

Nightmare in the Mountains

After a devastating earthquake, delays in getting relief to the Himalayan quake zone have left millions on the edge of survival

By **TIM MCGIRK**/NORTHERN PAKISTAN

THE RESCUERS HAD SEARCHED THE RUBBLE for days, with little expectation of finding anyone alive. Even the mother of 5-year-old Zarabe Shah had given up hope, leaving the ruins of Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, a once boisterous river town of about 150,000, to grieve elsewhere for her lost daughter. But what happened next was proof that even in the most devastated settings, miracles can happen. As workers pounded a hole in a collapsed house, the tiny figure of Zarabe crawled out. Her shiny red dress and spiky hair were caked with dust, and she was scared and thirsty. But otherwise Zarabe was unhurt—a living, breathing testament to the human will to survive.

She was among the lucky ones. As military helicopters and aid convoys began delivering food, water, medicine and tents to those stranded in the Himalayas, the full scale of the disaster became more apparent. The 7.6-magnitude earthquake that hammered northern Pakistan and India on October 8 flattened entire villages, burying scores of people whose bodies remain unrecovered. In Pakistan, officials expect the final toll to exceed 50,000 dead, with many thousands injured and more than 2 million people left homeless. In India, the quake killed more than 1,300 and left more than 100,000 without shelter. For the survivors, the devastation of the quake was followed by even more misery, as untold numbers in remote mountain villages went days without seeing any sign of relief. The delay in getting supplies to the disaster zone raised fears of untreated injuries, disease and malnutrition, or worse: the looming snow sea-

son could present the specter of masses of people freezing to death.

Most of the destruction took place in Kashmir, a stunningly beautiful land of rivers, lakes and valleys beset by decades of conflict and tragedy. India, which controls roughly two-thirds of the area, and Pakistan, which controls the rest, have fought two wars over the disputed territory. Both governments said they had summoned all available resources to assist the victims, but neither country's response was adequate to the task.

Like last year's tsunami, the Himalayan disaster

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presented a political opportunity for the Bush Administration, which hopes that by providing assistance to a Muslim country in need like Pakistan, it can help improve its image in the Islamic world. Washington has promised \$50 million in emergency aid, and already C-130 cargo planes are parachuting an airlift of blankets, plastic sheets, medical supplies and disaster-survival kits to victims. But U.S. officials say

the military can't afford to make an open-ended commitment to the relief effort without hampering antiterrorism operations in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, relief groups trying to raise money for the victims say they are encountering donor fatigue—perhaps caused by the massive private responses to the tsunami and to Hurricane Katrina. Jan Egeland, the United Nations' top humanitarian-aid official, is calling for worldwide donations of some \$272 million. "We are losing the race against the clock in the small villages," he says.

It is in those tiny outposts that the horror is still being uncovered. The quake struck as children were in their morning classes, in shabbily built schools that crumbled under the first shock waves, crushing thousands of boys and girls. Four days

after the quake, a teacher named Said Rasool traveled down from his village to seek help in Balakot, his cream-colored trousers still stained with the blood of his dead students. He wandered from one cluster of soldiers to another, pleading that they help him try to dig out his students. But there was still too much work to be done in Balakot before the soldiers could follow the teacher up

into the mountains. For Rasool, as for so many still awaiting relief, hope has already run out. ■

Questions

1. Who controls the region where the earthquake occurred?
2. Why does the Bush Administration believe that the earthquake provides a political opportunity?

KASHMIR IN RUINS

The deadly earthquake struck the heart of the rugged, war-torn area hotly contested by India and Pakistan. Now both countries are scrambling to get aid to remote villages

THE GROWING CRISIS

■ Officials expect the final death toll to top 50,000 as rescuers reach more remote mountain villages

■ With winter only a few weeks away, relief workers are scrambling to find shelter for the estimated 2 million people made homeless

■ Many roads into the high mountains are wiped out, and heavy rain grounds some relief flights, further slowing efforts to reach survivors

■ Pakistan's health-care facilities are strained to the limit. Thousands of injured people are without shelter or treatment, and officials fear large outbreaks of disease, particularly measles

WHAT LIES BENEATH

The 7.6-magnitude earthquake was triggered by the same forces that created the Himalayas. The Indian plate of the Earth's crust is moving north at around 2 in. (5 cm) per year, driving against the Eurasian plate. Because of those movements, southern Asia is prone to devastating earthquakes. A list of the deadliest over the past decade:

Date	Location	Magnitude	Death toll
Dec. 26, 2004	Indonesia	9.0	283,106
Oct. 8, 2005	Pakistan/India	7.6	50,000 (proj.)
Dec. 26, 2003	Iran	6.6	26,200
Jan. 26, 2001	India	7.7	20,023
Aug. 17, 1999	Turkey	7.6	17,118
Jan. 16, 1995	Japan	6.9	5,502

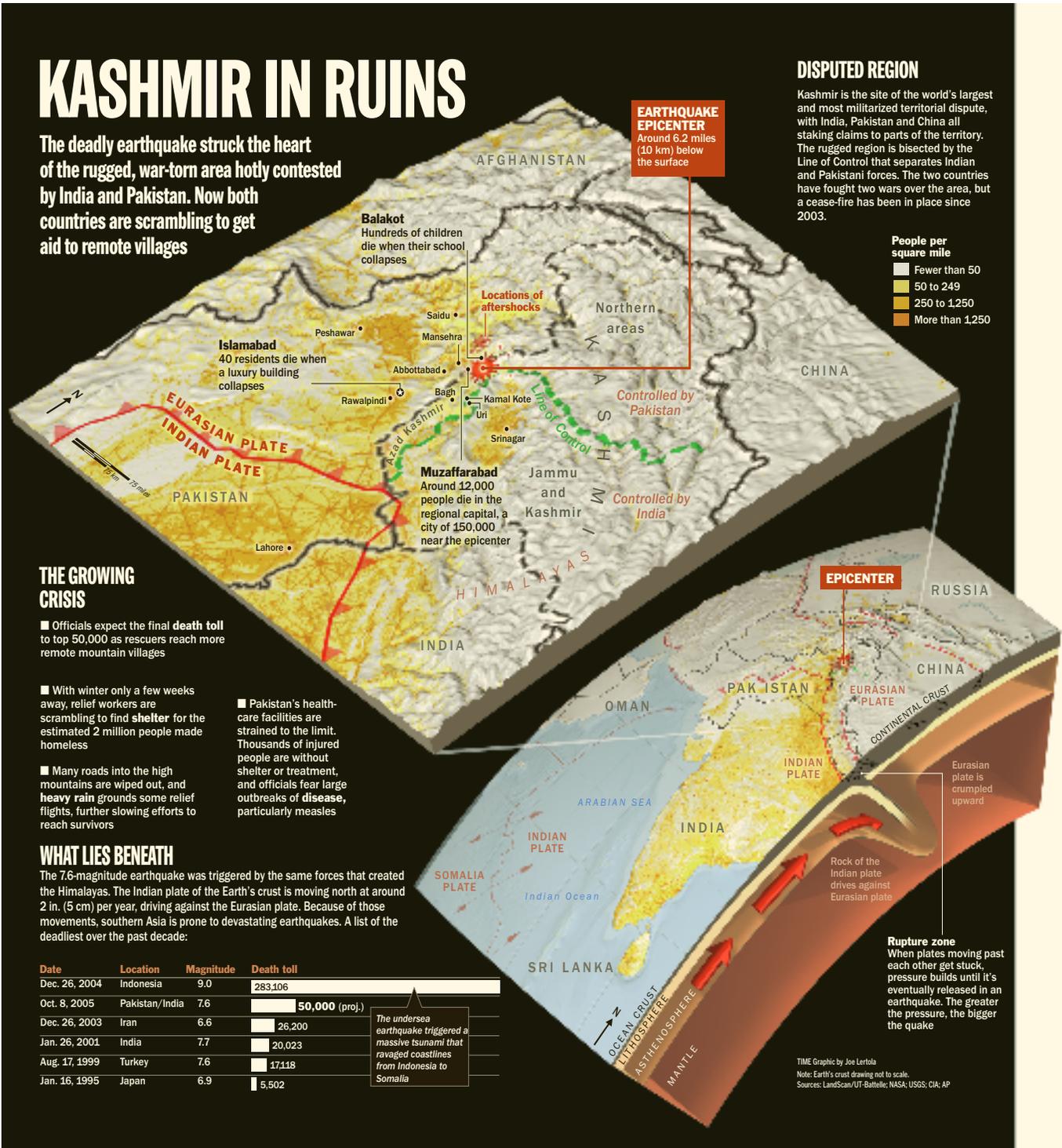
The undersea earthquake triggered a massive tsunami that ravaged coastlines from Indonesia to Somalia

DISPUTED REGION

Kashmir is the site of the world's largest and most militarized territorial dispute, with India, Pakistan and China all staking claims to parts of the territory. The rugged region is bisected by the Line of Control that separates Indian and Pakistani forces. The two countries have fought two wars over the area, but a cease-fire has been in place since 2003.

People per square mile

- Fewer than 50
- 50 to 249
- 250 to 1,250
- More than 1,250



TIME Graphic by Joe Lertola
 Note: Earth's crust drawing not to scale.
 Sources: Landsat/UT-Battelle; NASA; USGS; CIA; AP