

Powerful Japan quake sets off landslide, minor injuries (Update)

February 13 2021, by Yuri Kageyama and Mari Yamaguchi



A landslide caused by a strong earthquake covers a circuit course in Nihonmatsu city, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. The strong earthquake shook the quake-prone areas of Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures late Saturday, setting off landslides and causing power blackouts for thousands of people. (Hironori Asakawa/Kyodo News via AP)

Residents in northeastern Japan on Sunday cleaned up clutter and debris in stores and homes after a strong earthquake set off a landslide on a highway, damaged buildings and parts of bullet train lines and caused power blackouts for thousands of people.

The 7.3 magnitude temblor late Saturday shook the quake-prone areas of Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures that 10 years ago had been hit by a powerful earthquake that triggered a tsunami and a meltdown at a nuclear power plant.

More than 140 people suffered mostly minor injuries, many of them by falling objects and cuts while stepping on broken glass. Three people were confirmed with serious injuries but there were no reports of deaths, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said.

Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that runs the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant that was hit by the March 2011 disaster, said the water used to cool spent fuel rods near the reactors had spilled because of the shaking. But there were no radiation leaks or other irregularities, TEPCO said.

The quake did not cause a tsunami because the epicenter was deep at 55 kilometers (34 miles) beneath the ocean.

Noriko Kamaya, a Japan Meteorological Agency spokesperson, said in a news conference that the quake is considered to be an aftershock of the 9.1 magnitude quake in 2011.



Collapsed rocks block a road after a strong earthquake hit Soma city, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. The strong earthquake shook the quake-prone areas of Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures late Saturday, setting off landslides and causing power blackouts for thousands of people. (Yohei Nishimura/Kyodo News via AP)

Power had been restored by early Sunday, although some bullet train services were still halted. East Japan Railway Co. said the bullet train on the northern coast will be suspended through Monday due to damage to its facility.

TV footage and video shared on social media showed boxes, books and other items scattered on floors. In the northern Fukushima city of Soma, a roof at a Buddhist temple collapsed.

Workers were clearing up a major coastal highway connecting Tokyo and northern cities where a major landslide occurred. Several other roads were also blocked by rocks.

Saturday's powerful rattling less than a month before the 10th anniversary of the 2011 triple disaster was a frightening reminder of the earlier tragedy for the residents in the region.

"It started with minor shaking, then suddenly became violent," said Yuki Watanabe, a convenience store employee in the Fukushima town of Minamisoma, told the Asahi newspaper. "I was so frightened," she said, adding it reminder her of the 2011 quake.



A portion of a highway is blocked by a landslide after an earthquake hit the city, in Soma, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. A strong earthquake hit off the coast of northeastern Japan late Saturday, shaking Fukushima, Miyagi and other areas, but there was no threat of a tsunami, officials said.(Hironori Asakawa/Kyodo News via AP)



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Evacuees shelter at a gym as an earthquake hit the area, in Soma, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. A strong earthquake hit off the coast of northeastern Japan late Saturday, shaking Fukushima, Miyagi and other areas, but there was no threat of a tsunami, officials said.(Kyodo News via AP)



A large boulder sits on a road after an earthquake hit the city, in Soma, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. A strong earthquake hit off the coast of northeastern Japan late Saturday, shaking Fukushima, Miyagi and other areas, but there was no threat of a tsunami, officials said.(Hironori Asakawa/Kyodo News via AP)



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Heavy machinery work to remove a landslide blocking Joban Expressway after a strong earthquake hit Soma city, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan, Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021. The strong earthquake shook the quake-prone areas of Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures late Saturday, setting off landslides and causing power blackouts for thousands of people. (Yusuke Ogata/Kyodo News via AP)

As she ran outside, she heard banging noise coming from behind the store as glass bottles from the shelves smashed against the floor.

Experts warned of more aftershocks. Many residents spent the night at evacuation centers, where tents were set up as part of coronavirus protection measures.

Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of economic and fiscal policy, expressed sympathy for those who had suffered damage and injuries.

"The government will continue to do our utmost to respond," he said.

Defense troops also were mobilized to provide water in some areas.

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