

Fierce earthquake rattles Taiwan, killing 9 and injuring more than 1,000

April 3 2024, by JOHNSON LAI, CHRISTOPHER BODEEN and SIMINA MISTREANU



In this image taken from a video footage run by TVBS, residents rescue a child from a partially collapsed building in Hualien, eastern Taiwan on Wednesday, April 3, 2024. A powerful earthquake rocked the entire island of Taiwan early Wednesday, collapsing buildings in a southern city and creating a tsunami that washed ashore on southern Japanese islands. Credit: TVBS via AP

The strongest earthquake in a quarter-century rocked Taiwan

Wednesday morning, killing nine people, stranding dozens at quarries and a national park, and sending some residents scrambling out the windows of damaged buildings.

The quake, which injured more than 1,000, struck just before 8 a.m. and was centered off the coast of rural, mountainous Hualien County, where some buildings leaned at severe angles, their ground floors crushed. Just over 150 kilometers (93 miles) away in the capital of Taipei, tiles fell from older buildings, and schools evacuated students to sports fields as aftershocks followed.

Rescuers fanned out in Hualien, looking for people who may be trapped and using excavators to stabilize damaged buildings. The numbers of people missing, trapped or stranded fluctuated as authorities learned of more in trouble and worked to locate or free them.

Some 70 workers who were stranded at two rock quarries were safe, according to Taiwan's national fire agency, but the roads to reach them were damaged by falling rocks. Six workers were going to be airlifted on Thursday.

In the hours after the quake, TV showed neighbors and rescue workers lifting residents, including a toddler, through windows and onto the street. Some doors had fused shut in the shaking.

Taiwan is regularly jolted by quakes and its population is among the best prepared for them. But authorities expected a relatively mild earthquake and did not send out alerts. The eventual quake was strong enough to scare even people who are used to such shaking.

"I've grown accustomed to (earthquakes). But today was the first time I was scared to tears by an earthquake," said Hsien-hsuen Keng, who lives in a fifth-floor apartment in Taipei. "I was awakened by the earthquake.

I had never felt such intense shaking before."



In this image taken from a video footage run by TVBS, a partially collapsed building is seen in Hualien, eastern Taiwan on Wednesday, April 3, 2024. A powerful earthquake rocked the entire island of Taiwan early Wednesday, collapsing buildings in a southern city and creating a tsunami that washed ashore on southern Japanese islands. Credit: TVBS via AP

At least nine people died in the quake, according to Taiwan's fire agency. Most of the fatalities were caused by falling rocks, including four people who were struck inside Taroko National Park, according to the state Central News Agency. One died in a residential building that was damaged, the news agency said.

A small tsunami washed ashore on southern Japanese islands but caused no damage.

At least 1,011 people were reported injured. Authorities initially lost contact with 50 hotel employees in minibuses in the park after the quake downed phone networks; three employees walked to the hotel, while the others remained stranded. About two dozen tourists were also stranded in the park, the state news agency said.

The quake and aftershocks caused many landslides and damaged roads, bridges and tunnels. The national legislature, a converted school built before World War II, and sections of the main airport in Taoyuan, just south of Taipei, also saw minor damage.

Hualien Mayor Hsu Chen-wei said 48 residential buildings were damaged in the city, which shares a name with the county. Hsu said water and electricity supplies were in the process of being restored.

Taiwan's earthquake monitoring agency said the quake was 7.2 magnitude while the U.S. Geological Survey put it at 7.4. It struck about 18 kilometers (11 miles) from Hualien and was about 35 kilometers (21 miles) deep. Multiple aftershocks followed.

Traffic along the east coast was at a virtual standstill after the earthquake, with landslides and falling debris hitting tunnels and highways. Train service was suspended across the island of 23 million people, with some tracks twisted by the stress of the quake, as was subway service in Taipei, where sections of a newly constructed elevated line split apart but did not collapse.



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The initial panic quickly faded on the island, which prepares for such events with drills at schools and notices issued via public media and mobile phone. Stephen Gao, a seismologist and professor at Missouri University of Science and Technology, said Taiwan's readiness is among the most advanced in the world and includes strict building codes and a world-class seismological network.

By noon, the metro station in the busy northern Taipei suburb of Beitou was again buzzing with people commuting to jobs and people arriving to

visit the hot springs or travel the mountain paths at the base of an extinct volcano.

The earthquake was felt in Shanghai and provinces along China's southeastern coast, according to Chinese media. China and Taiwan are about 160 kilometers (100 miles) apart.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said a tsunami of 30 centimeters (about 1 foot) was detected on the coast of Yonaguni island about 15 minutes after the quake struck. Smaller waves were measured in Ishigaki and Miyako islands. All alerts in the region had been lifted by Wednesday afternoon.

Taiwan lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur.

Hualien was last struck by a deadly quake in 2018 that killed 17 people and brought down a historic hotel. Taiwan's worst quake in recent years struck on Sept. 21, 1999, with a magnitude of 7.7, causing 2,400 deaths, injuring around 100,000 and destroying thousands of buildings.

The economic fallout from the quake has yet to be calculated. Taiwan is the leading manufacturer of the world's most sophisticated computer chips and other high-technology items that are highly sensitive to seismic events. Parts of the electricity grid were shut down, possibly leading to disruptions in the supply chain and financial losses.

Taiwanese chipmaker TSMC, which supplies semiconductors to companies such as Apple, said it evacuated employees from some of its factories in Hsinchu, southwest of Taipei. Hsinchu authorities said water and electricity supplies for all the factories in the city's science park were functioning as normal.

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