

'We cannot get to survivors fast enough'

Death toll from Turkish earthquake nears 300 as villagers claim to have been left without help

By JUSTIN VELA
in Istanbul

Thousands of people were working frantically yesterday to save survivors from the devastating earthquake in eastern Turkey despite rescue efforts being hampered by serious shortcomings in equipment.

As the death toll in Van province climbed yesterday afternoon to 265, with 1,140 injured, rescue teams described hearing calls for help from beneath the rubble from victims who they were unable to reach.

"We can't get to survivors fast enough," one rescue team member said, according to local media. In Ercis, a town of about 75,000 near the Iranian border said to have been hit hardest by Sunday's earthquake, it was reported that rescuers only had access to one device for detecting survivors under rubble. "We have to yell in buildings to see if anyone is there," one worker told the *Hurriyet Daily News*.

There were also reports that many villages in the surrounding area had been left without assistance, although that claim was denied by the Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay. An official at the Ercis municipality told *The Independent* that the town urgently needed supplies if it was to prevent more deaths. "We need blood [for the injured] and machinery to break the concrete to search for survivors faster," said Mustafa Aratoglu. He said the town also needed generators and batteries for heaters.

At least 120 people have already been killed in Ercis after 80 multi-storey buildings collapsed, including a student dormitory. The 7.2-magnitude earthquake, six miles underground, has knocked down 970 buildings in total. It is expected that the death toll will rise as teams reach outlying areas.

Across the province, people were re-



Rescue efforts

Five people pulled alive from the rubble

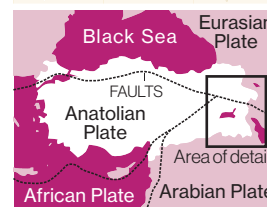
There were some good news stories among the destruction yesterday, with five people rescued alive from the rubble. One boy (pictured above) was pulled out from under a concrete slab, after crying out for help with the lifeless hand of an adult resting on his shoulder. He was one of two children rescued, while a man, Yalcin Akay, was dug out from a collapsed six-storey building with a leg injury after he called a police emergency line on his phone and described his location. KURSAT BAYHAN/ZAMAN/SIPA/REX

SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS VAN EARTHQUAKE

265 have died in the earthquake and **1,140** have been injured

970 buildings have collapsed in the disaster

2,400 rescue workers involved



portedly sleeping in tents provided by the government. Too scared to return to their homes, they lit campfires, trying to stay warm as nighttime temperatures dropped towards freezing. The disaster is likely to intensify, with snow expected later in the week.

In Ercis, the Turkish Red Crescent had set up tents in a stadium. But Mr Aratoglu said the tents had arrived late and the distribution was disorganised. Other residents told Reuters that tents were only being given to relatives of police and soldiers. One man told the news agency that he believed the government in Ankara was holding back aid. "All the nylon tents are on the black market now," said Ibrahim Baydar, a 40-year-old tradesman. "We cannot find any. People are queueing for them. No tents were given to us whatsoever."

Another Van official, Abdurrahman Dogar, said the situation in the smaller villages was even worse. "There is nothing, no tents, no blankets, no food," he said. "There are babies outside, there are pregnant women outside in the cold."

Construction worker Sulhattin Secen, 27, said he had initially thought the sound of the earthquake was a car crash. "Then the ground beneath me started moving up and down as if I was standing in water," he said. "May God help us. It's like life has stopped. What are people going to do?"

Visiting Van on Sunday, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he was especially concerned about the villages, which are largely composed of mud-brick homes. "I must say that almost all buildings in such villages are destroyed," he said.

Countries including Britain, the United States, Iran and Azerbaijan have offered support. An offer of assistance from Israel has reportedly been rebuffed, reflecting the two countries' troubled relations in the aftermath of last year's fatal shooting by Israeli forces of nine Turks aboard a Gaza-bound flotilla. "The Turks are not interested in our aid this time," Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told Israel's Channel 2 TV station.

Argentine President wins landslide re-election

By ED STOCKER
in Buenos Aires

Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez has cruised to a landslide re-election win after securing the widest victory margin recorded in the country since the return to democracy in 1983.

Final polls showed the Peronist leader won 54 per cent of the vote in Sunday's national election, a rise on the 50 per cent she achieved in August's primaries.

The 58-year-old President made her victory speech from a central Buenos Aires hotel when only 23 per cent of ballot papers had been scrutinised, a sign of how confident the mood was. She continued to strike a conciliatory tone, as she had done throughout the campaign, calling for national unity.

"These numbers are impressive," she said. In reference to her woeful approval ratings of 2009, she added: "If we'd mentioned these numbers a few years ago,



people would have said we were mad."

Few speeches made by Ms Fernandez fail to mention her husband and former president Néstor Kirchner who died of a heart attack last year. In keeping with her policy of only referring to him in the third person, she called him "the great founder of tonight's victory".

Ms Fernandez speaks in Buenos Aires after her re-election victory REUTERS

She made it clear she intended to continue with the expansionist economic policies that helped sweep her to victory: "Through historical understanding, popular will and political conviction, count on me to continue developing the national project that is helping improve the lives of the 40 million Argentinians."

The Kirchner-Fernandez years in power have looked to re-establish a strong state in the wake of the 2001/2 crash. The President has been able to fund social projects and state subsidies through booming commodity exports to China and trade with Brazil, Argentina's most important partner.

International organisations, including the International Monetary Fund, warn Argentina's economic situation is unsustainable. Despite predicting last month the country's economy would grow by 8 per cent this year – second only to China – it sounded alarm bells over an unofficial inflation rate of 25 per cent.

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