

## ‘We need aid’ Rescuers in Mandalay city plead for help

AFP, Mandalay

Exhausted, overwhelmed rescuers in Myanmar’s second-biggest city pleaded for help Saturday as they struggled to free hundreds of people trapped in buildings destroyed by a devastating earthquake.

Friday’s shallow 7.7-magnitude quake destroyed dozens of buildings in Mandalay, the country’s cultural capital and home to more than 1.7 million people.

In one street, a monastery’s clock tower lay collapsed on its side, its hands pointing to 12:55pm – just minutes after the quake struck.

Among the worst-hit buildings in the city is the Sky Villa Condominium development, where more than 90 people are feared to be trapped.

The building’s 12 storeys were reduced to six by the quake, the cracked pastel green walls of the upper floors perched on the crushed remains of the lower levels.

A woman’s body stuck out of the wreckage, her arm and hair hanging down.

Rescuers clambered over the ruins, painstakingly removing pieces of rubble and wreckage by hand as they sought to open up passageways to those trapped inside.

Elsewhere, rescuers in flip-flops and minimal protective equipment picked by hand over the remains of buildings, shouting into the rubble in the hope of hearing the answering cry of a survivor.

“There are many victims in condo apartments. More than 100 were pulled out last night,” one rescue worker who requested anonymity told AFP.

Widespread power cuts have hampered rescue efforts, with emergency personnel relying on portable generators for power.

After more than 24 hours of desperate searching, many are exhausted and desperate for relief.

“We have been here since last night. We haven’t got any sleep. More help is needed here,” the rescue worker told AFP.

“We have enough manpower, but we don’t have enough cars. We are transporting dead bodies using light trucks. About 10-20 bodies in one light truck.”

Myanmar is accustomed to regular earthquakes, bisected north to south by the active Sagaing Fault, but the violent fury of Friday’s quake was exceptional.

The country has faced at least 16 earthquakes in the last century above 6 in Richter scale.

More than 1,600 deaths have been confirmed already, with nearly 2,400 injured, and with the scale of the disaster only beginning to emerge, the toll is likely to rise significantly.

Myanmar’s ability to cope with the aftermath of the quake will be hampered by the effects of four years of civil war, which have ravaged the country’s healthcare and emergency systems.

In an indication of the potential enormity of the crisis, the junta has issued an exceptionally rare call for international aid.

Previous military rulers have spurned all foreign assistance even after major natural disasters.



(From left, clockwise) A rescue worker attempts to free a resident trapped under the rubble of a destroyed apartment building in Mandalay; a husband accompanies his wife on their way to the hospital after she was rescued from the rubble of the collapsed apartment building; and people stand near a collapsed temple in Mandalay. Rescuers dug through the rubble of collapsed buildings yesterday in a desperate search for survivors a day after a huge earthquake hit Myanmar.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

### MYANMAR QUAKE

## Why was it so deadly?

AFP, Bangkok

Experts say that the devastating earthquake in Myanmar on Friday was likely the strongest to hit the country in decades, with disaster modelling suggesting thousands could be dead.

Automatic assessments from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said the shallow 7.7-magnitude quake northwest of the central Myanmar city of Sagaing triggered a red alert for shaking-related fatalities and economic losses.

“High casualties and extensive damage are probable and the disaster is likely widespread,” it said, locating the epicentre near the central Myanmar city of Mandalay, home to more than a million people.

Myanmar’s ruling junta said yesterday that the number killed had passed 1,600.

However, the USGS analysis said there was a 35 percent chance that fatalities could be in the range of 10,000-100,000 people.

The USGS offered a similar likelihood that the financial damage could total tens of thousands of millions of dollars, warning that it might exceed the GDP of Myanmar.

Weak infrastructure will complicate relief efforts in the isolated, military-ruled state, where rescue services and the healthcare system have already been ravaged by four years of civil war sparked by a military coup in 2021.

Rebecca Bell, a tectonics expert at Imperial College London (ICL), suggested it was a side-to-side “strike-slip” of the Sagaing Fault.

This is where the Indian tectonic plate, to the west, meets the Sunda plate that forms much of Southeast Asia – a fault similar in scale and movement to the San Andreas Fault in California.

“The Sagaing fault is very long, 1,200 kilometres (745 miles), and very straight,” Bell said. “The straight nature means

earthquakes can rupture over large areas – and the larger the area of the fault that slips, the larger the earthquake.”

Earthquakes in such cases can be “particularly destructive”, Bell added, explaining that since the quake takes place at a shallow depth, its seismic energy has dissipated little by the time it reaches populated areas above.

conflict and there is a low level of building design enforcement.

“Critically, during all previous magnitude 7 or larger earthquakes along the Sagaing Fault, Myanmar was relatively undeveloped, with mostly low-rise timber-framed buildings and brick-built religious monuments,” Watkinson said.



That causes “a lot of shaking at the surface”, Bell said.

Myanmar has been hit by powerful quakes in the past. There have been more than 14 earthquakes with a magnitude of 6 or above in the past century, said Brian Baptie, a seismologist with the British Geological Survey.

Ian Watkinson, from the department of earth sciences at Royal Holloway University of London, said what had changed in recent decades was the “boom in high-rise buildings constructed from reinforced concrete”.

Myanmar has been riven by years of

“Today’s earthquake is the first test of modern Myanmar’s infrastructure against a large, shallow-focus earthquake close to its major cities.”

Strong tremors also rocked neighbouring Thailand, where a 30-storey skyscraper under construction was reduced to a pile of dusty concrete, trapping workers in the debris.

Christian Malaga Chuquitaype, from ICL’s civil and environmental engineering department, said the soft ground in Bangkok contributed to the impact on the city, despite being some 1,000 kilometres from the epicentre in Myanmar.

## 6 dead after clashes in J&K

AFP, Srinagar

Four police officers and two suspected rebels have been killed in Indian-administered Kashmir during a drawn-out firefight that also left several police wounded, security forces said.

The Indian army’s Rising Star Corps said in a social media post yesterday that “relentless operations” led to the “elimination of two terrorists”, a term commonly used for rebels opposed to Indian rule in Kashmir.

The clash began Thursday in the rugged and forested area of Kathua in the south of the disputed territory when a police foot patrol was ambushed while searching for militants, leaving four police dead, police chief Nalin Prabhat told reporters late on Friday.

Muslim-majority Kashmir has been divided between nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947, with both claiming the territory in full.

## 8 Pak soldiers, civilian killed

AFP, Peshawar

At least eight soldiers and a civilian were killed in western Pakistan on Friday in separate attacks along the border with Afghanistan, where violence has erupted in recent months, police told AFP.

Seven soldiers were killed in a security operation against “armed Taliban” in northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a police source said yesterday.

“Fighters hiding in a house fired on security forces,” the source said. The army deployed combat helicopters during the hours-long fight, killing eight Taliban fighters, while six other soldiers were wounded, the source said.

A blast from a bomb planted by separatists on a motorbike also killed a soldier and a civilian further south in Balochistan, police officer Mohsin Ali told AFP.

## Indian forces kill 16 Maoist rebels

AFP, Raipur

Indian security forces killed at least 16 Maoists during a fierce gun battle yesterday, police told AFP, as New Delhi ramps up efforts to crush the long-running insurgency.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in the decades-long “Naxalite” rebellion, whose members say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised people in India’s resource-rich central regions.

Saturday’s skirmish in Chhattisgarh state began after security forces launched a raid in the dense forests of Sukma district, police chief P. Sundarraj told AFP.

“We have so far recovered 16 bodies from the Maoists,” he said, adding that the toll may rise further.

Sundarraj said the gunfight was ongoing and that government forces had recovered a cache of arms including rocket and grenade launchers, assault weapons and other rifles.

A crackdown by security forces killed around 287 rebels last year, an overwhelming majority of them in Chhattisgarh, according to government data.

The Maoists demand land, jobs and a share of the region’s immense natural resources for local residents.

The movement gained in strength and numbers through the first decade of this century. At its peak, the rebels had an estimated strength of 15,000-20,000 armed cadres and were operating in districts equivalent to nearly a third of India’s landmass.

New Delhi then deployed tens of thousands of troops in a stretch of territory known as the “Red Corridor”.

The insurgency is a shadow of its former self as a result of years of counterinsurgency operations. Home Minister Amit Shah has vowed to eradicate the last remnants of the movement by early 2026.



Protesters shout slogans as they march through a tunnel after attending a rally called by the Republican People’s Party (CHP) in support of Istanbul’s arrested mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in Maltepe, on the outskirts of Istanbul yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Iran faces ‘bad, bad things’ if no nuke deal

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump said Friday that Iran faces severe consequences if it fails to reach a nuclear deal, after Tehran responded to a letter from the US president calling for talks.

“I sent them a letter just recently, and I said: you have to make a decision, one way or the other, and we either have to talk and talk it out or very bad things are going to happen to Iran,” Trump told reporters.

“I don’t want that to happen. My big preference – and I don’t say this through strength or weakness – my big preference is, we work it out with Iran. But if we don’t work it out, bad, bad things are going to happen to Iran.”

Trump, who in 2018 pulled the United States out of an agreement to relieve sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear program, now says he is open to talks on a deal that could reduce the risk of military escalation.