

INDONESIA QUAKE, TSUNAMI

Desperate locals turn to looting

Police guard fuel, shops amid growing lawlessness; death toll passes 1,300

REUTERS, Palu

Indonesia is in a race against time to save victims of a devastating earthquake and tsunami on Sulawesi island, the government said yesterday, as the official death toll rose to more than 1,300 and looting fuelled fears of lawlessness.

Four days after the double disaster struck, officials feared the toll could soar, as most of the confirmed dead had come from Palu, a small city 1,500 km (930 miles) northeast of Jakarta.

Some remote areas have been largely cut off after Friday's 7.5 magnitude quake triggered tsunami waves, destroying roads and bridges, and their losses have yet to be determined.

"The team is racing against time because it's already D+four," Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman of National Disaster Mitigation Agency, told a briefing in Jakarta, referring to four days since the quake.

He said rescuers had reached all four of the badly affected districts, which together have a population of 1.4 million, but he declined to give an estimate of casualties.

He gave few details of the conditions rescuers had found, saying they were similar to those in Palu.



Earlier, President Joko Widodo called for reinforcements in the search for survivors saying everyone had to be found.

The official death toll surged to 1,347 with 800 people seriously injured.

There has been particular concern about Donggala, a district of 300,000 people north of Palu and close to the epicentre of the quake, which only a few aid workers have managed to reach.

Nugroho said it had been "devastated" by the tsunami.

In Palu, tsunami waves as high as six metres (20 feet) smashed into the beachfront, while hotels and shopping malls collapsed in ruins.

Before-and-after satellite pictures showed a largely built-up neighbourhood just south of Palu's airport seemingly wiped clean of all signs of life by liquefaction.

More than 65,000 homes were damaged and more than 60,000 people have been displaced and are in need of emergency help.

The government has ordered that aid be airlifted in but there's little sign of help on Palu's shattered streets and survivors appeared increasingly desperate.

A Reuters news team saw a shop cleared by about 100 people, shouting, scrambling and fighting each other for items including clothes, toiletries, blankets and water.

Police were at the scene but did not intervene. The government has played down looting saying victims could take essentials and shops would be compensated.



Earthquake and tsunami victims look for goods in a convenience store in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia yesterday. Inset, sand is placed over dead bodies of the victims during a mass burial at the Poboya Cemetery in Palu.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US, China tensions mount

Beijing expresses anger after US Navy destroyer sails near islands in disputed South China Sea

REUTERS, Beijing

China expressed anger yesterday after a US Navy destroyer sailed near islands claimed by China in the disputed South China Sea, saying it resolutely opposed an operation that it called a threat to its sovereignty.

Beijing and Washington are locked in a trade war in which they have imposed increasingly severe rounds of tariffs on each other's imports.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the destroyer the USS Decatur travelled within 12 nautical miles of Gaven and Johnson Reefs in the Spratly Islands on Sunday.

The operation was the latest attempt to counter what Washington sees as Beijing's efforts to limit freedom of navigation in the strategic waters, where Chinese, Japanese and some Southeast Asian navies operate.

China's Defence Ministry said a Chinese naval ship had been sent to warn the US vessel to leave.

The ministry said China has irrefutable

sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and the waters around them, and the situation there is progressing well thanks to the hard work of China and countries in Southeast Asia.

"The US side repeatedly sends military ships without permission into seas close to South China Seas islands, seriously threatening China's sovereignty and security, seriously damaging Sino-US military ties and seriously harming regional peace and stability," the ministry said.

"China's military is resolutely opposed to this," it said.

The Chinese armed forces will continue to take all necessary steps to protect the country's sovereignty and security, the ministry said.

Reuters reported on Sunday that China cancelled a security meeting with Mattis that had been planned for October. A US official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said Mattis was no longer going to China.

China has not yet commented on the matter.

Dispute coincides with US-China trade war

China cancels security meeting with Mattis

Mahathir stands by criticism of Israel

Describes Jews as 'hook-nosed'

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad yesterday described Jews as "hook-nosed" and blamed them for creating the troubles in the Middle East.

Mahathir, who at 93 became the world's oldest head of government after starting his second stint as prime minister in May, has for decades been accused of anti-Semitism for his attacks against Jews, whom he has accused of perpetrating a humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories.

"If you are going to be truthful, the problem in the Middle East began with the creation of Israel. That is the truth. But I cannot say that," he said in an interview on BBC's Hard Talk.

Calling Israelis "special", Mahathir, prime minister of Muslim-majority Malaysia, challenged historical accounts that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, arguing that the figure was four million.

When asked why he described Jews as "hook-nosed" in his book The Malay Dilemma, he said: "They are hook-nosed. Many people called the Malays fat-nosed. We didn't object, we didn't go to war for that."

The Anti-Defamation League was not immediately available for comment but called out Mahathir's "decades-long record of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories" in a tweet in May.



United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres (L) and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) leave the Rashtrapati Bhawan Cultural centre during the conclusion of the Mahatma Gandhi international sanitation convention and launch of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth year celebrations, in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Saudi woman barred from marrying suitor

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi woman has lost a judicial battle to marry the man of her choice as a court deemed him "religiously" unfit because he plays a musical instrument, a Saudi newspaper reported yesterday.

The ultra-conservative kingdom requires women to seek permission from male "guardians" -- their fathers, husbands or other male relatives -- to travel, get married and other tasks.

In some parts of the kingdom, a man who plays a musical instrument is considered of inferior status and having a bad reputation.

Two years ago the suitor, a teacher, asked for the hand of the woman, a 38-year-old bank manager from the ultra-conservative region of Qassim, north of the capital Riyadh, Okaz newspaper said.

But her family objected, saying he was not "religiously compatible" with her because he played the oud, the oriental lute which is popular across the Arab world.

The woman, who was not named, took her case to the courts. A lower court weighed in on the side of the family, saying the marriage could not go through.

"Because the suitor plays a musical instrument he is unsuitable for the woman from a religious point of view," the court said, according to Okaz.

America's global image worsens under Trump

Finds a survey of 25 nations by Pew Research Center

REUTERS, Berlin

The image of the United States has deteriorated further among its traditional allies after a year in which President Donald Trump ratcheted up his verbal attacks on countries like Canada and Germany, a leading survey showed.

The survey of 25 nations by the Pew Research Center also showed that respondents from across the globe have less confidence in Trump's ability to lead than they do in Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping.

Since taking office in January 2017, Trump has pulled the United States out of international agreements like the Paris climate accord and Iran nuclear deal, coaxed up to authoritarian leaders like Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un, and criticised his neighbours and Nato allies.

In June, after a G7 summit in Canada,

Trump refused to sign a joint statement with America's allies, deriding his host, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as "very dishonest and weak". He has repeatedly attacked Germany for its trade surplus, low defence spending and reliance on Russian gas.

Last week, when giving a speech at the UN General Assembly in New York, Trump drew laughter from world leaders when he claimed to have achieved more in his two years in the White House than almost any other US administration in history.

The survey showed that America's image, which took a big hit in 2017, Trump's first year in office, continued to deteriorate in many countries in 2018, particularly in Europe.

Just 30 percent of Germans have a favourable view of the United States, down five points from last year and the lowest score in the entire survey after Russia, on 26 percent.



Peace treaty no bargaining chip

N Korea warns Washington

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday ruled out dismantling its nuclear arsenal in exchange for the US declaring an end to the Korean War, saying a peace treaty should "never be a bargaining chip."

The North has for decades demanded that the US formally declare the end of the 1950-53 conflict that was halted only with an armistice, saying an official end to the war would ease tensions on the flashpoint peninsula.

At a summit with the South's President Moon Jae-in last month, the North's leader Kim Jong Un offered to shut down its main Yongbyon nuclear complex if Washington takes "corresponding measures".

Kim did not elaborate on what those measure might be, but state news agency KCNA said in a commentary that some US experts have suggested trading the end of the war for denuclearisation.

It flatly described that as only the "most basic... process" to restore ties, not a point for negotiation.

"The end of war... is not just a gift from a man to another at all. Furthermore, it can never be a bargaining chip for getting the DPRK denuclearised," it said.

KCNA said that Pyongyang was willing to take "such... steps as eternal dismantlement" of its nuclear complex "if the US

AFGHAN ELECTION RALLY

Suicide bomber kills 13 people

More than 40 injured

AFP, Jalalabad

A suicide attack on a political rally in eastern Afghanistan killed at least 13 people yesterday, officials said, as the country braces for an escalation in violence ahead of this month's parliamentary election.

The attack is the first suicide assault since campaigning officially began last Friday for the long-delayed ballot, preparations for which have already been marred by dozens of bloody attacks.

More than 40 people were wounded, some of them critically, when the militant blew himself up among supporters of candidate Abdul Nasir Mohmmad in Nangarhar province, provincial governor spokesman Ataullah Khogyani said.

Mohmmad survived the attack, Khogyani confirmed, but he did not say if the candidate had been hurt.

Provincial health director Najibullah Kamawal put the death toll slightly higher at 14.

An AFP reporter saw numerous ambulances delivering bodies and wounded people to a hospital in the provincial capital of Jalalabad.

Sayed Humayun, who had brought his injured cousin to the medical facility, said scores of people had been inside a hall listening to campaign speeches when the bomber struck.

"I heard a big explosion," Humayun told AFP.

"For a while I could not see, I thought I was blinded, but later I saw I was surrounded by bodies and people covered in blood."

The force of the blast caused the ceiling to collapse on top of the gathering. "There are still people trapped under the rubble," Malik Zeerak, who was at the rally, told AFP.

No group immediately claimed the attack, but the Islamic State group has taken responsibility for most of the suicide bombings in recent months.



POST-POLLS MALDIVES

Yameen received \$1.5m in cash ahead of vote

Anti-money laundering body tells police

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

An anti-money laundering body in the Maldives has informed police that President Abdulla Yameen received 22.5 million Maldivian rufiyaa (\$1.5m) in hard currency days in advance of a contentious presidential election in the Indian Ocean island nation.

Yameen, long dogged by allegations of corruption and rights abuses, suffered a decisive defeat in the September 23 vote in an outcome hailed as a win for democracy in the upmarket tourist destination.

A confidential letter seen by Al Jazeera said the president received the money in two instalments to a private bank account at the Maldives Islamic Bank.

The document from the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), an agency under the

Maldives' central bank, was dated September 13 and was addressed to Acting Commissioner of Police Abdulla Nawaz.

In the letter, the FIU said a third party deposited \$648,508 in hard currency into the president's account on September 5.

Another \$810,635 was deposited to the same account on September 10.

"The whole amount was later withdrawn in hard currency," the letter said.

"When the bank asked about the source of the money and its use, the bank was told the money was donations from private companies and various others to be used in the 2018 presidential election," it said, without specifying who spoke on behalf of the president.

Two police sources confirmed the authenticity of the letter to Al Jazeera.



NEWSIN brief

Melania Trump starts Africa tour in Ghana

AFP, Accra

US First Lady Melania Trump yesterday kicked off her first major solo trip in Ghana's capital Accra, aiming to cast a positive light on her embattled husband's administration. A relaxed-looking Trump smiled and waved as she stepped off an overnight flight from Washington to be met on the red carpet by her Ghanaian counterpart Rebecca Akufo-Addo.

Bomb blast kills child, injures 9 in Kolkata

AFP, Kolkata

An eight-year-old child was killed and at least nine other people injured yesterday when a homemade bomb went off in a suburb of the Indian city of Kolkata, police said. India's eastern West Bengal state, of which Kolkata is the capital, has a long history of political violence and targeted killings of rival party activists. Eyewitnesses described a "powerful explosion" to local media and said that it shattered the windows of nearby buildings.

Japan PM Abe names new defence minister

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday replaced his defence minister in a cabinet reshuffle that otherwise left key government positions largely unchanged. Itsunori Onodera, defence minister since August 2017, was replaced by Takeshi Iwaya, 61, a veteran politician who has had short stints in roles including vice minister for defence and foreign affairs.