

7.1 magnitude quake rattles western China, killing at least 3 people and collapsing 47 homes

January 23 2024, by Ken Moritsugu



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, rescuers search through a quake-affected area in Yamansu Township, Wushi County of Aksu prefecture, China's Xinjiang, Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. An earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China's western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, injuring people and damaging

or collapsing scores of homes in freezing cold weather, authorities said. Credit: Wang Xudong/Xinhua via AP

A magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China's western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, killing three people and causing extensive damage in freezing cold weather, officials said. It was the latest in a series of temblors and natural disasters to hit the country's west.

The quake rocked Uchturpan county in Aksu prefecture shortly after 2 a.m., the China Earthquake Networks Center said. Rescue crews were rushed to the area, with about 1,000 on hand by midday. By evening, authorities said three people have died and five were injured in the county, which is also called Wushi in the Mandarin language spoken by most Chinese.

Rescue crews combed through the rubble, overturning bricks and stone blocks in search of victims. Emergency survival gear—including coats, tents and folding beds to help the thousands of people who fled their homes—had arrived or were on their way, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Although the quake was strong, its epicenter was located in a sparsely populated mountainous area some 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) above sea level, Zhang Yongjiu, the head of Xinjiang Earthquake Administration told a news conference on Tuesday night.

"This 7.1 rating is very strong, but the death and injury situation is not severe," Zhang said.

Liu Jinhua, who runs an advertising company in Aksu, rushed out of his

apartment in the middle of the night with his wife and kids in their pajamas as the quake shook their building.



In this image taken from video footage run by China's CCTV, rescuers work near the rubble from an earthquake in Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, China's western Xinjiang region Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. A strong earthquake struck China's far western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, knocking out power and destroying homes, local authorities and state media reported. Credit: CCTV via AP

"I was ... awoken by my wife and didn't know what was wrong. I just wanted my family to evacuate safely," he said.

Of the five hurt, two had serious injuries. Among the more than 120 buildings damaged, 47 houses collapsed, 78 houses were damaged and

some greenhouses were reduced to plastic sheets and rubble, the government of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region posted on its official Weibo social media account.

Officials also pointed out that most of the houses that collapsed were in remote areas and were mainly built by the residents themselves. The new public housing recently built by the government there did not collapse.

The quake downed power lines but electricity was quickly restored, Aksu authorities reported. The mountainous Uchturpan county had around 233,000 people in 2022, according to Xinjiang authorities.

Urumqi Railroad Bureau resumed services after 7 a.m. following safety checks that confirmed no problems on the train lines. The suspension had affected 23 trains, the bureau serving the Xinjiang capital said on its official Weibo account.



This image taken from video footage run by China's CCTV, shows a landslide caused by an earthquake blocks a highway in Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, China's western Xinjiang region Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. A strong earthquake struck China's far western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, knocking out power and destroying homes, local authorities and state media reported.
Credit: CCTV via AP

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake measured 7.0 magnitude and occurred in the seismically active Tian Shan mountain range. It said the area's largest quake in the past century was also magnitude 7.1 and occurred in 1978, about 200 kilometers (124 miles) to the north of Tuesday's quake struck.

Multiple aftershocks were recorded, the strongest of them measured at 5.3 magnitude.

The rural area is populated mostly by Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnicity that is predominantly Muslim and has been the target of a state campaign of forced assimilation and mass detention. The region is heavily militarized and state broadcaster CCTV showed paramilitary troops moving in before dawn to clear rubble and set up tents for those displaced.

Uchturpan county is recording temperatures well below freezing, with lows down to negative 18 degrees C (just below zero F) forecast by the China Meteorological Administration this week.

In Yunnan province in China's southwest, rescue workers were still searching for victims in 18 homes buried by a landslide Monday in the village of Liangshui. State media reported that 20 bodies had been recovered, while 24 others remained missing, though it was unclear when and where exactly those affected were registered. Three who

survived were pulled from their homes that were covered in rocks and mud in freezing cold and falling snow.



Rescue workers prepare to take a flight to Aksu, Xinjiang from Beijing Capital International Airport in Beijing on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. A strong earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China's western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, knocking out power and destroying at least a few homes, local authorities and state media reported. No fatalities have been reported. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

The tremors from Tuesday's earthquake were felt hundreds of

kilometers (miles) away.

Ma Shengyi, a 30-year-old pet shop owner living in Tacheng, 600 kilometers (373 miles) from the epicenter, said her dogs started barking before she felt her apartment building shudder. The quake was so strong her neighbors ran downstairs. Ma rushed to her bathroom and started to cry.

"There's no point in running away if it's a big earthquake," Ma said. "I was scared to death."

Chandeliers swung, buildings were evacuated and a media office building near the epicenter shook for a full minute, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. A video posted by a Chinese internet user on Weibo showed residents standing outside on the streets bundled in winter jackets, and a photo posted by CCTV showed a cracked wall with chunks fallen off.

Tremors were felt across the Xinjiang region and in the neighboring countries Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In the Kazakh capital of Almaty, people left their homes, the Russian news agency Tass reported. In both Xinjiang and Kazakhstan, classes were suspended to allow children to recover from the shock.



Rescue workers prepare to board a flight to Aksu, Xinjiang from Beijing Capital International Airport in Beijing on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. An earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China’s western Xinjiang region early Tuesday, injuring people and damaging or collapsing scores of homes in freezing cold weather, authorities said. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

Videos posted on the Telegram messaging platform showed people in Almaty running down the stairs of apartment blocks and standing outside in the street after they felt strong tremors. Some people appeared to have left their homes quickly and were pictured standing outside in freezing temperatures in shorts.

Earthquakes are common in western China, including in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, as well as the Xinjiang region and Tibet.

A 6.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Gansu in December killed 151 people and was China's deadliest quake in nine years. An earthquake that hit Sichuan in 2008 killed nearly 90,000 people. The collapse of schools and other buildings led to a yearslong effort to rebuild using more quake-resistant materials.

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