

International

Moderate earthquake shakes Istanbul; eight people hurt

Mosques damaged; schools closed

ISTANBUL: A moderate 5.7 magnitude earthquake shook buildings and damaged two mosques in Istanbul yesterday, slightly injuring eight people and causing residents to rush from buildings. Witnesses in the city of 15 million, Turkey's largest, felt buildings sway and said some offices and schools were temporarily evacuated. Three major seismic fault lines criss-cross Istanbul, which straddles Europe and Asia. "The quake really shook at the start and then it continued, maybe it felt like that because the building is so tall," said Ozge Etcan, 27, an employee at a financial firm in Istanbul's Levent district, where crowds gathered outside in the aftermath.

The tremor was at a depth of 12.6 km, the Kandilli Observatory and Earthquake Research Institute said, locating its epicenter 70 km west of Istanbul in the Marmara Sea, south of the town of Silivri. It struck at 1:59 pm. Both the observatory and the US Geological Survey assessed its magnitude at 5.7. "Despite this earthquake having a magnitude that could be considered serious, we have not as yet received heartbreaking news, just some small damage," President Tayyip Erdogan told a news conference. He said eight people had

been treated for slight injuries, but did not provide further details.

The top section of a minaret had collapsed at the central mosque in Istanbul's Avcilar district, close to the Marmara Sea, CNN Turk footage showed. Another minaret collapsed in the Sariyer district of the city, the municipality's disaster coordination centre said. "There will be aftershocks of this quake. What we ask from citizens is that they don't enter damaged buildings," Murat Nurlu, head of the earthquake department at Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Directorate (AFAD), told Reuters.

Some buildings damaged

Cracks emerged in some buildings across the city. Two of them in the Sultangazi and Eyup districts were damaged, AFAD said in a statement, clocking the quake at 5.8 magnitude. Mobile phone users had difficulty making calls shortly after the quake. AFAD said work was continuing to resolve the problem in communications. The epicentre was 22 km from the nearest inhabited area, Silivri, AFAD said. It said there had been 28 aftershocks, the strongest of which had a magnitude of 4.1.

The Istanbul governor's office said primary

Tuesday's earthquake. "You can see we have no arrangements, we don't have any place to live, have nothing to eat, we are pulling out rubble, and trying to restore electricity and water," Muhammad Waqas Aslam, who lives in the village of Nakkah Kharak outside Mirpur said. The village of Jatlan appeared to be one of the worst affected by Tuesday's quake, while Mirpur was largely spared major damage.

In Jatlan, bridges, mobile-phone towers and electricity poles were badly damaged while its roads were ripped apart. Pakistani geologists blamed the "poor construction of shanty houses in Jatlan" for some of the damage, as well as its location near a fault line and the shallowness of the quake. Pakistan's Kashmir information minister Mushtaq Minhas said at least 6,500 homes were destroyed by Tuesday's quake, adding that officials had begun to distribute thousands of tents to affected residents.

Mirpur, a city known for its palatial houses, has strong ties to Britain and many of its population of 450,000 carry both British and Pakistani passports. The city owes its prosperity to thousands of former residents who migrated to Britain in the 1960s, but retained their links to the area — repatriating money to buy land and build plush homes. Tuesday's quake also sent people in Lahore and Islamabad running into the streets, while tremors were felt as far as New Delhi.

Pakistan straddles the boundary where the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates meet, making the country susceptible to earthquakes. In October 2015, a 7.5-magnitude quake in Pakistan and Afghanistan killed almost 400 people across rugged terrain that impeded relief efforts. The country was also hit by a 7.6-magnitude quake on October 8, 2005, that killed more than 73,000 people and left about 3.5 million homeless, mainly in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. —AFP



ISTANBUL: Office workers speak on their phones after fleeing their buildings in the Maslak District of Istanbul yesterday after an earthquake struck the city. —AFP

and middle schools had been ordered shut for the remainder of the day. In 1999, a quake measuring 7.6 struck the city of Izmit, 90 km southeast of Istanbul, killing more than 17,000 people. Recep Kutuk, a 37-year-old civil ser-

vant, said he experienced two major earthquakes in the region in 1999 and this had made him sensitive to any tremor. "It was really powerful. I hope this is not a precursor to another major earthquake," he said. —Reuters

Shallow tremor rocks quake-hit area of Pakistan

MIRPUR: A shallow tremor yesterday sent terrified residents of northeastern Pakistan onto the streets, days after a powerful quake killed 38 people and caused widespread damage in the area. The tremor stretched already-frayed nerves in Mirpur, in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, as fears of aftershocks from Tuesday's quake sent hundreds into the streets and put local hospitals on alert.

The US Geological Survey put the quake at 4.7 magnitude and 10 kilometers deep, adding that it had struck just four kilometers outside of Mirpur. City residents huddled in streets following the quake, some still barefoot, while others recited verses from the Quran. "It's hell. I am running to save my life," Mohammad Bilal told AFP moments after the tremor. "I thought most of the building would have tumbled down," said Sagheer Ahmad. "Allah is very kind to us." Dozens of patients were evacuated from the main government hospital in Mirpur, some in wheelchairs or on stretchers. Dr Farooq Noor, the medical superintendent at the hospital, told AFP that 93 people were brought in after the tremor. Most were swiftly discharged with minor wounds or shock, but some with head injuries and broken limbs were admitted, he added. The city's hospitals were already packed with hundreds injured by the quake earlier in the week.

'Poor construction'

The tremor came as rescuers continued to pick through toppled buildings to reach victims from

A vast underground hideout house rebel base in Syria

LATAMINAH: Tunnels run for hundreds of meters, connecting caves strewn with mattresses that formed what the Syrian army and its Russian allies say was a vast rebel underground network. The road leading to the entrance of the tunnels in Lataminah in northwestern Syria is lined with the charred shells of cars and armored vehicles.

According to the Russian army, which organized a press tour of the site for dozens of journalists, the network of caves dug into a rocky outcrop could shelter up to 5,000 people. "We think this network was dug about four years ago with sophisticated machinery, of a kind which is not available in Syria," a Syrian army colonel said as he led reporters into the tunnels, escorted by Russian demining experts. The red-brick entrance to this underground base still bears the scars of the battle that saw Russian-backed regime forces retake the area in the province of Hama earlier this year.

"Those who fought here retreated to the north. First to Khan Sheikhun and then further into Idlib province when our forces took the city," the colonel said. In some places, the tunnels are barely big enough to stand in but connect large rooms carved out of the rock, including a prayer room, a drone workshop, a bathroom and even a prison. Military officials

told AFP reporters that the total size of the underground network, in which crates of ammunition were found, has not yet been fully assessed.

Drone workshop

It was used primarily by fighters from jihadist groups, among them the alliance known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham that now dominates the entire Idlib enclave. The caves provided shelter to those fighters from the intensive air strikes Russian and Syrian aircraft usually conduct as a prelude to any ground advance. In some of the caves, empty food cans and crumpled plastic water bottles, jerricans and decaying clothes give a glimpse of daily life in the dark hideout.

Some rooms were done up with tile panels and a coat of paint while others have fully cemented walls, over which Syrian soldiers have since scribbled slogans praising President Bashar Al-Assad. One room was even equipped with an old TV, wired up with cables that run around one kilometer from the nearby town of Lataminah. The room which officers believe was used as a prison was dug out no less than 400 meters deep into the maze of tunnels and caves.

Blood stains are still visible on the ground, as are tiny separate cells with rusting doors. The Russian army said it has uncovered around 10 such underground networks across northwestern Syria and others in the desert region of Palmyra. Officers said the Lataminah cave was a local hub for the manufacture of drones that jihadist fighters used against regime and Russian forces. The massive Russian military base of Hmeimim, which lies in the neighboring province, has been repeatedly targeted by rebel drone attacks. —AFP