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ACCUMOLI - Rescue teams were working through the night to try to find survivors under the rubble that remained of central Italian towns flattened by an earthquake that hit in the early hours of Wednesday, killing at least 159 people.



One hotel that collapsed in the small town of Amatrice probably had about 70 guests, and only seven bodies had so far been recovered, said the mayor of the town that was one of the worst hit by the quake.

The strong 6.2 magnitude quake razed homes and buckled roads in a cluster of mountain communities 140 km (85 miles) east of Rome. It was powerful enough to be felt in Bologna to the north and Naples to the south, each more than 220 km (135 miles) from the epicentre.

"Tonight will be our first nightmare night," said Alessandro Gabrielli, one of hundreds preparing to sleep in tents erected by rescue workers in fields and parking lots, each one housing 12 people whose homes had been

destroyed.

"Last night, I woke up with a sound that sounded like a bomb," he added.

Rescuers working with emergency lighting in the darkness saved a 10-year-old girl, pulling her out of the rubble alive, where she had lain for some 17 hours in the hamlet of Pescara del Tronto.

Many other children were not so lucky. In the nearby village of Accumoli, a family of four, including two boys aged 8 months and 9 years, were buried when their house imploded.

As rescue workers carried away the body of the infant, carefully covered by a small blanket, the children's grandmother blamed God: "He took them all at once," she wailed.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said the Cabinet would meet on Thursday to decide measures to help the affected communities.

"Today is a day for tears, tomorrow we can talk of reconstruction," he told reporters late on Wednesday as he announced 120 bodies had been found and 368 people had been taken to hospital.

