

REUTERS, Caracas

The death toll from Wednesday's twin earthquakes neared 1,500 people as foreign rescue teams poured into La Guaira, the hardest-hit state of a country long mired in a deep political and economic crisis. A strong aftershock of



The 80-strong team had found multiple people alive in the rubble thanks to alerts from their eight search dogs, but had not been able to pull them out in time to save them, he added. Saturday evening marked 72 hours since the quakes.

Dozens of buildings collapsed into piles of sand and rubble in the coastal state, about 40 km (25 miles) north of Caracas.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Pak airstrikes kill dozens

Islamabad says it targeted militants; Afghan govt reports civilian casualties

AFP, Tsamkanī

The strikes are the latest flare-up of violence between the neighbours whose relationship has been fraught since 2021, when the Taliban government took power in Kabul, and follow a weeks-long war that erupted in February.

Pakistan's information minister said the operations killed 25 militants and were aimed at a group that it blames for a deadly weekend attack in Karachi, although Afghan authorities have repeatedly denied their territory harbours militants.

The Taliban government said the airstrikes hit three eastern provinces, killing 36 civilians and

Pakistan's information minister said the offensive also included ground operations in border areas and targeted Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

“Three targets in Paktia, Paktika and Kunar were destroyed during precision strikes,” information minister Attaullah Tarar said. He said four militants were also killed in ground operations. The neighbours agreed to a ceasefire in March but there have been sporadic attacks since, with Pakistani strikes in June killing 13 people, according to Afghan officials.

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Prime Minister Tarique Rahman expressed deep sorrow at Monwar's death, saying his passing leaves a void in the country's cultural landscape that will be difficult to fill. He said Monwar's contributions would be remembered with respect and continue to inspire future generations. The prime minister also prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and extended condolences to his family.

Paying tribute to the veteran artist, Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation General Secretary Kamal Bayezid said, "A figure like Mustafa Monwar is born perhaps once in a century, and the void he leaves behind can never truly be filled."

Born in Brahmanbaria in 1935, Monwar's artistic journey began long before he became a household name. He studied at Kolkata's Sishu Vidyapith and was introduced to music by his father and elder brother. He later trained under Ustad Santosh Roy, a disciple of Ustad Fayaz Khan. Although his early interests included music, visual art would become the foundation of a career spanning more than six decades.

A graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Dhaka, Monwar dedicated himself to making art accessible and meaningful to wider audiences. He viewed culture not simply as creative expression but as a means of education, awareness and social engagement.

His influence extended far beyond galleries and classrooms. In 1964, he joined Pakistan Television as a producer and later became one of the key figures behind children's programming at Bangladesh Television. At a time when television was still establishing itself in the

region, Monwar recognised its potential to educate as well as entertain.

Among his most enduring contributions was "Notum Kuri", the talent show that introduced generations of young performers to audiences across the country. Many prominent artists, musicians and actors made their first television appearances through the programme.

Yet it was puppetry that became most closely associated with his name.

At a time when the art form received little institutional attention, Monwar helped bring it into the mainstream. Through characters such as Parul, Bagha and Mini, he introduced children to stories drawn from folklore and everyday life. For many viewers, these characters became as familiar as members of their own families.

His work took on added significance during the Liberation War in 1971. In refugee camps across West Bengal, Monwar used puppetry to inspire and encourage displaced people. Productions such as "Agachcha" ("Weeds"), "Rakshas" ("The Monster"), and "Elkjon Sahosi Krishok" ("A Brave Farmer") reflected the realities of the time and offered hope amid uncertainty.

Beyond children's programmes, Monwar also made notable contributions to television drama. He wrote and produced works including "Roktokorobi" and "Mukhora Romoni Boshikoron", both of which were nominated for inclusion in Granada Television's "A Global History of Television Drama".

Recognition followed throughout his career. In 2004, he received the Ekushey Padak, one of the country's highest civilian honours, for his contributions to arts and culture. In 2018, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy awarded him the Sultan Gold Medal.

Yet for many Bangladeshis, his legacy lies elsewhere—in memories of afternoons spent watching puppet shows, in stories shared across generations, and in the countless artists, performers and cultural workers inspired by his example.

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Closure of the waterway sent oil prices to above \$100 a barrel, pushing up global inflation and causing a political headache ahead of midterm elections for Trump, who touted falling oil and gas prices in a series of other early morning posts yesterday.

The accord paves the way for 60 days of more in-depth talks on thornier issues such as Iran's nuclear programme, although both sides have given conflicting accounts as to what was agreed.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday said that \$6 billion out of \$12 billion of assets frozen in Qatar would be released following the accord and returned to Iran, Iranian state media reported.

He described the memorandum, which includes waivers for sanctions on Iran's oil and petrochemical sectors, as "a great victory for the Iranian people."

in the final stages of agreeing on technicalities for the release of the first \$6 billion of frozen assets, which he said would be issued in two tranches.

Oil prices rose on Monday with Brent crude futures up almost 1% after the weekend tension highlighted the fragility of the US-Iran accord.

Earlier yesterday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner would fly to Doha this week for high-level meetings, which would take place alongside technical talks.

"As far as we're concerned, we're holding up our end of the ceasefire. Violence will be met with violence," Leavitt added.

A return to talks would follow several days of strikes and counterstrikes since an Iranian projectile hit a cargo vessel in the Strait of Hormuz on Thursday, with both the US and Iran accusing the other of breaking the interim ceasefire.

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