5km, the USGS said.

Two men were seriously injured by falling masonry and glass, but there have been no reports of fatalities.

"The damages are incredibly frightening. The only thing you can say it's a miracle that no-one lost their life," Prime Minister John Key told TVNZ.

Many homeowners faced a cold winter's night and leaking or damaged homes. Hours after the quake, one building in the Christchurch city centre burst into flames, following a suspected gas leak.

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker said the "sharp, vicious earthquake" had caused significant damage in parts of the city.

He said daylight showed that the damage was considerably worse than first thought.

"There would not be a house, there would not be a family in our city that has not in some way have damage done to their person, to their property," he said on national radio.

"I think it's like an iceberg; there is... below the visible line, significant structural damage."

'TERRIFYING'

Police said damage and power outages had been reported as far afield as Dunedin, 360km (223miles) to the south-west.

Chimneys and walls had fallen from older buildings, with roads blocked, traffic lights out and power, gas and water supplies disrupted, he added.

"There is considerable damage in the central city and we've also had reports of looting, just shop windows broken and easy picking of displays," police inspector Mike Coleman told Radio New Zealand. "It's very unsafe to be out and about."

Susan Birkbeck, who lives in the centre of Christchurch, told the BBC: "It was absolutely shocking, we're all terrified and scared of what's going to happen next."

"I was asleep when suddenly the house started shaking and there was this smashing sound, I thought a large truck had just driven through the front window."

"I'm now sitting on my bed surrounded by broken glass and I've no idea what to do. The walls and roof are just hanging, it's terrifying," she added.

The local newspaper, The Press, said it was felt widely across the South Island, including Christchurch and the nearby port city of Timaru.

New Zealand lies at the southern end of the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, and above an area of the Earth's crust where the Pacific Plate converges with the Indo-Australian Plate.

The country experiences more than 14,000 earthquakes a year, of which only around 20 have a magnitude in excess of 5.0.

The last fatal earthquake was in 1968, when a 7.1-magnitude tremor killed three people on the South Island's western coast.

Time is now for ME peace: Hillary

AP, Washington

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton sought to inject urgency into Israeli-Palestinian peace talks Friday, warning the negotiations may be "the last chance for a very long time" to reach an agreement.

In an unusual joint interview with Israeli and Palestinian television broadcasters a day after she presided over the launch of the first direct talks in two years, Hillary said the rise of Iranian-backed extremist ideology in the Middle East is a major reason why time is short.

Iran's suspected nuclear ambitions have surfaced as a new motivating factor for a Mideast resolution. There have been growing Israeli warnings that the nation might take military steps to blunt Iran's nuclear program, and even some of Israel's Arab neighbours have shown concerns.

The administration believes that a successful Mideast peace deal would limit Iran's ability to use Mideast tensions to justify its behaviour.

"I think that time is not on the side of either Israeli or Palestinian aspirations for security, peace and a state," she said. Iranian-sponsored "rejectionist ideology" and a "commitment to violence" by those opposed to peace make reaching an agreement quickly all the more necessary, she said.

"The United States," Hillary added, "wants to weigh in on the side of leaders and people who see this as maybe the last chance for a very long time to resolve this." Shortly before the interview, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed the peace talks, saying "the fate of Palestine will be decided in Palestine and through resistance and not in Washington."

Iran supports the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, which along with the West Bank is supposed to form an eventual Palestinian state. Hamas also rejected the talks this week.

The Obama administration wants a peace deal concluded within a year and both sides pledged Thursday to try to meet that goal in successive rounds of talks. Despite early positive signals from Israeli and Palestinian leaders, hopes for an agreement rest on overcoming significant obstacles and decades of hostility and suspicion.

➔ **1. Netanyahu, Abbas will meet for a second round of talks in Egypt on Sept 14 and 15. Thereafter about every two weeks while lower-level negotiations will continue.**

➔ **2. After the meeting in Egypt, both the leaders will likely see each other, as well as Obama, again on the sidelines of the upcoming UN General Assembly session in the third week of September**

➔ **3. The talks to face first tough test shortly after the UN gathering, when an Israeli freeze on settlement activity in the West Bank is due to expire**

Source: AP

9 killed in New Zealand skydiving plane crash

AP, Wellington

A light aircraft carrying skydivers crashed in flames yesterday near a popular tourist spot in New Zealand's Southern Alps, killing nine people including four foreign tourists, police said.

The plane caught fire after takeoff from an airstrip at Fox Glacier on the country's South Island, said Ian Henderson, a spokesman for local ambulance services. But other locals said the fire erupted when the plane crashed into a fence at the end of the runway after it failed to lift off safely.

The pilot and eight passengers were killed, Greymouth Police Senior Sgt Allyson Ealam said.

Ealam said four foreign tourists from Ireland, England, Germany and Australia were among the dead, and the embassies of each victim had been informed.

Police would not release names until next of kin had been advised, she noted, and the bodies would remain at the crash site until Sunday when they were to be moved to Dunedin Hospital for autopsies.

Miliband brothers fighting for top Labour post

AP, London

Mom is neutral. Everyone else has an opinion.

The unusual spectacle of two brothers fighting for the soul of the defeated Labour Party and the chance to challenge Prime Minister David Cameron in the next general election has turned a ho-hum contest into a nail biter.

Voting began this week, with former Foreign Secretary David Miliband seen as a slight favourite over his younger brother, former Energy and Climate Change Secretary Ed Miliband, and three other candidates. Results will be announced at the start of a party conference in late September.

The younger Miliband is running a maverick campaign, promising to bring the Labour Party back to its working class roots after the centrist, pro-business policies that brought Tony Blair and his New Labour cronies to power in 1997. He enjoys strong support from some vocal union leaders, who have an influential voice in the selection process.

"I'm the candidate most willing to turn the page in this election," Ed Miliband says on his campaign website, taking a subtle dig at his big brother, who represents the party Establishment.

He isn't attacking his older brother by name they have promised to maintain family harmony if at all possible. But he has launched a scathing attack on New Labour leaders for endorsing "brutish" US-style capitalism at the expense of the working man, accusing them of adopting the Conservative Party philosophy of letting the free market rule.

The youthful brothers physically resemble each other and have similar mannerisms. Both have a hint of gray in the same spot of their otherwise dark hair, and both cultivate an easy, approachable manner. David Miliband is more polished and experienced on the world stage making a strong and favourable impression on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others at summit meetings.

TRAPPED CHILEAN MINERS Threefold drilling effort to rescue

AFP, Copiapo

A faster drilling machine was being assembled yesterday to enlarge an existing supply shaft to 33 Chilean trapped miners, as work on the main shaft continued and a special rescue cage was being built by the Navy.

A third alternative, or plan "C," involving a football-pitch-size oil drilling platform was also under way and expected to begin drilling a third rescue shaft by September 18 (Chile's Independence Day), said President Sebastian Pinera.

The battle to reach the men trapped 700 meters (2,300 feet) underground since an August 5 collapse presents a twofold challenge: drilling through the rock and managing the psychological effects of prolonged isolation deep underground.

A group of NASA officials wrapped up a three day visit to the mine Friday with a report recommending the miners be given extra doses of vitamin D, to compensate for the lack of sunlight, an adequate exercise regimen and activities to keep them busy.

"We've got three alternative plans: plan A is up and running, plan B... should be starting on Sunday, and plan C is in the works so that by September 18 a third option is up and running," said the rescue operation's chief engineer Andres Sougarret.

"For now, we've got those three alternatives, but we're still dealing with a three to four month timeframe for the rescue," he added. Engineers Friday resumed drilling with the Australian-made Strata 950 excavator after a brief halt Thursday when the drill hit a geological fault 40 meters (130 feet) down that had to be reinforced with concrete to make it water tight.

A second drill that will widen a supply chute to the miners and could aid their rescue, arrived Friday dismantled atop five trucks at the site of the copper and gold mine in Chile's Atacama desert, some 800 kilometers (500 miles) north of Santiago.

Indonesia's smoking toddler kicks the habit

AP, Jakarta

Indonesia's smoking toddler has kicked the habit. Footage of 2-year-old Aldi Rizal who smoked up to two packs a day puffing away circulated the Internet in May and sparked an international outcry. His parents said he'd throw tantrums every time they tried to stop him from lighting up.

Psychologist Seto Mulyadi, who took the child into his own home as part of rehabilitation efforts, said Friday the boy has stopped asking for cigarettes.

He said Aldi picked up the habit because virtually every man in his fishing village in South Sumatra province smokes.

When removed from that environment, and offered a wide range of activities, including playing and drawing, he no longer had the urge, the psychologist said.

Aldi's father gave him his first cigarette when he was just 18-months-old, relatives have said.

মজার ঈদে মজাদার ভুনা খিচুড়ি

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