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Pace of Massive Relief Effort in Pakistan Speeds Up

By Benjamin Sand
Islamabad
13 October 2005

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Pakistani soldiers load relief goods into a US Helicopter bound for earthquake-affected area of Pakistani controlled Kashmir at Chaklala Airbase in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

landslides in the quake-affected mountainous areas northeast of the capital.

Relief efforts continued around the clock, as more aid began reaching the hardest-hit areas in Kashmir and the Northwest Frontier Province.

Several key roads leading to Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, have been cleared of

debris, and trucks carrying relief supplies are moving into the beleaguered city.

But aid workers say logistical challenges remain, and delivering urgently needed supplies such as food and shelter is still taking longer than they would like.

Dorothy Blaine, the country director for the Irish aid agency Concern Worldwide, says one of the main obstacles now is traffic.

"There are hundreds and thousands of vehicles on the road, not just aid, not just trucks, there are journalists driving up there, relatives driving up, and it is very, very slow," described Ms. Blaine.

The efforts in Pakistan to assist the hundreds of thousands of victims of last Saturday's devastating earthquake are beginning to take hold.

Another powerful aftershock rattled northern Pakistan, sending thousands of terrified residents of Islamabad back out onto the streets.

No damage was reported, but rescue workers say the tremor may have increased the odds of fresh

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Throughout the day helicopters ferried supplies to the remote mountain areas and evacuated the wounded.

The official death toll from Saturday's 7.6 magnitude earthquake was raised to 24,000, but rescue workers say that number could easily double in the next few days. Pakistani officials say billions of dollars may be needed to help the victims.

During a televised address to the nation late Wednesday, President Pervez Musharraf said he was establishing a special trust for donations, and asked for international support.

"I appeal to the international community to donate funds, to give financial assistance and donate to the president's relief fund," said President Musharraf.

Foreign governments continue to increase their initial contributions. The United States has provided \$50 million and says more is on the way.

The United Nations has issued an appeal for \$272 million, saying more than four million people in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan were affected by the earthquake.

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