

Bad weather hits India's quake rescue effort

Toll climbs to 71

STAR REPORT

Landslides and inclement weather yesterday hampered rescue operations in quake-hit Sikkim as the death toll in the 6.8-magnitude temblor mounted to 71, including 41 in the Himalayan State.

The earthquake, which struck on Sunday evening, left a trail of devastation damaging roads, buildings and other structures, uprooting mobile phone towers and snapping communication and power lines. Aftershocks made people panic in several areas forcing them to spend the night outdoors.

West and South districts in Sikkim remained inaccessible to the Army due to landslides and inclement weather and rescuers were facing an uphill task to reach these areas, Major General S.L. Narasimhan, GOC 17 Mountain Division told reporters in Gangtok.

Sikkim alone accounted for 39 deaths, with most casualties taking place in the North District and in towns and villages like Rangpo, Dikchu, Singtam and Chungthang located along the course of Teesta river, officials in the district control room said.

Eight persons travelling in a bus of Teesta Urja Limited in North District are presumed dead as their vehicle got stuck under debris caused by a landslide, Narasimhan said. This, however, has not been incorporated in the official figure of those killed.

The overnight toll climbed to 66

which included six deaths in West Bengal and seven each in Bihar, Nepal and Tibet, official reports said. Over a hundred people have been injured.

In Delhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced Rs. 2 lakh as ex gratia to next of kin of those killed in the earthquake and Rs. 1 lakh each for those seriously injured, reports our correspondent in New Delhi.

Maj Gen Narasimhan said Army has launched 'Operation Madad' in Gangtok and other areas by deploying over 2,500 troops. "We are also sending teams to Darjeeling and Kalimpong (in West Bengal)," he said.

A group of 14 tourists were rescued by the army from north Sikkim last night, Maj Gen Narasimhan said.

Six people have died in different areas of north Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is on her way to Kurseong in Darjeeling district, said, adding she would review the situation there with officials, reports PTI.

She said efforts were on to repair the damages to NH-31A and NH-55 caused by landslides on a war-footing. She also announced compensation of Rs two lakh each for the next of kin of those who died in the State.

In Gangtok, Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Chamling announced an ex-gratia compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the kin of the deceased, Rs 50,000 for those grievously injured and Rs 25,000 for those with minor injuries.

Union Home Secretary R K Singh

said in Delhi that road communication in Sikkim, disrupted due to landslides, were being opened with the help of Border Roads Organisation personnel.

In Bihar, seven people have died with several houses being damaged in four districts. While Darbhanga alone accounted for four deaths, one each was reported from Nawada, Nalanda and Bhagalpur districts, officials at the state headquarters said.

Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua reported that at least seven persons have been killed and 22 others injured in Tibet in the quake which has caused landslides and has disrupted traffic, power and water supplies as well as telecommunication in Yadong County, an area 40 km away from Sikkim.

Three people were killed at Lainchaur in Kathmandu, two in Sunsari district, and one each in Dhankuta and Sankhuwasabha districts in eastern Nepal, according to Home Ministry sources in the Nepalese capital.

Around 300 rescue workers from the National Disaster Response Force were stuck at Bagdogra Airport as chopper services to Gangtok have been suspended due to inclement weather, officials said.

Seismic observatory in Shillong said that an earthquake of 4.3 magnitude on the Richter scale shook parts of Meghalaya yesterday.

At least 20 aftershocks throughout the night had created panic in the city.



Clockwise, People walk past a crack on the road in Gangtok yesterday after a 6.9-magnitude earthquake hit the region. Residents sit in a collapsed house damaged by the earthquake in Bhaktapur, some 12 kilometres south-east of Kathmandu. Survivors are seen at a temporary shelter in Gangtok.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Japan govt websites hit by cyberattacks

AFP, Tokyo

Websites of some Japanese government agencies were hit by cyberattacks over the weekend, temporarily blocking access to them, Kyodo news agency reported yesterday, citing national police.

The attacks affected the websites of the National Personnel Authority, a video distribution service and a site run by the Cabinet Office, the National Police Agency said, according to Kyodo.

Police said they believed the websites were hit by distributed denial-of-service attacks in which hackers overwhelm a target website with massive amounts of data using a multitude of compromised

US slams Iran at UN atomic agency meet

AFP, Vienna

The United States took a renewed swipe at Iran yesterday, telling the annual gathering of the UN atomic agency Tehran was creeping "still closer" to producing nuclear weapons-grade uranium.

"Iran has continued to engage in a longstanding pattern of denial, deceit and evasion", US Energy Secretary Steven Chu told the 151-nation International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) general conference in Vienna.

He said a recent example of Iran's "provocative behaviour" was to begin installing facilities to enrich uranium, which can be used for nuclear power as well as

China shuts factory after pollution protests

AFP, Haining

China shut down a solar panel factory yesterday after hundreds of angry residents staged days of violent protests over pollution, the second such incident in as many months.

A large red sign at the entrance to the factory in the eastern city of Haining announced the temporary closure, which came a month after authorities agreed to relocate a chemical plant following protests over pollution fears.

The swift decision to shut the solar panel plant underscores the intensity of official concern over mounting public anger about pollution in China, where an emphasis on economic growth has led to

Strauss-Kahn denies violence in sex assault cases

AP, Paris

Dominique Strauss-Kahn broke his silence four months after a New York hotel maid accused him of sexual assault, calling his encounter with the woman a "moral failing" he deeply regrets, but insisting in an interview on French television Sunday that no violence was involved.

Kahn, the former head of the International Monetary Fund and a one-time top presidential contender in his native France, also denied using violence against a French writer who claims he tried to rape her in a separate 2003 incident.

Throughout what appeared to be a heavily scripted 20-minute-long interview with French broadcaster TF1, Kahn managed to come off as contrite even as the Socialist politician insisted he hadn't forced himself on either of the women.

He said his May 14 sexual encounter with Nafissatou Diallo, an African immigrant who claimed that he attacked her when she



entered his room in Manhattan's Sofitel hotel to clean it, "did not involve violence, constraint or aggression."

Still, he acknowledged, it "was a moral failing and I am not proud of it. I regret it infinitely. I have regretted it everyday for the past four months and I think I'm not done regretting it."

It "was not only an inappropriate relationship, but more than that, it was a failing... a failing vis-a-vis my wife, my children and my friends but also a failing vis-a-vis the French people, who had vested their hopes for change in me."

Kahn resigned from the IMF's top job in the wake of the scandal. Though he didn't rule out a future return to politics.

Kahn, who had a long-standing reputation as a man with a weakness for sex and women, said the Diallo imbroglio had profoundly changed him.

"I've seen the pain that I caused around me and I thought, I thought a lot," he said. "That lightness, I've lost it for good."

8 dead as Pak Taliban target anti-terror cop

AFP, Karachi

A Taliban suicide car bomber flattened the house of a senior counter-terrorism police officer in Pakistan's financial capital Karachi yesterday, killing eight people including six policemen.

Senior Superintendent Aslam Khan escaped unhurt, but his home was destroyed and he said he knew he was the target, telling AFP that he had been threatened by the Al-Qaeda-allied Pakistani Taliban.

The Islamist militant group claimed responsibility for the attack and said Khan had been targeted for arresting, torturing and killing Taliban members.

It was the worst Islamist militant attack in Karachi.

Gaddafi troops stall rebel advance

AP, Wadi Dinar

Pro-Gaddafi fighters fired anti-aircraft guns at revolutionary forces holding the northern gate of a loyalist stronghold for a second day yesterday, as frustration with weeks of halting advances grows among the former rebel ranks.

Anti-Gaddafi forces have been massed outside Bani Walid since shortly after Libya's new rulers gained control of Tripoli and other parts of the country in August, leaving just a few major holdouts remaining loyal to the fugitive leader.

The official, trained military of the National Transitional Council, Libya's interim government, pulled away from Bani Walid to regroup and reinforce for a new assault after they were heavily beaten in the city Friday. That has left bands of ragtag, undisciplined fighters on the front line.

When they decide to enter the town, they charge in half a dozen pickup trucks only to retreat a short while later.

Yesterday, three of their cars rode right into an ambush by Gaddafi forces on a street none of the outsiders was familiar with.

Describing another typical attempt, fighter Lutfi al-Shibly of Libya's western mountains, said, "We entered the city, 600 meters from the city centre, but we didn't have enough forces so we lost the position and had to retreat."

The new leadership is facing a tough fight uprooting the remnants of Gaddafi's regime nearly four weeks after the then-rebels rolled into Tripoli on Aug 21.

Pro-regime forces kill 23 people in Yemen

AP, Sanaa

Pro-regime forces, including snipers picking off protesters from rooftops, killed at least 23 people yesterday in a second day of clashes shaking Yemen's capital, medical and security officials said.

The two days of fighting, which have killed nearly 50 people altogether, marked the most serious outbreak of violence in months, as frustration in the streets again builds over the president's refusal to step down after 33 years in power.

The officials said thousands of protesters armed with sticks overran a camp belonging to the Presidential Guards in Sanaa and that others were headed toward the headquarters of the elite force led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh's son Ahmed in the south of the city.

The officials said 20 of the 23 killed yesterday were on Sanaa's central Hayel street. They included a child and at least three soldiers who defected to join the protesters. Mortar shells thought to have been fired by pro-regime forces killed another two people in the capital, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to share the information.

Tens of thousands of protesters demonstrated in Sanaa Sunday to press demands for Saleh to step down. Pro-regime snipers killed at least 26 of the protesters.

36 killed in Burundi attack

AFP, Gatumba

Raiders killed at least 36 people when they stormed a Burundi bar and opened fire on patrons in one of the country's worst attacks in months, an official said yesterday.

The governor of Bujumbura Rural province where the attack occurred Sunday night, Jacques Minani, told AFP at least 36 people had been killed.

The attackers raided a bar in Gatumba area, some 13 kilometres (eight miles) west of the capital Bujumbura in a stronghold of the former National Liberation Forces (FNL) rebels whose leader Agathon Rwasa has been blamed for a recent spate of attacks.

Court extends Norway killer's detention, isolation

AP, Oslo

Confessed mass killer Anders Behring Breivik was ordered to remain in pre-trial detention for eight weeks yesterday during a closed court hearing in which he was cut off from making statements irrelevant to the case, a judge said.

The 32-year-old right-wing extremist has confessed to setting off a bomb in downtown Oslo and massacring dozens at an island youth camp outside the city, killing 77 people on July 22.

The Oslo District Court approved a police request to keep Breivik in custody on terror charges for another eight weeks - four of them in solitary confinement - as they prepare a formal indictment.

Judge Anne Margrethe Lund said she stopped Breivik "on a few occasions" when he tried to make statements during the court hearing, his third since being arrested fol-



lowing the carnage on Utøya island.

"He wanted to communicate something to the court. It wasn't relevant for the decision that was to be made today and therefore he wasn't allowed to say anything further," Lund told reporters after the hearing.

Breivik's defense lawyer Geir Lippestad also told reporters that his client tried to address the court but declined to give details, citing a gag order.

The ruling means police can continue to hold Breivik in custody until Nov. 14 when a new detention hearing will be held. But they can only hold him in isolation until Oct. 17 because decisions on solitary confinement must be reviewed every four weeks.

The district court initially ordered an open hearing, but a higher court overruled that decision after police appealed it. Some of the more than 600 survivors were represented by lawyers at the hearing.

Niger asks help for fighting terrorism

REUTERS, Geneva

Niger needs help training and equipping its security forces to deal with potential terrorism in the aftermath of the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's government in neighbouring Libya, Niger's president, Mahamadou Issoufou, said yesterday.

Addressing a World Trade Organization conference in Geneva, Issoufou said Niger wanted a speedy end to the conflict in Libya because of its impact on trade, immigration and security.

Three convoys carrying important members of Gaddafi's entourage have fled to Niger this month, including Saadi, one of Gaddafi's sons, Gaddafi's security chief and at least two top generals, all of whom are now in the capital.

Niger has voiced concern that weapons

plundered from the Libyan conflict could fall into the hands of al Qaeda's North African wing and other rebel groups who are already established in the region.

Niger has called for international help with intelligence-gathering and aerial surveillance to secure its six million square kms (2.3 million square miles) of northern desert, where Nigerien forces have clashed twice this month with suspected al Qaeda members.

"There have been concerns for security because weapons have been circulating in the country and we're concerned these will fall into the wrong hands," Issoufou told the conference.

Niger's security forces need help to deal with "terrorist activity that might develop in the sub-region," he said, adding that terrorism could develop from poverty.



Palestinian protesters hold flags in support of the Palestinians' United Nations bid for statehood during a protest outside the UN offices in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Berlusconi faces court for graft hearing

AFP, Milan

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was in court in Milan yesterday for a hearing into claims he paid a former lawyer 416,000 euros for false testimony about his business dealings.

The embattled Berlusconi, who faces a string of other legal challenges, is alleged to have paid the money to his former British lawyer David Mills for false testimony in a case dating back to the 1990s.

The Milan court, resuming proceedings suspended in July, was expected yesterday to hear video testimony from Swiss fund manager Maria De Fusco, who is alleged to have transmitted the payment to Mills.

A seemingly untroubled Berlusconi arrived at court smiling to journalists and saying: "Me, I'm fine, it is you who look a bit rough."

Mills, a specialist in offshore tax havens, was convicted by a Milan court in 2009 and sentenced to four-and-a-half years in jail, but an appeals court threw out the corruption case in 2010 as the time limit had expired.