

NEWS IN brief

S Korea president accepts PM resignation

AFP, Seoul

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye yesterday accepted the resignation of her prime minister over a widening bribery scandal that has tainted senior members of her faltering administration.

Halt Indonesia drug executions: Australia

AFP, Sydney

Australia urged Indonesia yesterday to delay the execution of two men for drug offences until a corruption probe into their case is complete, after a report that judges sought tens of thousands of dollars in bribes.

'Batman' theater gunman to go on trial

AFP, Centennial

Opening statements will finally begin yesterday in the long-awaited trial of James Holmes, the allegedly crazed gunman accused of opening fire in a packed Batman movie premiere in 2012, killing 12.

WEST MYANMAR VIOLENCE US 'concern' over insurgent clashes

AFP, Yangon

The United States yesterday voiced alarm over rare clashes between the Myanmar military and insurgents in Rakhine state believed to have caused hundreds of civilians to flee their homes.

The US embassy in Yangon said it was "concerned by reports that hundreds of Rakhine civilians have been displaced by recent fighting" in Rakhine's Kyauktaw township.

"We urge all parties to cease hostilities, and ensure the protection of civilians and timely delivery of all necessary humanitarian assistance to the affected population in accordance with international standards," the embassy said in a statement.

State media reports of clashes since April 17 in Rakhine between the army and AA insurgents are believed to be the first time the rebels have fought troops in their home region.

The state remains deeply troubled after unrelated deadly religious violence in 2012 between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims, mainly from the Rohingya minority.

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE Villages 'all but gone'

BBC ONLINE

As emergency teams reach the areas around the epicentre of the Nepal earthquake, many are warning of scenes of complete devastation.

Aid groups say the damage could be far worse in rural areas than in the capital.

One aid worker spoke of "an entire village - all but gone" - and there are fears others have suffered the same fate.

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs said it expected "high and significant damage" in the regions closest to the earthquake's epicentre, Gorkha and Lamjung.

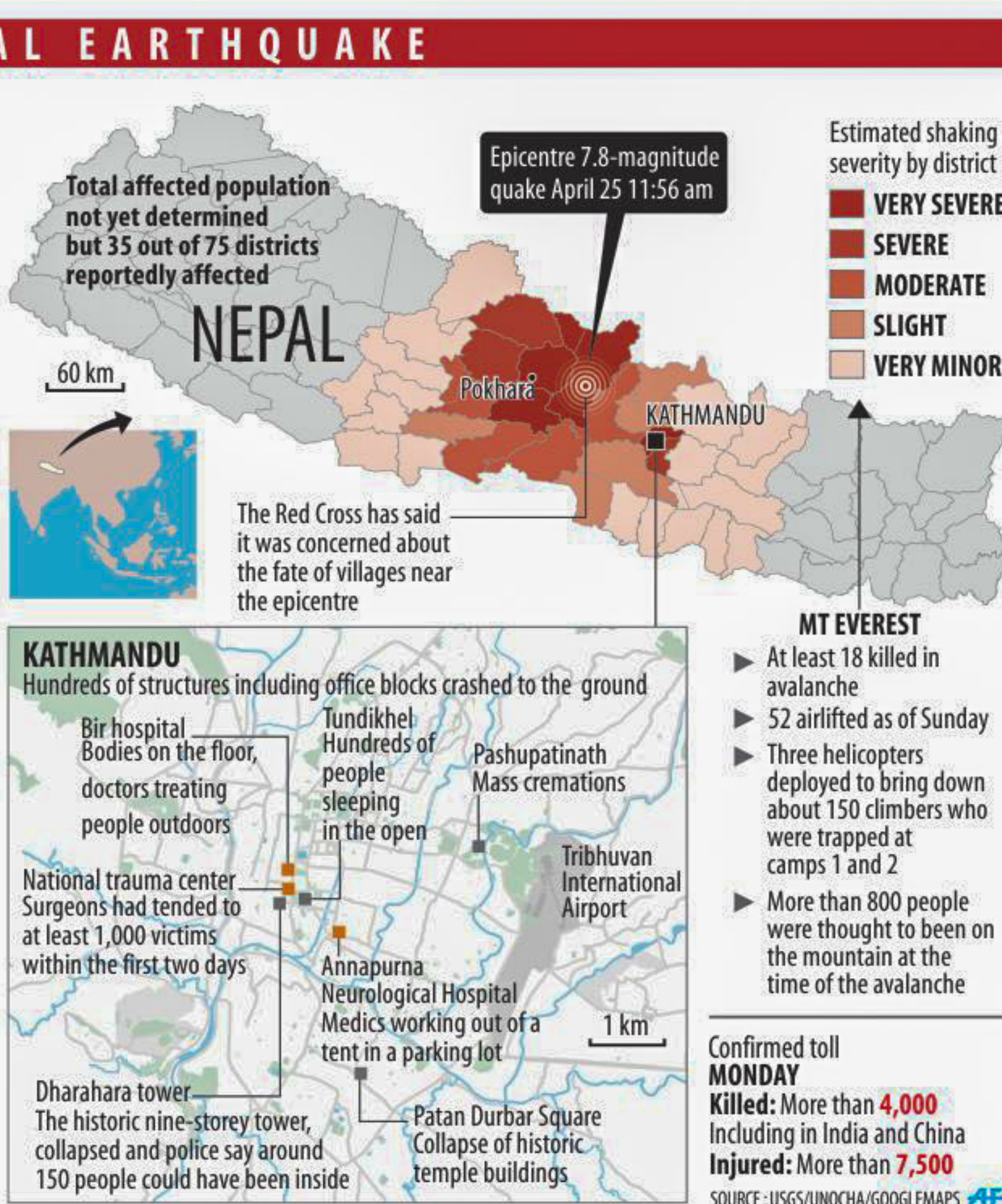
Close to 300,000 people live in Gorkha, which is normally around four hours' travel from Kathmandu. The region's most senior official, Udav Prasad Timalsina, said: "There are people who are not getting food and shelter."

"I've had reports of villages where 70% of the houses have been destroyed."

Timalsina said 223 people had been confirmed dead in the district but he said "the number would go up because there are thousands who are injured".

Yesterday, an Indian journalist flew over the damage in Gorkha in an Indian army helicopter. The footage shows many low-lying houses, seemingly cut off in the middle of mountains and reduced to rubble.

The journalist, Jugal Purohit, said: "What we are witnessing here are villages completely devastated, destroyed and, in a sense, rubbed off the map of Nepal."



Aid agencies prepare 'massive' operations

Fearful foreigners desperate to leave

AFP, Geneva/new Delhi

Humanitarian agencies said yesterday they were preparing a large-scale aid operation to earthquake-ravaged Nepal, with more relief planes arriving in the coming hours.

"This will be a... massive operation," Elisabeth Byrs, spokeswoman for the UN's World Food Programme, told AFP.

Officials say more than 4,000 people are now known to have died, the overwhelming majority in Nepal - making it the quake-prone Himalayan nation's deadliest disaster in more than 80 years. WFP experts arrived in Kathmandu on Sunday to evaluate the situation, and the agency estimates shelter and medical equipment should be the first priority.

The World Health Organization said Monday it had already distributed medical supplies to cover the health needs of more than 40,000 people for three months in the country.

But with food also expected to quickly run scarce, the UN agency has "mobilised all of our food stocks in the region," Byrs said.

WFP is loading a plane with rations of high energy biscuits in Dubai, and Byrs said it would



arrive in Nepal today. They will be distributed to survivors in the country, taken by truck where possible, but due to the massive destruction, "the relief cargo may need to be airlifted," she added.

The UN refugee agency meanwhile said it was yesterday sending nearly 20,000 plastic sheets and some 8,000 solar lamps.

About half the stocks were already in place in Nepal and the rest were being flown from Dubai to Kathmandu yesterday afternoon on a cargo plane

donated by the ruler of the United Arab Emirates, UNHCR said.

WFP experts are meanwhile poring over satellite images to estimate how many people have been affected by the disaster, Byrs said.

Meanwhile, thousands of tourists who flocked to Nepal for spring holidays and are now desperate to leave the quake-hit nation. With its stunning mountains and rich cultural history, Nepal is a drawcard for foreign tourists every year - almost 800,000 in 2013 - many of them climbers heading straight to Everest and surrounding towering peaks.

It is unclear how many foreigners are among the dead, including on Mount Everest, where at least 18 people were killed in avalanches sparked by the quake. Neighbouring India has evacuated close to 1,000 nationals on military aircraft since Saturday, but foreign secretary S Jaishankar said it was difficult to know how many were left in Nepal. China, which has lost four nationals in Nepal, said yesterday it had evacuated more than 1,000 of its citizens and that airlines were racing to fly out 4,000 stranded tourists.

YEMEN WAR Saudi coalition vows two-pronged strategy

AFP, Sanaa

A coalition of Arab states vowed to coordinate political and military efforts to restore order in Yemen as Saudi-led warplanes yesterday launched new air strikes on Shiite Huthi rebels.

The raids killed at least 12 Huthi insurgents and allied forces as fighting continued across several provinces, military and local sources said.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the Abu Dhabi crown prince and armed forces chief of the United Arab Emirates, said the coalition is now working on military and political fronts to reestablish the legitimate authority in Sanaa.

The campaign's new phase is based on a "multilayered strategy, including military, as well as politics and development, to reestablish the legitimacy," he said on a visit to his troops in Saudi Arabia taking part in the coalition.

"We have no other choice but to succeed in the test of Yemen," Sheikh Mohammed said, quoted in UAE daily Al-Ihtihad, ahead of another UN Security Council meeting Monday on efforts to halt the conflict.

He stressed the UAE's determination to act alongside other Arab countries to confront "regional agendas that reflect greed", an apparent reference to Gulf neighbour Iran which supports the rebels but denies having armed them.

A police officer searches a man as South African Police officers backed by soldiers of the South African Defence Force SADF conduct searches and identity checks in Hillbrow Johannesburg, an area mostly inhabited by foreign nationals, yesterday. At least seven people have been killed in three weeks of unrest that have revived memories of xenophobic bloodshed in 2008, when 62 people were killed mainly in Johannesburg's townships.

PHOTO: AFP



Hawking endorses Labour in the General Election

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Stephen Hawking, argued to be the most intelligent man on the planet, thinks that Ed Miliband is the best person to be Prime Minister.

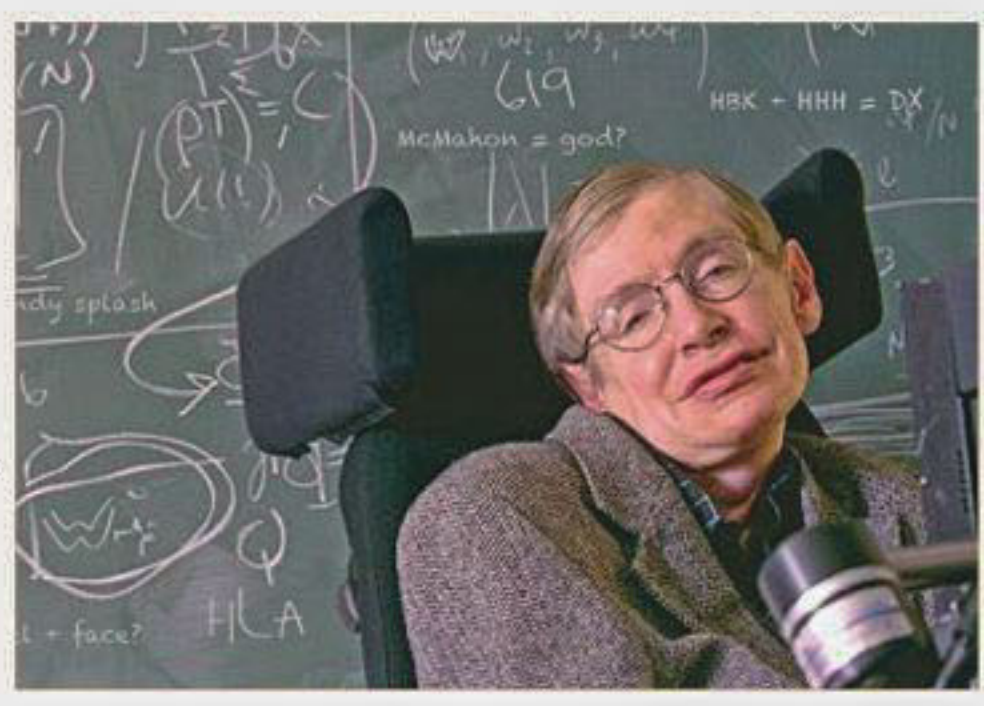
The physicist who was the subject of Oscar-winning film The Theory of Everything, has confirmed he is voting Labour and has backed Cambridge candidate Daniel Zeichner.

"We're really pleased and we hope that people will take note," said Zeichner.

"I think he fully appreciates the huge investment that the last Labour government made in science and you can see that in a lot of the buildings and laboratories around Cambridge.

"And many other scientists understand the city needs a Labour government to get the kind of investment we need again."

Hawking has previously spoken out against the privatisation of the National Health Service.



He described the NHS as "Britain's finest public service".

In 2013, he said: "Only last summer, I caught pneumonia, and would have died, but for the NHS hospital care. We must retain this critical public service, and prevent the establishment of a two-tier system, with the best medicine for the wealthy, and an inferior service for the rest."

Hawking has been politically vocal in recent years, refusing to attend a conference in Israel in protest against the state's treatment of Palestinians in 2013.

Land rises out of the sea in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Crowded Japan has got a little bit roomier after a 300-metre (1,000-foot) strip of land emerged from the sea and attached itself to the coast, experts said yesterday.

The extra stretch of coastline at the town of Rausu on Hokkaido island has risen as high as 10 metres from the sea surface in some places, exposing what used to be the ocean floor to the elements.

Initially the phenomenon, in a remote part of the island, prompted speculation among residents of mysterious seismic activities, fuelling fears of another big quake in a nation scarred by the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami of March 2011.

But geologists believe the emergence was probably a result of a landslide nearby, when melting ice and snow caused a section of land to drop, pivoting the underwa-

Ukraine seeks EU help as shelling blazes in east

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine pressed European leaders yesterday to send peacekeepers to stabilise the war-torn east, as monitors reported a surge in shelling near a strategic government-held city.

Top European Union officials landed in Kiev for a key summit with the former Soviet state as it faces off against separatists in the east, whom its Western allies accuse Russia of backing.

The EU leaders pressured Ukraine's government to speed up anti-corruption reforms to clean up Ukrainian politics and business in return for closer ties with the bloc.

"You have a powerful enemy, but you also have a lot of friends. You can count on their help, but it will not be enough unless you yourself change Ukraine," said EU president Donald Tusk.

Ukraine's pro-Western President Petro Poroshenko says the country first needs more help to stabilise the industrial east, where separatists have seized partial control of two regions and shelling is rumbling on despite a February ceasefire.

Observers with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe near the flashpoint town of Shyrokyne said they

had witnessed "the most intense shelling" since fighting began there in mid-February, as well as movement of heavy weapons.

Ahead of the summit Poroshenko called on EU leaders to "provide powerful signals in support of Ukraine and its European integration".

His office said it had "agreed to continue coordination" with EU officials on the possibility of a peacekeeping force.

An EU official said ahead of the summit: "We are studying these proposals in detail." But he added that the EU saw "no reason" to replace the OSCE monitors.

The official said the EU will stand up for Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and aims to see Kiev regain full control of its eastern border in 2015.

Poroshenko joined hands in front of the cameras with Tusk and the European Commission's top executive Jean-Claude Juncker before a series of closed-door talks.

The three were scheduled to give a news conference at 1315 GMT.

The top commissioner for EU enlargement negotiations, Johannes Hahn, meanwhile met Ukraine's Finance Minister Natalie Jaresko to discuss financial and administrative reforms, Hahn said in a Twitter message.

Clinton Foundation admits missteps in donor disclosure

AP, Washington

The acting chief executive of the Clinton Foundation is acknowledging the global philanthropy made mistakes in how it disclosed its donors amid growing scrutiny as Hillary Rodham Clinton opens her presidential campaign as the presume Democratic frontrunner.

In a blog posting on Sunday, Maura Pally defended the foundation's work and reaffirmed its commitment to transparency, describing its policies on donor disclosure and contributions from foreign governments as "stronger than ever."

Still, Pally said the foundation expected to refile some of its tax forms, following a voluntary external review, because it had "mistakenly combined" government grants and donations. She said the foundation would "remedy" any errors but stressed the total revenue was reported accurately and that grants were properly broken out on audited statements on its website.

"Yes, we made mistakes, as many organizations of our size do, but we are acting quickly to remedy them, and have taken steps to ensure they don't happen in the future," she said.

Pally also described the foundation's work with the Clinton Giustra Enterprise Partnership, which she said received funding from a separate organisation in Canada. She said that partnership does not disclose its donors because under Canadian law they are not disclosed without



Lanka seeks to restore presidential term limits

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government yesterday unveiled a bill that will restore a two-term limit for presidents and ensure the independence of the police and the judiciary, undoing moves by the country's former strongman to consolidate power.

The presidential term limit was removed by Mahinda Rajapakse as he gave himself more control over the administration after winning a second term in 2010.

His successor Maithripala Sirisena came to power on a mandate of reducing the powers of the presidency.

The amendment, presented by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to parliament, seeks to establish independent commissions to run 11 public institutions and removes the president's power to make appointments to them. Members will vote on it on Tuesday.

In a rare address to the assembly appealing to MPs to pass the amendment, Sirisena said they were "privileged" to support the bill.

"It is a meritorious act," he said.

The bill, however, falls short of his election pledge to scrap the presidency and transfer most of the executive powers to parliament, re-establishing a Westminster-style

