

Big quake rocks North

BUILDINGS, ROADS DAMAGED IN CHIANG RAI BY 6.1-SCALE EARTHQUAKE AND AFTERSHOCKS

THE NATION

PEOPLE in Chiang Rai's Phan district ran out of their homes and buildings in panic as ground in the far North shook during a 6.1-magnitude earthquake yesterday.

The quake was so strong it could be felt in Bangkok high rises, such as Baiyoke Tower and Central World Mall. But no fatalities had been reported by press time.

It was believed to be the biggest quake recorded with an epicentre in Thailand.

The National Disaster Warning Centre urged people in the affected area to stay in safe places, as more aftershocks were expected. People have also been advised to follow the centre's updates closely.

At press time, at least five aftershocks – each between 3 and 4 in magnitude – were recorded, Burin Wechbunthung, chief of the Meteorological Department's Seismological Bureau, said.

A road in Phan district cracked when the quake took place at about

6pm yesterday evening, and a hotel in Chiang Rung district suffered damage to its exterior.

Shoppers were seen running out of the Central Plaza Mall in Muang district as things began falling off the shelves, while ceiling tiles at Chiang Rai Airport began dropping during the quake.

Chalermchai Kositpipat, a Thai artist famous for religious paintings who built the famous Wat Rong Khun in Muang district, told Nation TV that the temple's high-rise structure and pagoda – as well as the hall featuring his paintings – had been damaged by the quake. He said he had no idea how the damage would be repaired.

"The earth shook so violently that it felt like the end of world," he said, adding that the damage could not be assessed just yet.

Asian Institute of Technology seismological expert Dr Penneung Wanitchai told Nation TV that the quake could be a main shock, as there were fault lines all over the North and the cumulative stress on these fault lines had led to this. He warned that the quake could lead to other, stronger earthquakes.

He called on people living within a 50-kilometre radius from the epicentre to stay outside buildings that have cracks, because there may be more aftershocks in the next three or four days.

Penneung said the quake, which damaged several properties,

was the largest in Thailand since 1935, when a 6.5-magnitude quake hit Nan province and an area near the Lao border.

He also urged officials to survey the damage within a 10-20km radius from the epicentre and provide aid to any affected residents.

The impact was also felt in other provinces in the North and ancient sites with structural issues reported cracks and damage.

Chiang Mai residents said they felt the earth shaking violently for several minutes, and many shoppers at malls and those living in buildings higher two storeys ran out in panic.

Office worker Patlada Pattanodom said the quake's impact prompted her to rush out of her home in Hang Dong district.

"I could hear the ceiling creaking loudly, and everything fell out of the shelves. So my husband and I ran out of the house. We thought we were going to die," she said.



Clockwise from top right: The head of a Buddha image fell off at Wat Udom Waree; the quake caused a road in Chiang Rai to crack; the patio roof of a house collapsed; products fell off shelves in a minimart; the famous Wat Rong Khun, created by National Artist Chalermchai Kositpipat, sustained damage; the walls of Chiang Rung Hotel were found cracked.

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