

Strong quake has people fleeing homes in Afghanistan, Pakistan

March 21 2023, by Qubad Wali with Sajjad Tarakzai in Islamabad



Residents of an apartment block in the Afghan capital gather outside their home after the quake.

A strong earthquake lasting for at least 30 seconds was felt across much of Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India Tuesday night, with the United States Geological Survey putting the magnitude at 6.5.

"It was a terrifying tremor. I had never felt such a tremor before in my life," Khatera, 50, a resident of Kabul, told AFP after rushing out of her fifth-storey apartment in the capital.

The USGS said the quake was centered near Jurm in northeastern Afghanistan and had a depth of 187 kilometers (116 miles).

The region is frequently hit by earthquakes—especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Two people, including a child, were killed in Laghman province, Shafiullah Rahimi, spokesman for Afghanistan's Ministry of Natural Disaster Management, told AFP.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said [health centers](#) across the country had been put on high alert.

Noor Mohammad Hanifi, a shopkeeper in Kabul, set up tents in a street for his family to spend the night in.

"Nobody dares to go inside their homes," Hanifi told AFP as his family, cloaked in blankets, took shelter.

Hanafi said he felt dizzy when the quake hit as he had just returned from a long trip.

"But when I heard the doors and windows shaking I realized it was an earthquake."



People gather by the side of the road after fleeing a high-rise building in Islamabad, Pakistan, following the earthquake.

'We all ran out'

In Pakistan, frightened people fled their homes as the tremor hit.

"People ran out of their houses and were reciting the Koran," said an AFP correspondent in Pakistan's city of Rawalpindi.

Ikhtlaq Kazmi, a retired professor in the city, said his entire house started shaking.

"The children started shouting that there is an earthquake," he said. "We

all ran out."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ordered the National Disaster Management Authority to be ready to deal with any emergency.

At least 180 people who suffered minor injuries were taken to hospitals across the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, Shahidullah Khan, a senior government official, told AFP.

In Afghanistan, many families were out of their homes celebrating Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when the quake struck.

"I heard people screaming and yelling as they came out in the streets," said Masieh, who was outside with his family when the tremor hit.



Map of Afghanistan and the surrounding region locating the earthquake on March 21.

"It's possible that there could be another tremor so I'm still waiting outside."

Those indoors also quickly left their houses and apartments.

"They just fled without wearing shoes, just carrying their children in their hands," an AFP correspondent said.

In June of last year more than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands made homeless after a 5.9-magnitude quake—the deadliest in Afghanistan in nearly a quarter of a century—struck the impoverished province of Paktika.

Over 55,000 people were killed by an earthquake that struck southeastern Turkey and parts of Syria last month.

Afghanistan is in the grips of a humanitarian disaster made worse by the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021.

International development funding on which the South Asian country relied dried up after the takeover and assets held abroad were frozen.

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