

International

Village life left in ruins after deadly Afghan quake leaves tens of thousands homeless

'Before the earthquake, life was nice and beautiful'

AKHTAR JAN, Afghanistan: Village life has always been tough for Afghans in the rugged mountains of the east, but compared to what they are enduring today it was paradise. A 5.9-magnitude earthquake rumbled through the area last Wednesday, killing more than 1,000 people, injuring three times that many, and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

"If life before was not really good—because for years there was war—the earthquake has made it even harder for us," says Malin Jan, who lost two daughters in the quake. All 14 houses in his village of Akhtar Jan were flattened, and survivors—including some from outlying hamlets—are now living in tents among the ruins.

Two small makeshift camps have been set up in dusty gardens, with stunted grass grazed by three cows, a donkey, two goats and a flock of chickens. In tents pitched in a circle, about 35 families—more than 300 people including many children—are trying to survive.

Living in such close proximity to non-relatives is anathema to Afghans—particularly in the conservative countryside where women rarely interact with strangers. Sanitary conditions are likely to deteriorate rapidly—there are no toilets, and people have to draw water from a well to wash.

"Before the earthquake, life was nice and beautiful," says villager Abdul Rahman Abid. "We had our houses and God was good." He gives a gruesome

count of those he lost in the rubble—his parents, his wife, three daughters, a son and a nephew. "The earthquake killed eight members of my family and my house is destroyed," he says, looking weary.

"There is a big difference now. Before we had our own houses and everything we needed. Now we have nothing and our families are living in tents." Neighbour Malin Jan is already looking ahead, fearful of what the future holds.

The harsh winter, which lasts almost five months in this remote mid-mountain region, will arrive in September. "If our children stay in this situation

their lives will be in danger because of the rain and snow," he says. Massoud Sakib, 37, who lost his wife and three daughters, also fears for the months ahead.

"Even living in a house is difficult during winter, so if our houses are not rebuilt by then our lives will be in danger," he says. On Saturday, the UN's top

official in the country, Ramiz Alakbarov, arrived from Kabul by helicopter to visit the region—including the village of Akhtar Jan—with representatives of each UN agency. Alakbarov was moved to tears as he met a young girl and was offered tea by a survivor, praising the "resilience and courage" of the people.

But their tenacity only stretches so far. Interviewed by AFP, the Afghan minister of health, Qalandar Ebad, warned of the "mental and psycho-

logical" suffering of victims. Malin Jan said the villagers were doing their best to help each other through the crisis.

"When a family is hit by a tragedy, the others naturally come to surround and support

them," he said. "Everything is affected... we console each other." But they cannot do it alone, adds villager Abdul Rahman Abid. "We ask the world to help us as long as we need it. It must share our pain." —AFP



GAYAN: In this photograph taken on June 25, 2022, men cook outside temporary tents for the earthquake affected people in Gayan district of Paktika province. —AFP

Widodo is scheduled to visit Moscow and meet with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The visit to Moscow is planned for June 30. Indonesian authorities said earlier. "With the same mission, I will ask President Putin to open a dialogue and to immediately have a ceasefire and to stop the war," he said. Earlier in April Widodo announced he had called Zelensky and invited him to join world leaders at G20 Summit in Bali in November 2022 as a guest.

Indonesia holds the rotating presidency of the G20 this year and has been pressured by Western countries, led by the United States, to exclude Russia from the meeting. Widodo, however, did not rescind the invitation to Russia and said that Putin has expressed his intention to attend the November summit.

Indonesia, like most major emerging economies, has tried to maintain a neutral position and has called for a peaceful resolution to the months-long conflict. Widodo refused to send



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

weapons to Ukraine in response to a request from Zelensky, instead offering humanitarian aid. After concluding the European visit, Widodo will head to the United Arab Emirates before returning to Indonesia. —AFP

Indonesia president to meet Zelensky, Putin to urge peace talks

JAKARTA: Indonesian President and G20 chairman Joko Widodo set off on Sunday to Europe where he said he plans to visit Russia and Ukraine and meet with the countries' leaders to urge peace talks. Widodo departed for Germany to attend as a guest for the G7 summit from June 26 to 27, and he will then go to the Ukraine capital Kyiv to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"The mission is to ask... President Zelensky to open a dialogue forum for peace, to build peace because the war has to be stopped," he told a press conference in Jakarta. The two leaders will also discuss the food supply chain "that needs to be reactivated" soon, Widodo said. From Kyiv,

Myanmar: Seized drugs worth half a billion dollars torched

YANGON: Myanmar authorities said they torched more than half a billion dollars worth of narcotics on Sunday as part of eradication efforts for World Drug Day, as the UN warns that production of methamphetamine in the region is hitting record levels.

Almost two tonnes of heroin and more than 630 million "yaba" meth pills went up in smoke at ceremonies in Myanmar's commercial hub of Yangon, the central city of Mandalay and Shan state in the north, authorities said. But some analysts cautioned that the \$642 million bonfires are part of a long-running game of smoke and mirrors played by a junta government not serious about tackling the problem.

The televised burnings represent a "decade-long delusion" about Myanmar's multibillion-dollar drug industry, independent analyst David Mathieson told AFP. "The military pretends to get serious about drug eradication and the West pretends to believe them," he said.

There was "active military complicity in protecting large-scale drug production to ensure stability in conflict zones", Mathieson added. This includes Shan state—Southeast Asia's primary source of meth according to the United Nations.

The state is home to militias and has seen relatively little violence in opposition to the military since Myanmar's generals seized power in a coup last year. At the ceremony in Yangon, bundles of meth wrapped in innocuous-looking Chinese tea packaging sat alongside bricks of cannabis as well



YANGON, Myanmar: Workers moving a structure in front of a burning pile of seized illegal drugs during a destruction ceremony to mark the United Nations' "International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking" in Yangon on June 26, 2022. —AFP

as bags of ketamine and MDMA.

A series of small explosions sent the contraband up in flames before thick plumes of black smoke billowed into the sky. Firefighters moved in for safety and police officers took selfies against the backdrop of the blaze while Burmese pop music blared through speakers.

Last month the UN said law enforcement across Southeast and East Asia netted nearly 172 tonnes

of meth in 2021 — about seven times more than a decade ago. The surge in supply has sent street prices in Thailand and Malaysia crashing to all-time lows.

From Shan state the drugs are increasingly shipped to Laos, then Thailand before reaching Malaysia, where they are trafficked onwards to countries throughout the Asia-Pacific, the UN report said. —AFP

Five things to know about International Criminal Court

PARIS, France: The International Criminal Court, which celebrates its 20th anniversary on July 1, is the world's only permanent tribunal to investigate and try alleged cases of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and aggression where member states are unable or unwilling to do so. Here are five things to know about the court based in the Dutch city of The Hague, which is investigating alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

US, Russia, Zionist entity opted out

A total of 123 countries have ratified the court's founding Rome Statute, meaning they recognise its jurisdiction, but there are some conspicuous absences, notably the United States, Russia and Zionist entity.

Both the United States and Russia have signed the Rome treaty but never ratified it. Moscow in 2016 withdrew its signature over an ICC report calling its annexation of the Crimean peninsula an occupation.

Zionist entity opposed the court from the outset, fearing that its leaders and/or military could be targeted in politically motivated cases. Other notable non-members include China, India and Myanmar.

The ICC can pursue nationals of non-member states for crimes committed on the soil of a member country or, as in the case of Ukraine, a non-member that recognises its jurisdiction. The UN Security Council can also call on the court to investigate potentially serious international crimes, as for instance in Libya and Sudan.

Five convictions in two decades

Between 2012 and 2021, the ICC successfully convicted five men of war crimes and crimes against humanity, all Africans. Three of the five were former militia leaders from the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo, with Bosco Ntaganda, a rebel leader nicknamed "Terminator" receiving the longest jail sentence the court has issued of 30 years for mass murder, rape and abduction. The court also sent Dominic Ongwen, a commander of Uganda's notori-

ous Lord's Resistance Army militia to jail as well as Malian jihadist Ahmad al Faqi al Mahdi, who was convicted of destroying a mosque and mausoleums in the ancient Malian city of Timbuktu. Former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo was the first former head of state to be tried by the ICC in 2016 but he was acquitted of crimes against humanity. Some convictions were overturned on appeal, notably that of former Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba, who was convicted of crimes committed by rebels under his command in Central African Republic but later cleared of responsibility.

Failures and fugitives

The court suffered a major setback in 2014 when its highest profile case—over Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's involvement in the inter-ethnic violence that broke out after disputed 2007 elections — collapsed.

Kenyatta reluctantly appeared before the court, the first sitting head of state to do so, but the prosecutor was forced to drop the case amid allegations of witness intimidation and bribery. Former Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir is also still being wanted by the ICC for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the western Sudanese province of Darfur. But three years after he was

One killed in Philippine ferry fire

MANILA: At least one person was killed after a fire engulfed a Philippine ferry on Sunday, authorities said, forcing scores of people on board to jump into the sea. Rescuers plucked 163 passengers and crew from the waters off the central island of Bohol, the Philippine Coast Guard said, as they searched for one missing passenger.

The "Mama Mary Chloe" vessel, which had a 236-person capacity, was carrying 157 passengers, including 15 children, along with eight crew from Ubay in Bohol to Bato on the nearby island of Leyte.

The body of a passenger has been recovered and a coast guard ship has been deployed to help with the search, authorities added. "The rescue of the crew and passengers was swift because of the help from motorbancas (boats) sailing in the waters when the incident happened," the coast guard said.

Almost 100 people were brought to land at a port in Leyte, where emergency personnel checked on the rescued passengers, coast guard videos showed. The Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, is plagued by poor sea transport, with its badly regulated boats prone to overcrowding and accidents.

In May, seven people were killed when a fire ripped through a ferry carrying 134 passengers and crew off the main island of Luzon. —AFP



A fire engulfed the ferry killed at least one person on Sunday.

deposed Sudan has yet to hand him over. The son of former Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi, Seif al-Islam Gaddafi, has been wanted by the court on war crimes charges for over a decade.

Dispute with Trump

The ICC infuriated US president Donald Trump's administration in March 2020 by authorising an investigation into alleged war crimes by US forces serving in Afghanistan. Washington imposed sanctions on the ICC's prosecutor in protest but his successor Joe Biden later lifted them. The investigation, which also included violence by the Taliban and Islamic State (IS) group, was later suspended at the Afghan government's request but relaunched after the Taliban takeover. Since it resumed however, it has focused on violence by the Taliban and IS to the exclusion of alleged US atrocities.

Pivot to Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has vaulted the former Soviet state to the top of the agenda of a court often accused of unfairly focusing on Africa. Four days after the war started ICC prosecutor Karim Khan announced an investigation into possible war crimes.