

Quake hits U.S.S.R., rescuers seek victims

MOSCOW - A strong earthquake hit Soviet Georgia on Monday, setting off rockslides in mountain villages and killing at least 40 people, authorities said.

The quake also was felt in neighboring Armenia, which was devastated by a 1988 earthquake that killed 25,000 people. There were no reports of damage or injuries in Armenia.

Police spokesman Zurab Kadzhaya in the Georgian town of Kutaisi, near the epicenter, said Monday night about 40 people were killed and buildings in five mountain towns suffered widespread damage. The official Tass news agency earlier reported 30 people killed. It was not immediately known how many people were injured.

There were fears the death toll could rise as rescuers searched collapsed buildings in villages isolated by severed communications.

An aftershock as powerful as the initial quake struck the region at 9:33 p.m. (2:33 p.m. EDT), Tass said. U.S. Geological Survey spokeswoman Pat Jorgenson in Menlo Park, Calif., said the aftershock registered 6.2 on the Richter Scale.

Soviet Interior Ministry troops already in the region to quell ethnic unrest were ordered to the disaster area to aid in rescue efforts.

The initial quake struck at 12:13 p.m. (5:13 a.m. EDT) in north-central Georgia among the sparsely populated villages and towns in the Caucasus Mountains. It measured 7.1 on the Richter scale, according to the

Soviet Union's Central Seismic Station.

The epicenter was near Dzhava, a town of 11,000 people about 60 miles northwest of the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

In a report from Dzhava, Soviet TV showed collapsed buildings and others with gaping holes. Rescuers standing atop a mound of rubble dug frantically with their hands to remove large stones in search of further victims.

The independent Interfax news agency said a kindergarten, a high school, a hospital and a printing house were among buildings destroyed in addition to 30 homes.

The evening TV program "Vremya" showed rescuers pulling an injured woman from a badly damaged building in Dzhava. Another woman sat stunned outside a shattered house with her arm in a sling.

Don Finley of the U.S. Geological Survey in Reston, Va., put the Richter reading at 7.2 and said the quake released about four times as much energy as the 1988 Armenian quake.

Kadzhaya said by telephone from Kutaisi, 63 miles west of Dzhava, that about 40 people were killed in the region Monday and about 80 percent of the buildings were destroyed in Dzhava, Ambrolauri, Onei, Chiatura and Sachkhere.

Aftershocks continued throughout the day in the region, and a "Vremya" camera even captured one strong aftershock collapsing an already se-



verely damaged building.

Electricity and water supplies were disrupted in Dzhava and communications were severed, "Vremya" correspondent A. Parfendkov reported.

"Dzhava is awaiting help," he said. Rocks cascaded off a mountain-side onto houses in Chiatura and a railroad station was badly damaged in Sachkhere, Georgian officials in Moscow said.

Georgian Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua led a government commission to the scene, and the Soviet government expressed condolences to bereaved families.

Shakro Dekanoidze, a police officer in Kutaisi, said two helicopters were sent to survey damage.

Tass said the quake was felt for 30 seconds in Yerevan, the Armenian capital. It also was felt in Spitak, an Armenian town that was flattened by the Dec. 7, 1988.

Child witnesses Supreme Court to hear case

WASHINGTON - The Supreme Court said Monday it will take a new look at the right of alleged child abusers to question their young accusers in court, weighing how far judges can go to protect children from having to testify.

The court agreed to hear an appeal by an Illinois man who said his rights were violated because he was convicted, based on hearsay testimony, of sexually abusing a 4-year-old girl. The child never took the witness stand.

The justices will decide, probably sometime in 1992, whether juries may hear out-of-court statements by children when the young alleged victims are available and capable of testifying but are excused from doing so.

The issue is a recurring one, sometimes arising in disputes in which one parent accuses the other of molesting a child. Reports of child-abuse cases now surpass two million a year, according to the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

The child-abuse case gives the court a new opportunity to provide guidelines for judges seeking to insulate children from potentially traumatic courtroom testimony.

The justices last year said the constitutional right of defendants to confront their accusers is not absolute. They allowed states to shield young witnesses from face-to-face confrontations with child-abuse defendants by using videotaped testimony, closed-circuit television and

testimony by those who interviewed the alleged abuse victims.

The court last year also said judges must have evidence the child faces the risk of serious emotional trauma before barring a face-to-face confrontation.

Left unanswered in those past decisions was whether judges may exclude all testimony by alleged victims capable of testifying — letting the jury decide entirely on the basis of hearsay evidence by those who questioned a child out of court.

In other action Monday, the court:
● Voted 6-3 to crack down on some people who file frivolous appeals. The court altered its rules so that it can strip some poor people of the privilege of filing appeals without having to pay a \$300 filing fee plus significant printing costs.

● Agreed to decide in a Louisiana case whether employers may impose wage cuts or other changes in working conditions before bargaining talks with unions formally reach an impasse.

● Agreed in a dispute between Yakima Indians and officials in Washington state to decide whether states and counties may tax Indian-owned land on reservations.

● Allowed Mississippi juries to be told whether convicted murderers ever would be eligible for parole if sentenced to life in prison rather than death.

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'Star Wars' experiment Shuttle crew conducts tests

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. - The astronauts aboard Discovery observed eerie waves of light above the horizon in a "Star Wars" experiment Monday, and ground controllers struggled to fix data recorders needed for other tests.

Six experiments were canceled as a result of the recorder trouble, and the Defense Department expected to lose more data if the problem is not resolved by the end of the eight-day flight.

NASA flight directors and Pentagon officials insisted the mission would not be harmed by the loss of what they termed "secondary experiments." Nonetheless, there was disappointment.

"From our view, everything is obviously important," said Air Force Capt. Marty Hauser, a Pentagon spokesman.

The seven astronauts tried four times to activate the two recorders before turning their attention to instruments unaffected by the failure. Engineers on the ground continued to work on the problem.

“From our view, everything is obviously important.”

Hauser
Pentagon spokesman

Three of five scientific instruments that constitute one of Discovery's primary payloads are hampered by the recorder problem. The instrument considered most important by the military has its own recorders, which successfully collected data Monday on atmospheric light, or aurora.

The astronauts beamed down black-and-white television images of light rippling off the atmosphere as they flew over the Pacific near Australia. They sent back a videotaped scene of a halo shimmering for thousands of miles along the horizon with the constellation Orion in the background. "Pretty spectacular," said Mission

Control's Kathy Thornton. The crew also took pictures of a rapid-fire sequence of steering jet blasts. They captured that on film with ultraviolet cameras, also unaffected by the recorder problem.

Officials of the Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as "Star Wars," said they need information about naturally occurring phenomena to develop sensors that can distinguish enemy missiles amid such clutter.

Air Force Capt. Lindley Johnson, a program director, said the three affected instruments will be used for observations later in the mission as planned regardless of whether the recorders are fixed. Information will be transmitted instantly from a computer monitor in the flight deck to ground controllers when possible, but much of the data will be lost, he said.

"It is a critical loss... but it's not a complete loss," Johnson said. Johnson said 80 percent to 85 percent of the planned experiments still could be achieved even if the recorders remain off.

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