

NEWS DIGEST

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Taiwan nemesis Beijing offers quake aid

■ The earthquake, the country's second-deadliest, has killed more than 1,700.

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Rescuers scrambled through the night Tuesday to unearth thousands of people trapped under debris from Taiwan's second-deadliest earthquake, which killed more than 1,700 people and left hundreds reported missing.

More than 100,000 Taiwanese were homeless after the 7.6-magnitude quake toppled houses and high-rise apartment complexes across central Taiwan.

Roads buckled, chunks of land rose up to create new hills and a bridge was left dangling in the air.

By early Wednesday, officials said 1,712 people were dead, more than 4,000 were injured and almost 3,000 were believed trapped in the rubble. Some 216 were missing, according to the Interior Ministry's disaster management center.

About 4 million households were

still without power early Wednesday, utility officials said.

Taiwan is hit by dozens of quakes each year, but most are centered in the Pacific Ocean east of the island and cause no damage. The island's deadliest quake, with a 7.4 magnitude, killed 3,276 people in 1935.

"We're pulling the dead out one by one, but it's hard to get an overall picture of the number of fatalities," said Chen Wen-hsien, a rescue official in the central city of Fengyuan, about 30 miles from the epicenter. He had to plug his nose with tissue after part of a building began shifting from an aftershock, releasing the stench of a corpse still inside.

Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau listed the quake as a 7.3 magnitude, a little less than the U.S. Geological Survey's estimate.

The bureau said the quake's epicenter was in Nantou County, 120 miles south of the capital, Taipei, where most of the deaths occurred.

Morgues filled up with bodies, and officials appealed for donations

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CHEN WEN-HSIEN
rescue official

of bulldozers, cars, quilts and food. Rescue crews from the United States, Singapore, Japan, Switzerland and Russia were on their way to provide assistance, as was a U.N. disaster assessment team.

Taiwan's political nemesis, the communist regime in Beijing, offered aid, but with a subtle dig.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin said the disaster "hurt the hearts of people on the mainland as the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are as closely linked as flesh and blood."

China's Red Cross said it would provide the equivalent of \$100,000 in

disaster aid and \$60,000 worth of relief supplies. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said Beijing will provide "all assistance within our capability."

The Taipei government expressed cautious thanks.

Ties between Taiwan and mainland China had recently sunk to a new low after Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui said Beijing must deal with the island on a "state-to-state" basis.

Lee surveyed the damage by helicopter and urged officials and citizens to concentrate on saving lives.

Most of the island's 22 million people were asleep when the quake

Company looks to aid blacks' credit ratings

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly twice as many blacks as whites have bad credit, mortgage lender Freddie Mac said Tuesday as it began an initiative with several black colleges to get teen-agers and young adults started on a better track.

"This initiative furthers our mission to help make the American dream of decent accessible housing a reality," said Freddie Mac chairman and CEO Leland C. Brendsel.

"Increasing the pool of qualified minority homebuyers will play an important role in future expansion of the home mortgage industry," Brendsel said. "This initiative is not only good for our nation but makes good business sense."

The findings are the results of a survey Freddie Mac launched nine months ago with the help of five historically black colleges and universities — Benedict College in Columbia, S.C.; Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta; Florida A&M University in Tallahassee; Howard University in Washington; and Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, N.C.

Among all respondents, 30 percent had bad credit records. About 47 percent of blacks and 34 percent of

Hispanics had bad credit. Among whites surveyed, 27 percent had bad credit.

Bad credit refers to consumers who have been either 90 days late on a payment in the last two years or 30 days late on a payment more than once in the last two years or have a record of delinquent liens, public records or bankruptcy.

The study found that while bad credit crosses racial and economic lines, it is pervasive among blacks.

Among people with incomes under \$25,000, 48 percent of black borrowers had bad credit, while 31 percent of white borrowers had bad credit. And even in the \$65,000 to \$75,000 income bracket, 34 percent of blacks had bad credit, compared with 20 percent of whites.

Officials are now analyzing the results to develop an initiative, which will include some college courses, to help consumers obtain and maintain good credit. The National Urban League and the NAACP have agreed to help implement the program.

Of particular concern are college students, who are often bombarded with credit card offers after enrolling in school.

23-year-old shot near Omaha high school

From staff reports

The Omaha Police department had no suspects as of late Tuesday night in the shooting of a 23-year-old man outside of Central High School.

Israel Rodriguez, who lives in the 1600 block of Z Street in Omaha, was shot five or six times as he waited outside of Central High School on Tuesday about 2 p.m., said Meg Fricke, public information officer for the Omaha Police Department.

The shooting at 21st and Dodge streets was not school-related, she said.

"This is in no way at all related to the schools or Omaha Public Schools at all," Fricke said.

Fricke said the police department believed Rodriguez was waiting for someone, reportedly his girlfriend,

who is a student at the school, outside of the school when he was shot in the arm and leg.

Police had reports that Rodriguez's girlfriend attended Central, but Fricke said police had not confirmed that information.

"We don't know that for sure. That's the rumor on the street," Fricke said.

Fricke was not sure how many times Rodriguez was shot in each arm and leg.

The suspect fled in a vehicle, but it was unclear if the suspect shot Rodriguez from a car or on foot.

Rodriguez was listed in fair condition Tuesday evening at University Hospital, where he underwent surgery.

Central High School has 2,300 students. Some seniors are allowed to leave the school at 2:10 p.m. during open campus.

Clinton: Clemency decision not politically motivated

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton on Tuesday denied that political considerations played a role in his decision to grant clemency to 14 Puerto Rican nationalists.

He also defended invoking executive privilege in refusing to provide a House inquiry with documents related to the decision and said the "extremely lengthy sentences" the prisoners were serving was a major factor in his decision.

The president spelled out his position in a letter to Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., as a House committee opened a hearing into the clemency grants.

Critics have suggested the clemency was aimed at boosting first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's popularity among the 1.3 million Puerto Ricans who live in New York, where she is contemplating a bid for the Senate in 2000.

But Clinton said the timing of the announcement was dictated by the promise of his former chief counsel, Charles F.C. Ruff, to finish the review of the clemency case before leaving the government.

Republicans, who control the House Government Reform

Committee, are displaying a grainy videotape that purports to show one of the militants allegedly making a bomb. Republicans are trying to disprove Clinton's contention that none of those to whom he offered clemency had been involved in a violent crime.

But Julio Cortes, brother of freed prisoner Edwin Cortes, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the tape was "old news" and part of "party politics."

Clinton has explained that he agreed to commute the sentences because most of the jailed Puerto Ricans had spent nearly 20 years in prison, yet had not been charged with acts of violence that left anyone dead or wounded.

Most of those offered clemency were associated with the FALN — the Spanish initials for the Armed Forces of National Liberation — responsible for a wave of bombings of U.S. civilian and military targets in the late 1970s and early 1980s that left six dead and more injured.

Those granted clemency were convicted of seditious conspiracy and possession of weapons and explosives.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ Washington

Report: Phone companies save, customers pay more

WASHINGTON (AP) — Residential customers making an hour of long-distance calls a month are paying on average 20 percent more on their total bills than they did two years ago, despite cost savings to phone companies during that time, consumer groups say.

The report by Consumers Union, the Consumer Federation of America and the Texas Office of Public Utility Counsel says long-distance providers have targeted their price breaks at customers who make a large volume of calls.

Long-distance companies contend that low-volume customers also have benefited from cost savings and note that low-volume customers are not necessarily from low-income households.

■ Florida

Tropical Storm Harvey drenches Florida coast

MIAMI (AP) — Tropical Storm Harvey drenched Florida's Gulf Coast with more than 10 inches of rain Tuesday, forcing schools to close, flooding homes and businesses and playing havoc with travelers' plans.

The storm was expected to cross the southern Florida peninsula and head into the Atlantic Ocean.

In advance of the storm, schools were ordered shut in some Gulf Coast areas mostly out of fear of street flooding. Some government offices also closed for the day.

Flight cancellations were reported at at least five Florida airports, and delays were common throughout the state.

■ Washington

Senator jumps on board to back Bradley campaign

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan plans to endorse Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley on Thursday, giving a boost to Bradley's underdog campaign against Vice President Al Gore, party officials said Tuesday.

Gore holds a wide lead over Bradley in national polls of Democratic voters and has secured endorsement of 109 members of Congress, with more expected to be announced this week. Bradley, a former New Jersey senator, has been publicly backed by just two senators and a congressman.

Sens. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota and Bob Kerrey of Nebraska endorsed Bradley earlier this year.

■ Washington

Money laundering rules proposed in House

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration is proposing new rules to fight money laundering, including requirements that storefront check cashers, brokerage firms and casinos notify authorities of suspicious activities the way banks do.

The proposal surfaced in testimony Tuesday as the House Banking Committee began an inquiry into allegations of a huge money-laundering scheme involving the Russian mob and the Bank of New York.

No one has been charged, and U.S. investigators have not commented publicly on the case in which

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Questions? Comments?

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