

JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

Death toll rises to 73

Survivors face freezing rain, threat of landslides

REUTERS, Wajima

Rescuers raced against the clock yesterday searching for survivors of an earthquake in western Japan that killed at least 73, while evacuees continued to wait for further aid amid freezing temperatures and heavy rain.

The quake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck the Noto peninsula on New Year's Day, levelling houses and cutting off remote areas from aid.

Heavy rain was forecast in the quake-hit areas yesterday, raising fears of landslides that could further hinder efforts to free many more people still trapped under rubble.

Severed roads, damaged infrastructure, and remote location of the hardest-hit areas have complicated rescue efforts. The full extent of damage and casualties remains unclear two days after quake.



Satellite images from Maxar Technologies showed extensive damage in coastal areas, revealing destroyed buildings and capsized boats.

In Suzu, a town of about 13,000 people near the quake's epicentre, 90 percent of houses may have been destroyed, its mayor said on Tuesday, calling the damage "catastrophic".

Ishikawa prefecture has confirmed 65 deaths, up from 55 late on Tuesday, making the earthquake the deadliest in Japan since at least 2016. Smaller quakes continue to hit the peninsula.

Firefighters from Osaka and Nara prefectures pressed on despite the rain and aftershocks in hard-hit Wajima city, searching for a woman trapped in a wooden structure squashed by a seven-floor building that toppled over in the quake and landed on its side.

The rescuers were removing rubble to try to reach the woman, who was not showing any vital signs, a firefighter said. They dashed out from under the collapsed building as an earthquake warning alarm sounded yet again yesterday evening.



This picture taken from Rafah shows smoke billowing over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment yesterday. Inset, displaced Palestinians, who fled their homes due to Israeli strikes, shelter in a tent camp in Rafah. PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

RED SEA SHIPPING ROUTE

Huthi rebels fire on commercial ships

US military says 'none have reported any damage'

AFP, Dubai

Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels fired two missiles late Tuesday toward merchant ships travelling in the Red Sea near the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the US military said following a report by the British maritime security agency UKMTO.

United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations had initially reported explosions near a cargo ship sailing between the coasts of Eritrea and Yemen.

"Master reports no damage to the vessel and crew are reported safe at present," the agency, run by Britain's Royal Navy, said in a brief message.

The US Central Command later said Huthi rebels had fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles into the southern Red Sea, where there were multiple commercial ships but "none have reported any damage".

"These illegal actions endangered the lives of dozens of innocent mariners and continue to disrupt the free flow of international commerce," CENTCOM said on X, formerly Twitter, adding it was the 24th attack against merchant shipping in the area since November 19.

The UN Security Council was set to hold a meeting yesterday on maintaining international peace and security, which French diplomats said would address the issue of Huthi attacks in

the Red Sea.

In recent weeks, Huthi rebels have launched a flurry of drone and missile strikes targeting commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

They say their strikes are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel is battling Hamas members.

The Huthis, who control the Yemeni capital Sanaa and much of the country's Red Sea coast, have warned they will target ships sailing in the Red Sea that have links to Israel.

Several missiles and drones have been shot down by US, French and British warships patrolling the area.

According to the Pentagon, the Huthis have launched dozens of drone and missile attacks, targeting a dozen merchant ships.

The attacks endanger a transit route that carries up to 12 percent of global trade, prompting the United States to set up a multinational naval task force to protect Red Sea shipping.

On Sunday, the US military said it had sunk three Huthi boats following attacks on a container ship of Denmark's Maersk line.

The rebels said 10 of their fighters were killed in the incident.

Jet cleared to land before collision

Says Japan Airlines

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japanese authorities said yesterday that a passenger jet that collided with a Coast Guard turboprop at a Tokyo airport was given permission to land, but the smaller plane was not cleared for take-off, based on transcripts of conversations with the control tower.

All 379 people aboard the Japan Airlines (JAL) 9201T Airbus A350 had a miraculous escape after it erupted in flames following Tuesday's crash with a De Havilland Dash-8 Coast Guard turboprop shortly after landing at Haneda airport.

But five died among the six Coast Guard crew, while the captain, who escaped the wreckage, was badly injured.

Ukraine attacks Belgorod region with missiles

Says Russia; Nato to buy 1,000 Patriot missiles

REUTERS



Ukraine launched 12 missiles and several drones in the early hours of yesterday on Russia's southern region of Belgorod, Russia's defence ministry and local authorities said. Regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said the situation "continues to remain tense" in Belgorod, where

Russia says 25 civilians including five children were killed in Ukrainian attacks on Saturday. There was no word of any casualties from the latest attacks. Gladkov said the extent of damage would be assessed throughout the day. An aerial attack damaged several infrastructures and caused power cuts in the Kursk region, to the north of Belgorod. Meanwhile, Nato members in Europe have signed a contract for up to 1,000 Patriot missiles to bolster air defences in the face of the threat from Russia, the alliance said yesterday. Ukraine's escalation of attacks on Belgorod has come as Russia launched some of its most intense strikes on Ukraine since the war began almost two years ago.

Sweden sees coldest weather in 25 years

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden yesterday recorded its coldest January night in 25 years, with a reading of minus 43.6 degrees Celsius in the far north as a cold snap hit the country and neighbouring Finland. "To put that into perspective, that is the lowest January temperature in Sweden since 1999," Mattias Lind, meteorologist at Sweden's national weather agency SMHI, told AFP. In January 1999, a temperature of minus 49 degrees Celsius (minus 56.2 Fahrenheit) was recorded in Sweden, which then tied the record set in 1951. Lind said that yesterday's measurement was made at the Kvikkjokk-Arrenjarka station in Sweden's far north. "It is the lowest temperature that has been recorded in this specific spot since measurements began" at the site in 1888, he said. Several other stations recorded temperatures of below minus 40C in northern parts. While the region is used to seeing freezing temperatures, the recent cold snap has forced local bus operators to cancel services, and train operator Vy said Tuesday that it had cancelled all trains north of the city of Umea for several days. Trains were also disrupted in neighbouring Finland, where a seasonal record of minus 38.7 Celsius was recorded Tuesday evening in Lapland region. Several instances of frozen water pipes were also reported, and Finnish broadcaster YLE said around 300 people in the city of Tampere were left without running water on Tuesday.

Flawed polls may deepen political strife

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is likely to come under even greater strain. If the ruling party cannot manage competing demands within the party, the polls risk triggering more internal feuds. There could be greater risks of clashes between AL supporters and "opposition parties" who believe seat-allocation deals were being broken.

Even graver risks could lie in wait. The BNP's hope was that the AL could be forced to compromise in the face of a combination of mostly non-violent protests, economic crisis, and external and/or internal interventions, the report said.

The BNP leaders, many of whom are now in prison, could face pressure from factions within the party to revert to their old tactics of more

overt violence, possibly by teaming up with Jamaat. That would be a mistake, the ICG said.

The ICG said the BNP should continue to eschew political violence, even as it maintains its movement against the AL government and efforts to "restore democracy".

There is an economic aspect as well. A balance of payment or banking crisis could affect not only the country's poor, who are already suffering from high inflation, but also the middle class and even the wealthy, who have until now tended to back the government.

If Washington or other Western capitals impose sanctions, those would inflict further damage, the report said.

The ICG said instability in

Bangladesh serves no one's interests. Therefore, the election should be pushed back to create a new opportunity for dialogue, in which the US and India should work together to encourage a compromise between the two parties.

"A flawed election provides only more reason to redouble efforts to get the Awami League and its opponents talking again after January 7. Dialogue should aim to rebuild a modicum of trust between the two major parties, but its success will depend on concessions from the AL primarily, as well as the BNP to a lesser extent," the ICG said.

One possible outcome of this dialogue might be a second election in which the BNP and other opposition forces participate, the report said.

14 injured in pre-election violence

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Chowdhury, at a village in Agli union of Faridpur's Bhanga upazila around 3:00am yesterday.

However, MM Siddique, chairman of the union parishad and a Nixon supporter, denied the allegation and said none of their men were involved.

Mannur Rashid, OC of Bhanga police, said they launched an investigation in this regard.

In Netrakona-5, some 10 people were injured after an election camp of independent candidate Mazharul Islam Soheli Fakir was vandalised

allegedly by the supporters of AL-nominated Ahmed Hossain on Tuesday night.

The incident took place in Purbadhala upazila's Putika Bazar area, said Md Rashedul Islam, OC of Purbadhala Police Station.

The same night, Rasel, a supporter of the independent candidate, filed a case in this connection. In the statement, he alleged that supporters of the AL candidate carried out the attack, said the OC.

Ahmed Hossain could not be reached over phone for comments.

In Patuakhali 3, arsonists torched an election campaign office of AL nominee and incumbent lawmaker SM Shahzada in Galachipa upazila's Patabunia village early yesterday.

The upazila AL Joint General Secretary Sardar Md Shah Alam alleged that opposition supporters might have been behind the incident.

Galachipa Police Station's OC Ferdous Alam Khan said police are investigating the matter.

(Our correspondents from the respective districts contributed to the report.)

Twin blasts kill 103 in Iran

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IRNA said, adding that some were in "critical condition".

Iran's Tasnim news agency, quoting informed sources, said "two bags carrying bombs went off" at the site.

"The perpetrators... of this incident apparently detonated the bombs by remote control," Tasnim added.

The ISNA news agency quoted Kerman mayor Saeed Tabrizi as saying the bombs exploded 10 minutes apart.

"We were walking towards the cemetery when a car suddenly stopped behind us and a waste bin containing a bomb exploded," an eyewitness was quoted by ISNA as saying.

"We only heard the sound of the explosion and saw people falling. There was a bomb in the trash can," the witness added.

Online footage showed crowds scrambling to flee as security personnel cordoned off the area.

Images on state television showed several ambulances and rescue personnel in the area.

Among the 73 killed were three

paramedics who were dispatched to the area following the first explosion, according to Iran's Red Crescent.

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, overseeing military operations across the Middle East.

Declared a "living martyr" by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei while still alive, Soleimani was widely regarded as a hero for his role in defeating the Islamic State jihadist group in both Iraq and Syria.

In the eyes of many Iranians, his military and strategic prowess were instrumental in warding off the multi-ethnic disintegration of neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan as well as Syria and Iraq.

Long seen as a deadly adversary by the US and its allies, Soleimani was one of the most important powerbrokers across the region, setting Iran's political and military agenda in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

On days after his death in 2020 and leading up to his funeral in Kerman, millions turned out to mourn in a show of national unity.

A survey published in 2018 by IranPoll and the University of Maryland found Soleimani had a popularity rating in Iran of 83 percent, ahead of then-president Hassan Rouhani and then-foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Hamas leader

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But the total recorded Palestinian death toll has now reached 22,313, according to the Gaza health ministry. Some 128 Palestinians were killed and 261 injured in the past 24 hours, it added.

In the Al-Maghazi refugee camp, health officials said at least four people were killed in an Israeli air strike on a house. They said three people were also killed in an air strike on a house in Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip.

In Iran, foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said Arouri's killing would "ignite another surge in the veins of resistance and the motivation to fight against the Zionist occupiers..."



Migrants cross the Rio Bravo river, known as Rio Grande in the United States, into the US through Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua State, Mexico on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP