

Status Report No: EQT-1

Earthquake in Taiwan

Date: 26 December 2006
Time: 12:26:21 UTC (20:26:21 local time)
Position: 21.819N, 120.543E
Depth: 6.2 miles (10 km)
Magnitude: 7.1
Region: Taiwan Region



Reference points to earthquake location:
90 km (55 miles) SSE of Kaohsiung, Taiwan
120 km (75 miles) SSW of Taitung, Taiwan
375 km (235 miles) SSW of Taipei, Taiwan
800 km (495 miles) N of Manila, Philippines

Summary

A powerful earthquake struck off the southern coast of Taiwan at 12:26 UTC (20:26 local time) on 26 December, causing some damage in Taiwan and disruption communications across Asia. The earthquake, measuring 7.1M, was located 55 miles (90 kilometres) south-southeast of Kaohsiung City in Taiwan and 235 miles (375 kilometres) south-southwest of the capital Taipei, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). The USGS added that the quake was centred about 6.2 miles (10 kilometres) underground.

Taiwan's Central Weather Bureau said the earthquake was the most powerful to hit the Pingtung region in a century. The earthquake was followed by numerous aftershocks, including one that measured 6.9M. The Japan Meteorological Agency warned the earthquake had the potential to trigger a 3 foot (1 metre) high tsunami that could head towards the Philippines, but no tsunami was reported.

The earthquake was felt throughout Taiwan and some property damage was reported. Taiwanese media said three apartment buildings in the southern county of Pingtung collapsed during the earthquake, killing two people. Over 3,000 households lost power and road and rail traffic was also affected by the blackouts. Elsewhere in Pingtung, around 40 people were injured. Reports said many streets in the area were cracked and a major bridge was damaged. Officials added that several fires broke out in the county, apparently caused by downed electric power cables. The quake also swayed buildings and knocked objects off shelves in the cities of Kaohsiung and Taipei. Although reports said several high-rise hotels swayed violently in Kaohsiung, no serious damage was reported.

Businesses were also affected by the earthquake as it triggered a severe breakdown in telecommunications that hit several countries in Asia. The earthquake damaged up to a dozen undersea fibre-optic cables used to route internet and telephone traffic, disrupting web, email, and phone services to businesses in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, China, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong.

Taiwan's largest telephone company, Chunghwa Telecom Co, said 98% of Taiwan's communications with Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong were disrupted. China Telecommunications Group also reported that communication cables to the US and Europe were damaged, affecting phone links and internet connections. In South Korea, broadband provider KT Corp said six submarine cables had been affected, interrupting services to customers including banks. The disruption hit financial institutions across Asia particularly hard, with banking and securities transactions completely disrupted. Some foreign exchange trading was also disrupted. Engineers said it may take three weeks for the cables to be fixed, but most people will see services back to normal before then.

Sources: USGS, BBC News, Associated Press, CNN News, Reuters News, Agence France-Presse

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