

INDONESIA QUAKE AFTERMATH

New aftershock rattles survivors

Witnesses see buildings collapse, rocks tumbling from hills as death toll hits 319; more than 270,000 displaced

AFP, Mataram

The death toll from a devastating earthquake on the Indonesian island of Lombok jumped to 319 yesterday, as strong aftershocks triggered panic among traumatised survivors waiting for aid in the worst-hit regions.

The shallow 6.9-magnitude quake Sunday levelled tens of thousands of homes, mosques and businesses across Lombok, with relief agencies only just starting to reach survivors in some of the worst-hit areas four days later.

"Our latest update is that 319 people died," said Indonesia's chief security minister Wiranto, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, adding that rescue efforts were ongoing and complicated by aftershocks.

The number forced from their homes in the disaster has soared to 270,000, national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said, with around 1,000 people severely injured.

Most of the displaced are sleeping under tents or tarpaulins near their ruined homes or in evacuation shelters that are short of food, clean water and medical help.

Makeshift medical facilities have been set up to treat the injured.

Survivors of the quake have also been shaken by hundreds of aftershocks, including a shallow 5.9-magnitude quake yesterday which caused people to flee evacuation shelters crying and screaming.

Motorcycles parked on the street in northern Lombok's Tanjung district toppled over and the walls of some nearby buildings collapsed. People ran out onto roads even as



An Indonesian soldier and an official (C) try to calm people shortly after an aftershock hits the area in Tanjung on Lombok island yesterday.

rocks tumbled down from hillsides.

"We were stuck in the traffic while delivering aid, suddenly it felt like our car was hit from behind, it was so strong," witness Sri Laksmi told AFP.

"People in the street began to panic and got out of their cars, they ran in different directions in the middle of the traffic."

Twenty-four people were injured by falling debris in the tremor, Nugroho said.

Authorities and international relief groups have begun organising aid, but badly damaged roads have slowed efforts to reach survivors in the mountainous north of Lombok, which bore the brunt of the quake.

Aid had begun trickling into some of the most isolated regions by midday yesterday, officials said, but many displaced people still lack basic supplies. In some parts of northern Lombok, survivors can be seen standing on the road with cardboard boxes asking for donations and food.



People pray for victims of the 1945 atomic bombing in front of the Peace Statue commemorating the 73rd anniversary of the bombing at Nagasaki's Peace Park, western Japan yesterday. *Inset*, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delivers a speech during the memorial ceremony at the park.

PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP

Imran Khan bats for more 'trustworthy' ties with US

Pak EC clears him of indecent language charges

AGENCIES

Pakistani prime minister-in-waiting Imran Khan called for more "trustworthy" ties with the United States which have frayed amid US accusations that Pakistan is aiding Islamist insurgents waging war in Afghanistan, something Islamabad denies.

Khan, who is due to be sworn-in as premier next week after his July 25 election victory, met acting US Ambassador to Pakistan John F. Hoover on Wednesday and said the ups and downs in relations had led to a "trust deficit".

Washington has suspended aid and military assistance to Pakistan.

"(My party) wants to build a relationship with United States based on trust and mutual respect and hence our government will engage with US to make this relationship more balanced and trustworthy," Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said in a statement late on Wednesday, attributing comments to Khan.

Khan added that there was a need to "trans-

form" the diplomatic ties between the two countries. The US Embassy in Pakistan has not commented on the meeting, reported Reuters.

In January, US President Donald Trump further strained relations with a withering attack on Pakistan on Twitter, accusing Pakistan of playing a "double game" on fighting terrorism and vowing a tougher approach.

Khan's party said the former cricketer also discussed Afghanistan with the US envoy, stressing that a political solution was needed rather than more fighting.

"Stability in Afghanistan, he said, is (in) the larger interests of Pakistan, America and the region and hence should be earned through viable political engagements," said Khan, according to the PTI statement.

Meanwhile, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) yesterday dropped the charges against Imran Khan, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Pervez Khattak for using indecent language during their election campaigns, reported Dawn Online.



Taliban kill dozens of Afghan soldiers

REUTERS, Kabul

Dozens of bodies of Afghan soldiers have been found in a military base stormed last week by Taliban militants in the embattled southern province of Uruzgan, officials said yesterday.

The attack in Chinartu district last Friday underlined the ferocity of fighting in many areas of Afghanistan even as speculation has increased about a possible ceasefire during the Eid holiday later this month.

"We have discovered and transported 40 bodies from the area, so far," district governor Faiz Mohammad said, adding that a number of security forces were still missing.

News of the attack only began filtering out over the past two days. Muhammad Radmanish, a spokesman for the ministry of defence, said 27 Afghan soldiers were killed and five wounded.

The base was back under control of security forces, said Radmanish but the attack has caused significant damage and weapons losses.

Amir Muhammad Barezai, a member of the provincial council, said some soldiers appear to have been shot after they were captured but it was not possible to obtain independent confirmation. No comment was immediately available from a Taliban spokesman.

"By Wednesday evening, the bodies of 27 soldiers were recovered, but a number of others are still missing," Barezai said.

RUSSIA PROBE

US senators ask Assange to testify

Says WikiLeaks

AFP, London

WikiLeaks said Wednesday that its founder Julian Assange was "considering" a request by a US Senate committee to testify about alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US elections.

The whistleblowing website posted on Twitter a letter purportedly from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence asking Assange to "make yourself available for a closed interview with bipartisan committee staff at a mutually agreeable time and location".

It added: "WikiLeaks' legal team say they are 'considering the offer but the conditions must conform to a high ethical standard'."

In the run-up to the 2016 US presidential election, WikiLeaks published documents hacked from Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton's campaign.

US intelligence officials have blamed Russia for the theft of the documents, which they say was part of a deliberate attempt to hurt Clinton's chances.

They claim WikiLeaks knowingly acted in concert with Russian intelligence. WikiLeaks has denied that the source of the material was the Russian government, while stressing it will never reveal where it gets its information.

On Wednesday, WikiLeaks said the Senate letter -- dated August 1 -- was delivered to Assange via the US embassy in London, but the mission declined to comment when contacted by AFP.

There was also no immediate confirmation from the Senate committee.



Supporters of Pakistani opposition parties carry placards with the picture of ousted Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif outside the election commission office against the alleged election rigging in Islamabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

No impact on ties

Delhi assures Dhaka after release of Assam NRC draft

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday asserted that it did not apprehend any impact on its ties with Bangladesh due to the issue of National Register of Citizens in Assam.

Asked if the NRC issue would come up during talks between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit to be held in Kathmandu on August 31, the official spokesman of the Indian External Affairs Ministry Raveesh Kumar told media persons here that "it is a speculative question."

Four separate questions were posed, two of them by Indian representatives of Bangladeshi newspapers, to Kumar on the NRC issue.

Replying to them, the spokesman said "let me make it very clear at the beginning that let us not speculate too much on this issue."

Answering another question if India has been in contact with Bangladesh on the NRC

issue, Kumar said "We have been in very close touch with the government of Bangladesh both prior to and following the issuance of the draft NRC and at all points we have repeatedly assured the government of Bangladesh that it is still a draft NRC prepared under the order of the Supreme Court and that the process of identification of the citizens of Assam is still on."

He said Bangladesh government has taken the view that the process is an internal issue of India.

"We do not apprehend impact on our ties with Bangladesh which remain excellent," said Kumar.

Asked if the NRC issue would figure in Modi-Hasina talks on the margins of the coming BIMSTEC Summit in the Nepalese capital, the MEA spokesman said "it is a speculative question. Let them first announce the Summit, then we will confirm as to who is going there and then come down to the question of bilateral meeting and what all will be discussed."



NY Times to pass 4m subscribers 'soon'

AFP, New York

The New York Times, the most prestigious newspaper in the United States, announced Wednesday that it expects to "soon" cross the threshold of four million subscribers, even if growth is slowing.

The company added 109,000 new digital-only subscriptions in the second quarter.

As a result, the newspaper ended the quarter with a 2.89 million digital-only subscriptions and 3.8 million subscriptions as a whole, including readers who receive only the print edition.

Since late 2016, when Donald Trump shocked the US establishment by winning the US presidency, the Times has enjoyed a period of rapid growth, acquiring around one million new subscribers.

"We'll soon pass three million digital-only subscribers and four million total subscribers," Mark Thompson, president and chief executive officer, told a conference call with investors, on Wednesday.

But the market has seen digital subscription growth slow, with a net gain of 139,000 readers in the first quarter of 2018, compared to 157,000 new digital-only subscriptions in the last quarter of 2017.

Thompson countered that the net additions were "still much higher" than typically achieved in the second quarter since the launch of the pay model.

Crop killing Armyworm caterpillar spotted in Asia

AFP, New Delhi

A caterpillar native to the Americas that has devastated crops across Africa has made its way to Asia, scientists in India said yesterday, warning of a threat to food security.

Scientists at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research said a survey had identified fall armyworm or Spodoptera frugiperda on more than 70 percent of maize crops examined in the Chikkaballapur area of southern Karnataka state, the first time the armyworm has been spotted in Asia.

In addition to maize, the pest can devour more than 180 plant species including rice, cotton and sugar cane, according to the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI), a not-for-profit group.

A.S. Vastrad, a scientist with the University of Agriculture Sciences, said the yellowish-brown caterpillar had the potential to spread rapidly to India's neighbouring states and countries.

"The female lays eggs very rapidly and

the pest has already entered two more Indian states, Tamil Nadu and Telangana," he told AFP.

The pest was first detected in Africa in 2016 and has since spread to more than 40 African countries causing massive destruction to maize, a staple food crop essential for food security in large areas of Africa and Asia.

It is likely that the armyworm arrived in India through human-aided transport after slipping through regulatory systems.

Natural migration is also a possibility as the moth can fly hundreds of kilometres in one night on prevailing winds.

"Rapid action is necessary as the pest has the potential to spread to other Asian countries owing to suitable climatic conditions and the prominent cultivation of maize in the region," CABI said in a report on its website.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation says it has invested more than \$9 million from its regular budget and mobilised \$12 million for its fall armyworm programmes.

70pc of maize crops in Chikkaballapur area of Karnataka suffers infestation: scientists

Bihar Social welfare minister resigns

TNN, Patna

Bihar social welfare minister Manju Verma on Wednesday resigned after a section of media, quoting police sources and call data record (CDR), reported that her husband Chandeshwar Verma had talked to Muzaffarpur shelter home rape accused Brajesh Thakur at least 17 times between January-June.

Manju's resignation came soon after Thakur admitted to media persons at the Muzaffarpur court campus that he used to speak to Chandeshwar "on political issues". Sources said Manju met CM Nitish Kumar in the afternoon and put in her papers.

Manju was in the eye of the storm ever since Shiba Kumari, wife of jailed child protection officer Ravi Kumar Raushan, alleged that Chandeshwar used to frequently visit the Muzaffarpur shelter home where 34 girls were allegedly raped over a period of time.

Shiba had alleged that Chandeshwar used to go to the upper floor, where minor girls used to stay, while asking the accompanying officers to stay put on the ground floor.

Manju said: "My husband is innocent and will be proved innocent. But I resigned on moral grounds after media reports appeared that my husband had spoken to Thakur 17 times."

NEWSIN brief

Begging not a crime, rules New Delhi court

REUTERS, Bangkok

A court in New Delhi has struck down a law that made begging in the Indian capital a crime, a major victory for campaigners who have long argued that the legislation was being used to harass and intimidate the homeless and the poor. In an order on Wednesday, the Delhi High Court declared several provisions of the legislation to be unconstitutional.

Pakistani actress Reshma shot dead

ANI, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In yet another incident of violence against female artists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, actress and singer Reshma was recently shot dead allegedly by her husband in Nowshera Kalan area. According to a report by a Pakistani news channel, Reshma, who was the suspect's fourth wife, used to live with her brother in the city's Hakimabad area.

Landslides kill 20 in southern India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 20 people were killed yesterday in landslides triggered by heavy rains in southern India, an official said, pushing the nationwide monsoon death toll for this year to over 700. The monsoon, which lasts roughly from June to September, is heralded by millions of Indian farmers but the relentless rain wreaks death and destruction every year.

Australia strips five of citizenship over IS links

AFP, Sydney

Five people have been stripped of their Australian citizenship for fighting alongside the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria officials said yesterday. The five are all aged in their 20s and 30s. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton provided no further details on their identities but welcomed their exclusion.