

New earthquake strikes hard-hit Pakistan

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A new powerful earthquake struck Saturday in southwestern Pakistan, shaking an area already trying to recover from a quake that killed more than 300 people.

The 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck in Balochistan province Saturday about 96 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Awaran, the United States Geological Survey said.

Rasheed Baloch, the Deputy Commissioner Awaran told CNN seven people died when a house collapsed in Mashkay Tehsil as result of new earthquake on Saturday.

Just Tuesday, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck the same area of Pakistan. The death toll in that quake has risen to 366 people and another 765 are injured.

Authorities estimate that 21,000 houses were destroyed in Tuesday's earthquake.

But Rasheed Baloch, deputy commissioner for Awaran district, told CNN more than 60 mud-walled buildings had collapsed in the Nok Jo area of the district. Four bodies have been found in the rubble, he said, but they appear to be casualties of Tuesday's quake.

Baloch said a rescue operation was under way in Awaran district to retrieve the dead bodies and shift the injured to hospitals.

The remoteness of the affected area and damaged communications networks are hindering the rescue operation, officials said.

Rescue teams are also reluctant to visit some troubled areas owing to attacks by Baloch separatists, the deputy commissioner said.

The separatists are blamed for firing two rockets at a military helicopter ferrying the chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority, Maj. Gen. Muhammad Saeed Aleem, and another general to the earthquake zone on Thursday. Both survived the attack, said Jan Buledi, spokesman for the government of Balochistan.

The defunct Baloch Liberation Front reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

Militants fighting for a separate state in Balochistan operate out of part of Awaran district, which has been the site of bombings.

Tremors were also felt Saturday in Kech district, Khuzdar, Kalat and other towns of Balochistan province.

Injured flee hospital ward

Some of those injured in Tuesday's quake fled their hospital wards in Arawan as the new tremors rocked the area.

"More than 100 injured are now outside Awaran hospital," local journalist Muhammad Tariq told CNN.

Local TV footage also showed ministers and members of the Balochistan Assembly walking out of an Assembly session due to the tremors. The session was subsequently suspended.

"We cannot sit in the house after such strong tremors," Assembly member Mufti Gulab told CNN.

The quake also caused people to come out of their homes far to the north in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan. "I was sitting in my office when the earthquake struck," Nazeer Ahmed, a Balochistan government official, told CNN.

Saturday's 6.8 magnitude tremor "could be an independent earthquake and not an aftershock," of the 7.7-magnitude quake from earlier this week, Zahid Rafi, director of the National Seismic Center, told CNN's Pakistan affiliate Geo News.

The second quake will only add to the difficulties for Balochistan's residents.

Officials had already warned that thousands of survivors in need of assistance after Tuesday's quake are having to cope with high temperatures, a lack of drinking water and little in the way of shelter.

October is the hottest month in Balochistan and the region is in a perpetual state of drought, said Muhammad Hanif, the director of the National Weather Forecasting Center. Temperatures in Awaran and Kech have reached 37 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit).