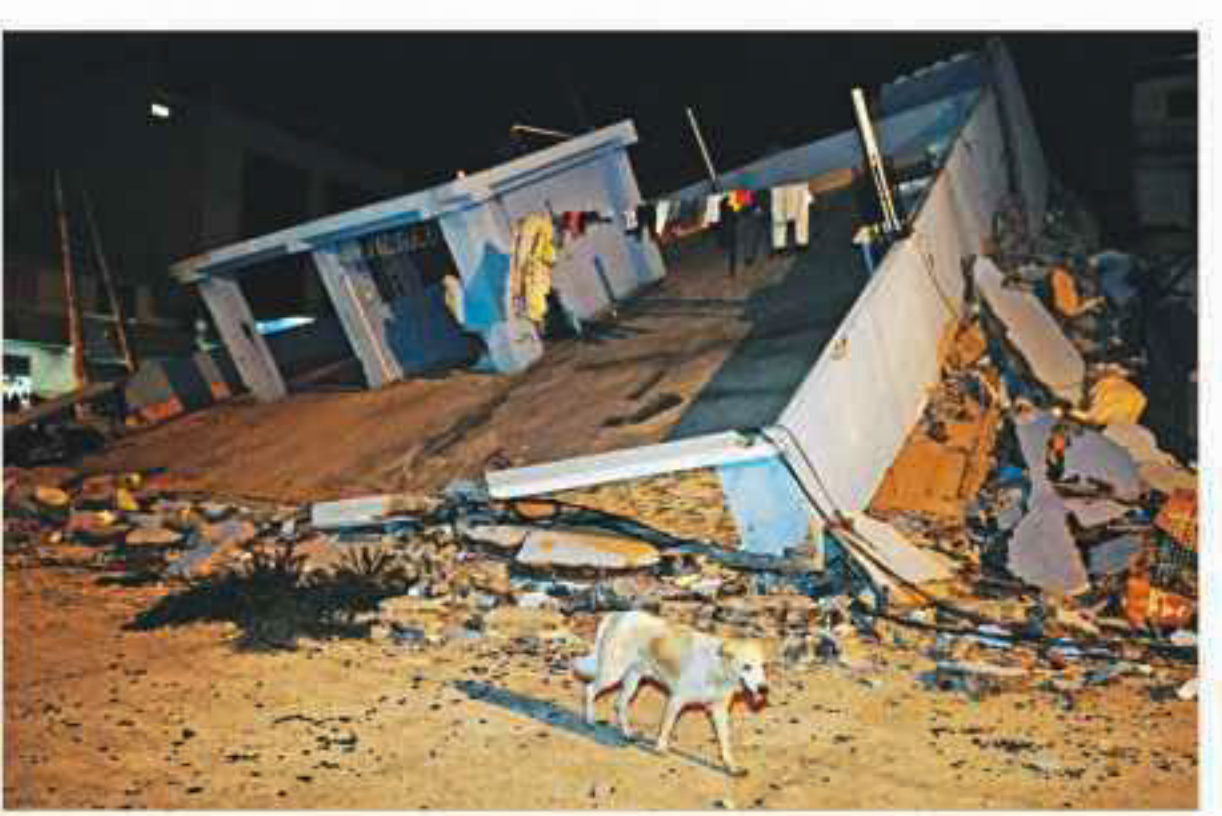


Ecuador quake 6x stronger than Japan's: expert

AP, Quito
Ecuador's earthquake is about six times stronger and has released more energy than the one in Japan a day before. David Rothery, a professor of planetary geosciences at The Open University, northeast of London, says the total energy released by the magnitude-7.8 quake Saturday in Ecuador was "probably about 20 times greater" than the magnitude-7.0 quake in Japan on Friday. Rothery told AP yesterday that bigger quakes last longer, so both the strength of the shaking and the duration contribute to the total energy. Rothery says the quake in Ecuador began deeper underground than the recent Japan quakes, which would have lessened the shaking on the ground. But the greater loss of life and greater damage in Ecuador can be attributed to the country's less stringent construction codes. The scientist also says "there is no causal relationship between the earthquakes in Ecuador and Japan."



ECUADOR



(From top, anti-clockwise) Rescue workers work to pull out survivors trapped in a collapsed building in the city of Manta early yesterday; a collapsed home in the city of Guayaquil; and people take picture of a damaged flyover in the city. Rescuers in Ecuador raced to dig out people trapped under the rubble of homes yesterday, following a powerful 7.8-magnitude earthquake that killed at least 233. PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Two shakes and everything came down, all at once'

Ecuadorian town residents recall how nature punished them twice in a week

AFP, Abdon Calderon
First came the flood and then the "long, long" earthquake, shaking so hard the two-story, covered market came down in a heap in this small town in western Ecuador. Dazed residents had begun the week in flood waters up to their chests, and ended it Saturday evening with a devastating 7.8-magnitude quake. "It's only been a week and nature has punished us so badly," said Nelly, a 73-year-old. In Abdon Calderon, 180 kilometers south of the epicenter, at least two people were killed in the collapse of the town market. "On Monday, water flooded the town. There wasn't a house that wasn't submerged. The water was up to our chests in the main avenue," Nelly said. Then on Saturday, she said, the market came down "like a house of cards." Too fearful to stay indoors, she had spent the night in the streets. Now she found herself standing outside the flattened market, hugging herself to keep warm as she tearfully recounted the town's double misfortune. A short distance away a firefighter

picked through the market ruin, looking for a way to retrieve the body of a man pinned under the mound of rubble and twisted steel. When the earthquake struck, Nelly said she rushed into the streets and saw that the market had collapsed. "How can I not cry," she sobbed. "There was a person trapped who screamed for help, but then the screaming stopped. Oh, it was terrible." Firefighters said when they arrived, the building had already been flattened. "Two shakes and everything came down, all at once. We've found two victims so far," said Alberto Santana, one of the firefighters on the scene. One of the victims was 51-year-old Francisco Mendoza who had a stand outside the market on weekends. His father, 73-year-old Colon Mendoza, said his son had just gone inside the market to use the bathroom when the quake struck. "This earthquake was unlike any I've felt before. It was stronger, the house shook so much it scared me, it was a tremendous rattle. ... The earthquake was long, long," he said.



Search on for survivors

250,000 people evacuated fearing more aftershocks; 11 still missing

AL JAZEERA ONLINE
Nearly 250,000 people have been evacuated amid fears of further earthquakes as rescue officials continue their desperate search for survivors in the remains of buildings destroyed in Japan. At least 41 people are known to have died in the double disaster and 11 are still missing, feared buried in shattered houses or under torrents of mud. Heavy rain forecast for the area around Kumamoto did not materialise Sunday, offering some relief for officials who cautioned more aftershocks might spark further mudslides. Tens of thousands of people had spent the night in temporary accommodation, or huddled in makeshift shelters as the rescue effort stepped up a gear. Rescuers on Sunday searched for dozens of people feared trapped or buried alive, while survivors queued for scarce supplies of food and water. Factories for companies including Sony, Honda and Toyota halted production as they assessed damage in the region, an important

JAPAN EARTHQUAKES



manufacturing hub in Japan's south. Rescuers pulled 10 students out of a collapsed university apartment in the town of Minamiaso on Saturday. Overnight, rescuers digging with their bare hands dragged some elderly survivors, still in their pyjamas, out of the rubble and onto makeshift stretchers made of tatami mats. Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he had accepted a US offer of help with air transporta-

tion in the rescue efforts. The US has almost 50,000 servicemen and women stationed in Japan. Tilt-rotor Osprey aircraft were among those taking part in relief efforts, the US Marines said. More than 400 aftershocks have rocked Kumamoto and other parts of central Kyushu, an area unaccustomed to the powerful quakes that regularly rattle other parts of Japan. The indiscriminate nature of the destruction saw some houses reduced to piles of splintered timber and smashed roof tiles while neighbouring homes were left standing. About 422,000 households were without water and 100,000 without electricity, the government said. NHK said around quarter of a million people had received evacuation orders across the affected region amid fears of landslides. On the other side of the Pacific, Ecuador was also struggling with the aftermath of a major 7.8 quake which hit on Saturday, killing at least 77 people. Both Japan and Ecuador are on the seismically active "ring of fire" around the Pacific Ocean.

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE Cruz wins Wyoming

AFP, Washington
Republican Ted Cruz picked up more delegates in the race for the White House Saturday, winning all 14 that were up for grabs at his party's state convention in Wyoming. The sweep comes as the Texas senator is attempting to chip away at rival Donald Trump's lead in the contest for the Republican presidential nomination. "Thank you Wyoming!" Cruz tweeted after the victory in the western state. "We had a tremendous show of grassroots support that resulted in a critical victory at today's Wyoming Republican Convention," he said in a statement. "This is another step in our drive to win a majority of Republicans to be the nominee." Cruz was expected to do well in the conservative state because of a solid ground operation and because he had been campaigning there -- unlike rival Trump, who has focused on delegate-rich New York primary on Tuesday. Cruz told party members before they picked delegates that he expected a battle at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio in July to determine the nominee. Cruz now has 553 delegates against 758 for Trump, according to CNN. A candidate needs 1,237 delegates to win the party's presidential nomination. Trump, speaking ahead of the vote on Fox News, blasted "the rigged and boss controlled" Republican primaries that he says are stacked against him. Party leaders in Wyoming however said that the rules were set long ago.

NEWS IN brief

- US transfers 9 from Gitmo to Saudi**
AFP, Washington
Nine Yemeni inmates have been transferred from Guantanamo Bay to Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon said on Saturday, bringing the controversial military prison's remaining population down to 80. It is the largest transfer from the facility since 10 Yemenis were sent to Oman in January and the first time Saudi Arabia has taken any Guantanamo inmates.
- S Sudan gunmen kill 140 in raid in Ethiopia**
AFP, Addis Ababa
Armed men from South Sudan have killed around 140 people and kidnapped a number of others in a cross-border raid into Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government said yesterday. The Murle, a tribe from South Sudan based in the eastern Jonglei region, often stage raids to steal cattle. They attacked the Nuer tribe, one of the two main ethnic groups in South Sudan, but who also live across the border in Ethiopia.
- Caste violence flares again in Gujarat**
AFP, Ahmedabad
Stone-throwing protesters clashed with police firing tear gas in Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state yesterday, the latest caste violence over demands for preferential treatment for jobs and university places. Police also fired water cannon when violence flared after a rally in the Gujarat state town of Mehsana by thousands of members of the Patidar, or Patel, caste.



Afghan child deaths soar amid warfare

AFP, Kabul
Child casualties have soared in Afghanistan this year as the Taliban stepped up attacks in urban areas, the United Nations said yesterday, branding the figures "appalling". Between January and March, 161 children were killed and 449 others injured -- a 29 percent increase from a year earlier -- the UN's mission in Afghanistan said in a report. Danielle Bell, the mission's human rights director, said women and children have suffered the most as the insurgents have launched more bomb attacks in populated areas. "In the first quarter of 2016, almost one third of civilian casualties were children," said Bell in the report. "If the fighting persists near schools, playgrounds, homes and clinics, and parties continue to use explosive weapons in those areas... these appalling numbers of children killed and maimed will continue. "Increased fighting in populated areas continues to kill and injure women and children at higher rates than the general population." Meanwhile, Afghan forces fought back a renewed series of attacks on Kunduz, killing dozens of Taliban fighters, officials said yesterday as insurgent forces stepped up their bid to retake the northern city that they captured briefly last year. The attack on Kunduz, involving hundreds of insurgent fighters, has intensified just days after the Taliban announced the start of their annual spring offensive, aimed at driving out the Western-backed government in Kabul.

Myanmar frees 83 political prisoners

AFP, Yangon
Myanmar President Htin Kyaw pardoned 83 political prisoners on the country's traditional New Year yesterday, a spokesman from his office said, as the fledgling civilian-led administration seeks to cast off the shackles of nearly half a century of military rule. The new government, steered by veteran democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, has spent its first weeks in power freeing scores of political activists prosecuted under the country's former military leaders. "All of the 83 prisoners that the president gave amnesty to today are political prisoners and prisoners concerned with political cases," Zaw Htay, the deputy director of the president's office, told AFP. A presidential pardon published yesterday morning said the amnesty was granted to "make people feel happy and peaceful, and (promote) national reconciliation during the New Year". The former junta's routine jailing of dissidents was one of many repressive policies that garnered support for the democracy struggle led by Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD), which swept historic polls in November.



Deputies hold signs reading "Impeachment now" and "Bye darling" during a session in the lower house of the Brazilian Congress in Brasilia, yesterday. Brazil's Congress was set to vote yesterday on whether to authorize impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, bringing to a head a crisis that has paralyzed and divided Latin America's biggest nation. PHOTO: AFP

Cuba's leaders are too old

REUTERS, Havana
Future top leaders of Cuba's Communist party should retire at 70 to let in younger blood, President Raul Castro said on Saturday, suggesting older members of the party hoping for promotion to the top table could play with their grandchildren instead. Cuba's current leaders include several septagenarian or octogenarian veterans of Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. There is a growing urgency for them to make succession plans to keep the party alive once they are gone. Raul Castro himself is 84 and after his planned retirement from government in two years time the country is likely to be led by somebody with a different surname for the first time since his brother overthrew a pro-US government nearly 60 years ago. His comments during a two hour speech at the inauguration of the Communist Party's twice-per-decade congress were met with silence, perhaps because some members were disappointed with the idea. "So serious! What silence is caused by this subject. Don't think that just because you can't be in the leadership of the country you can't do anything," Castro said, suggesting the elderly continue as party activists and spend more time with their grandchildren. Before the congress, the current party leadership faced some discontent among younger members critical of the slow delivery on promised economic reforms in the past five years. Fidel Castro, whose 90th birthday is in August, retired in 2008 after a serious illness and his younger brother took over, introducing a limit of two five-year terms for leaders. That limit has yet to be tested.

'We won't let you lose'

Putin told Assad; opposition threatens to quit UN peace talks
AGENCIES
Vladimir Putin has personally assured Bashar Al-Assad that Russia will not let the Syrian government lose the civil war, according to a senior British MP who recently met the Syrian dictator. During a visit to Damascus as part of a fact-finding mission, the Conservative MP David Davis held face-to-face talks with President Assad. He told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show that the Syrian leader discussed the motives behind President Putin's partial withdrawal of military forces from the country, after Russian troops proved instrumental in turning the tide of the war in favour of the regime. "The Russian intervention completely put the Syrian army back on its feet. I asked him why [Putin] downscaled it," Davis said. "[Assad] said: 'Because Russia was being criticised for stalling the [peace] talks,' taking away the incentive for him to negotiate it." "But then there was a line that came out of it, almost as a throwaway line, he said: 'Putin said, we will not let you lose.' For me, that was in some ways the most important phrase of the entire visit." Davis, also a former minister, said that an assurance of Russian support, if it had been given, meant there could only be a regime victory, or a negotiated settlement in Syria. In Geneva, the opposition delegation yesterday threatened to quit Syria peace talks if there is no progress on a political transition. Fighting in Aleppo killed at least 22 civilians yesterday. The opposition High Negotiations Committee said the indirect negotiations could collapse if Syria's regime refuses to compromise on political and humanitarian issues. **RULING PARTY WINS POLLS** Meanwhile, Syria's ruling Baath party and its allies won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections last week across government-held parts of the country, reports AFP.

