

WORLD | EARTHQUAKE IN TURKEY: THE OVERVIEW

EARTHQUAKE IN TURKEY: THE OVERVIEW; THOUSANDS KILLED AS BIG QUAKE HITS CITIES IN WESTERN TURKEY

By EDMUND L. ANDREWS AUG. 18, 1999

More than 2,100 people have been reported killed by the powerful earthquake that struck northwest Turkey before dawn on Tuesday, destroying thousands of buildings and giving rise to a vast archipelago of tent cities erected by people afraid to sleep indoors.

The quake, which struck at 3:02 A.M. local time on Tuesday, ripped through cities and villages while most people were asleep. Thousands were shaken out of their slumber to find walls collapsing, windows shattering and roofs tumbling down on them.

Government officials said that more than 13,000 people were injured by the earthquake and that they expected the death toll to rise.

Countless bodies remained buried under pulverized buildings in the early hours today. The most passionate plea from Turkish Government officials to neighboring

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"There are many living people who still have not been saved from beneath collapsing buildings," Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said on television on Tuesday night.

The epicenter was near the industrial city of Izmit, about 55 miles east of Istanbul, where as many as 1,000 people were killed, most of them trapped inside huge apartment buildings that crumbled within seconds.

In Golcuk, the site of a naval base on the southern coast of the Izmit Gulf, more than 248 sailors and naval officers were trapped under collapsed buildings. Scores of people were unaccounted for.

The quake was by far the strongest on record in this area, although the exact magnitude has not been determined. Turkish seismologists said the quake registered a magnitude of 6.7, while United States scientists first reported a magnitude of 7.8, but said additional measurements could lower that number.

Here in Istanbul, hundreds of buildings collapsed into dusty piles of concrete.

In a frantic, endless and exhausting race to reach all possible victims, rescue crews dug into piles of debris 20 feet high with bulldozers, tower cranes, front-end loaders and jackhammers.

Despite the extraordinary destruction, most of Istanbul's stunning mosques and minarets survived and appeared to remain in fairly good condition. Even while a vast majority of apartment buildings were dark, both because of power failures and the widespread fear of staying under a roof, the mosques remained well lighted and eerily serene against the late summer sky.

The treasured landmarks of the city, including the Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace and Hagia Sophia, were spared any visible damage.

On Tuesday night Istanbul became transformed into a city of tents and lean-to shelters as hundreds of thousands of people camped out along highways, in parks and in parking lots across the city. More than 250 aftershocks have been reported.

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70 buildings collapsed.

Jusuf Sever, a 54-year-old high-school teacher in Avcilar, watched in shell-shocked dismay as soldiers and about 100 construction workers tried to dig through the mountain of concrete that had been his apartment building.

"I was fast asleep, along with my wife and my daughter, when we woke up and the whole building was swaying back and forth," he said, pointing to what remained of his bed on the fringes of the rubble.

"Suddenly, the ceiling was gone and we were looking at the stars in the sky."

Mr. Sever's apartment was on the fourth floor of a six-story building. The top two floors were ripped off the building, and that allowed the family to escape without injury before the rest of the building collapsed.

Similar scenes played out in many places as the earthquake wielded a fearsome power across a wide swath of Turkey, including highly populated areas like Istanbul, with 12 million people, and Izmit, with nearly one million.

In Izmit, medical workers smashed pharmacy windows to obtain supplies for hospitals swamped by the injured, The Associated Press reported. Many areas were without electricity or water late on Tuesday.

Early today rescue workers suspended efforts to put out a fire at a large oil refinery not far from Izmit that had exploded and burned uncontrollably, pouring black smoke over the area, Reuters reported. The Anatolian news agency said a C-130 Hercules aircraft brought from the southern town of Antalya had sprayed foam, but failed to put out the raging flames of a naphtha tank at the refinery.

The Mayor of Izmit, Sefa Sirmen, told the agency that two fire extinguisher planes were on their way from France and Germany. He expressed fears that the blaze might spread to nearby gas tanks, "which will be catastrophic for Izmit."

The United States Energy Secretary, Bill Richardson, was in Istanbul at the time

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Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also visiting Turkey and offered help like helicopters, tents and blankets from American bases there.

Mr. Richardson and General Shelton were helping to organize aid from the United States, which will include a 70-member team being dispatched to Izmit.

Reuters reported that the group, from an organization in Fairfax, Va., that helped rescue victims of the bombings of United States Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania last August, includes dogs and equipment to locate survivors in rubble and help extricate them.

In badly hit areas many buildings with little visible damage stood side-by-side with others that were utterly destroyed.

And many people were already raising questions about whether slipshod construction practices had made a bad situation worse.

A vast majority of buildings along the main road through Avcilar were still standing, interspersed every few blocks by apartment buildings that were heaps of rubble.

One relatively new five-story apartment building with balconies and satellite dishes looked as if it had been pulled out of the ground. Each floor, from the front balconies to the rear windows, remained parallel to the one above it but now leaned at a 45-degree slant toward the ground.

Ozgur Oztopcu, a chemical engineer, stood watch over the diagonally shifted balconies of his friend's apartment. The friend had a wife and two daughters and one was still missing.

"I don't think she is still alive," Mr. Oztopcu said.

Telephone service within Turkey was disrupted in many areas but seemed to be functioning normally by the end of the day. But people trying to telephone from abroad found it almost impossible to reach anybody in Turkey for most of the day. In

Turkey were jamming up the international phone links into the country. But at least part of it appeared to be due to the limits of the telephone network.

As news of the earthquake raced around the world today, European countries, the United States, Israel and even Iran pledged to send medical supplies, equipment, rescue workers and other aid.

Even Greece, which has squabbled with Turkey for decades, offered condolences and indicated that it would send an airplane to help out.

As dust-caked soldiers and medical workers heaved slabs of rubble under the glare of spotlights throughout the night, thousands of people kept a weary vigil in the hopes of finding friends and family members.

"It is the biggest natural disaster I have ever witnessed," Mr. Ecevit told the Turkish people. "May God help our state and our people."

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