

## 1m tsunami in Japan after 7.3 quake

AFP, Tokyo

A one-metre-high tsunami hit northeast Japan yesterday after a powerful undersea quake struck off the coast, sending thousands fleeing to safety in a region that was devastated in last year's quake-tsunami disaster.

Broadcasters urged residents along the shoreline to remember the 2011 catastrophe and move to higher ground when the initial tremors rocked the region.

Telephone systems jammed up with the sheer volume of calls, complicating officials' efforts to evacuate exposed areas until the tsunami warning was lifted two hours later.

Meteorologists said the wave swept ashore just after 6:00pm in

Ishinomaki, a city badly hit by the 2011 quake-generated tsunami that wrecked a large swathe of coast, killing thousands.

The tsunami warning was lifted two hours later.

There were no immediate reports of any fatalities following the quake, which had a magnitude of 7.3, according to the United States Geological Survey.

Operator Tokyo Electric Power told AFP there were no reports of any problems at Fukushima power plant.

Broadcaster NHK reported 5,000 people had fled in Miyagi prefecture, a region devastated in last year's disaster.

## UK royal hoax call nurse found dead

BBC ONLINE

A nurse at a London hospital who took a hoax call about the Duchess of Cambridge was found dead yesterday.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge said in a statement they were "deeply saddened" by the death of the nurse, named as Jacintha Saldanha.

King Edward VII hospital paid tribute to "a first class nurse" who was the "victim of a hoax call."

Details of the pregnant duchess's medical condition were unwittingly revealed to two Australian DJs.

The DJs, from Sydney radio station 2Day FM - which says it is preparing a statement - posed as the Queen and Prince Charles.

The duchess had been admitted on Monday for acute morning sickness, and was discharged on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP  
Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal, left, and senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, right, wave to the crowd upon Meshaal's arrival in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Inset, Khaled Meshaal prays upon his arrival.



## Surprise meet fails to unite US, Russia

Hillary urges concerted push; raging violence kills 77

AFP, Damascus

### SYRIA CRISIS

Syria's army sent reinforcements to rebel town near Damascus as clashes raged south of the capital Friday, hours after talks on the conflict between the US, Russia and UN ended without a breakthrough.

Meanwhile, UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday said any use of chemical weapons by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to combat the revolt would be an "outrageous crime".

"If it is the case, then it will be an outrageous crime in the name of humanity," Ban told a news conference after visiting a Syrian refugee camp in the Turkish border town of Islahiye.

Ban's visit came amid international warnings to Assad's regime not to use chemical weapons to suppress the rebellion.

Inside Syria, activists feared a new ground assault on Damascus sub-

urbs where military reinforcements poured in, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The army bombed orchards surrounding Daraya where military reinforcements are heading," said the Observatory, citing activists on the ground.

Troops also bombarded the southern districts of Damascus.

Analysts say the Assad regime wants to ensure it hold on the capital so that it can be in a position to negotiate a solution to the nearly 21-month conflict.

The Observatory said at least 77 people were killed on Thursday across the country, half of them in Damascus and its suburbs.

Amid the unrelenting violence, a 40-minute meeting in Dublin on

Thursday between US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and UN-Arab League peace envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi ended with with "no sensational decisions".

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday called on all parties with influence in Syria to make a "concerted push" together to halt the conflict.

Hillary said there had been no "great breakthrough" during talks in Dublin on Thursday with her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and the UN peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, but said there would be further meetings.

It is likely the United States will move towards recognising the opposition National Coalition, set up in Qatar early last month, as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people at the meeting.

## Hamas chief in historic Gaza visit

AGENCIES

Hamas leader in exile Khaled Meshaal made his first visit to Gaza yesterday, kissing the ground and saying he hoped he would one day die a "martyr" in the Palestinian territory.

After his seven-vehicle convoy swept across the border from Egypt, Meshaal got out and kissed Palestinian soil before embracing Gaza's Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya.

Khaled Meshaal also called his first visit to the Gaza Strip his "third birth".

He said his previous two "births" were the day he survived an assassination attempt by Israeli agents in Jordan in 1997, and his actual birth in 1956.

Meshaal was born in the West Bank in 1956. He moved to Kuwait after the 1967 Middle East war and later Jordan, where his involvement with Hamas began.

His visit follows a ceasefire that ended days of violence between Israel and Hamas that killed 170 Palestinians and six Israelis. The Islamist militant group has governed Gaza since 2007.

Meanwhile, an Israeli official told the BBC that no guarantees for Meshaal's safety in Gaza had been requested and none had been given.

Israel, the US and the EU consider Hamas a terrorist organisation.

For the centrepiece of his three-day tour, Meshaal is scheduled to address the rally in Gaza City, where a stage has been set up with a replica of a type of rocket Hamas has fired into Israel.

He is also expected to discuss reconciliation moves with the Fatah movement, which Hamas removed from Gaza by force in 2007 after winning elections there. Fatah now rules parts of the West Bank.

Hamas was created in 1987 after the beginning of the first intifada - or Palestinian uprising - against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Under its charter, Hamas is committed to the destruction of Israel. But the group has also offered a 10-year truce in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from territories it occupied in 1967.



BENHAZI ROW

## Hillary defends Rice as 'stalwart colleague'

AFP, Dublin

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Thursday defended US envoy to the United Nations Susan Rice from a storm of Republican criticism, saying she had been a "stalwart colleague" and helped shape important policies.

"Let me repeat what I have said many times... Susan Rice has done a great job as our UN ambassador," she told reporters during a visit to Ireland.

Rice is one of the front-runners to succeed Hillary when she steps down early next year, but has been accused by Republicans of trying to mislead the American public over the September

attack on the US mission in Benghazi which killed US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans.

## Nepal again fails to form unity govt

Leaders get deadline extension to ink deal

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's president yesterday gave rival political parties a second extension to a deadline for forming a national unity government to lead the Himalayan nation into elections next year.

The decision came after leaders of all the main parties had failed to strike a deal on the political make-up of a proposed new cabinet, despite being given an extra seven days after missing the original target.

"Maoist leader Prachanda, who represented the four major parties in a meeting with the president, requested more time to resolve differences," said Lalit Basnet, a spokesman for President Ram Baran Yadav, using Pushpa Kamal Dahal's popular nom-de-guerre.

Nepal has been run by a caretaker Maoist-led government since the collapse



Ram Baran Yadav

in May of an interim assembly that had failed in its main task of drawing up a new constitution following a 10-year civil war that ended in 2006.

Yadav, whose role as head of state is normally ceremonial, had originally set a November 29 deadline for the parties to agree on the make-up of a unity government to take Nepal into polls for a new parliament set for April or May next year.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai hopes to name a cabinet that includes members of his Maoist party and others from the opposition Nepali Congress and UML as well as smaller regional groups.

Talks have stalled over who should lead the new administration, with the opposition blocs publicly rejecting the idea of a Bhattarai-led national unity government and the premier refusing to step aside.



Rescuers carry a body bag containing bodies of typhoon victims recovered from the debris swept by floodwaters at the height of Typhoon Bopha in southern Philippines yesterday. Rescue workers continued scouring remote areas for the typhoon yesterday which killed 546 people and left nearly as many missing.

PHOTO: AFP

## Manmohan govt wins FDI vote

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reforms," said Saugata Bhattacharya, an economist with Axis Bank in Mumbai.

Once again, Manmohan Singh's fragile coalition government relied yesterday on the outside support of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), underscoring the extent to which it is at the mercy of powerful regional groups to push through legislation.

SHOUTING AND WALKOUTS  
In the shrinking window before a general election due in just over a year, Manmohan Singh's minority government wants to push reforms such as allowing more foreign investment in its insurance and pension

sectors, and simplifying tax laws.

But these are likely to run into a wall of opposition from rival parties that say such market-friendly reforms will come at the expense of domestic businesses.

The Congress party has 10 days left before the end of the current parliament session to try to pass legislation.

"Our reforms are on track," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kamal Nath said after the vote, adding the government would bring financial sector bills to parliament next week.

However, the session could once again see the kind of disruption and walkouts that have repeatedly stalled business over

the last couple of years. Lawmakers have used them to air grievances on anything from corruption to demands for the creation of a new state in the south.

Moreover, the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), having seen its motion to block retail reform defeated, is likely to obstruct moves to allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector. The BJP wants a 26 percent cap set on investment, against the government's proposed 49 percent.

"We will oppose any move by the government against the recommendations of the standing committee on finance which has said it should be 26 percent," Prakash Javdekar, a BJP leader and spokesman for the party, told Reuters.

To carry on with reforms, the Congress party will have to rely on the support of the BSP and the SP to defeat the BJP.

In yesterday's vote BSP lawmakers voted with the government and SP deputies abstained, handing it a 123-109 victory after a debates punctuated by laughter and the occasional flare-up.

To be sure of its numbers, Congress brought one MP to parliament in a wheelchair and another on a hospital bed. Leading cricket batsman Sachin Tendulkar, a non-party MP, was in Kolkata playing in a test match against England.

"The regional parties supported the Congress party on retail reform and my feeling is that they will continue to do so because they don't want to give BJP any political advantage," said political analyst Amulya Ganguli.

The government also aims to pass a bill that paves the way for the Reserve Bank of India to issue new banking licences, as well as increase its regulatory powers over Indian banks.

India's economy is set to grow at its slowest pace in a decade in this fiscal year, and the government's overspending on subsidies on fuel and food has prompted global ratings agencies to warn of a downgrade.



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