

6.1 Magnitude Quake Strikes Off East Timor

DILI, EAST TIMOR — A 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of East Timor on Friday, the U.S. Geological Survey said, with tremors felt as far as the Australian city of Darwin, although there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

The USGS said the quake hit at a depth of 51 kilometers off the eastern tip of Timor island, which is split between East Timor and Indonesia.

An AFP journalist in the East Timor capital, Dili, felt the earthquake and said that, although it lasted only seconds, “the jolt was quite strong.”

“I saw people rushing out of their homes and children running outside of the school,” the journalist said.

The earthquake was more violent around the town of Lospalos in the east of the country, but local authorities were still assessing the situation and did not give a breakdown of the damage or possible casualties.

The quake was also felt in Darwin, Australia, which lies across the Timor Sea from the epicenter.

Darwin resident Joel Willingale, who works in heavy manufacturing, said “it went on for about 30 seconds.”

“The whole room shook and slammed down,” he said.

“We only really feel the effects of a quake occasionally, usually in the Banda Sea. But this one was a big one.”

The Banda Sea lies north of Timor island.

To the north in Indonesia, the earthquake triggered panic and prompted people to evacuate buildings in the southwest of the Moluccas archipelago, according to the National Emergency Management.

Authorities did not report any damage or casualties.

The United Nations' tsunami monitoring agency warned that the quake "could generate a tsunami affecting the Indian Ocean region."

No national authority in the region has yet issued a tsunami warning, however.

"No #tsunami threat to Australia from #earthquake felt in Darwin, NT," said Australia's Bureau of Meteorology in a tweet.

East Timor and Indonesia sit on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of intense seismic activity that stretches through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

In February, a 6.2 magnitude quake killed a dozen people when it struck Indonesia's North Sumatra.

In 2004, a 9.1-magnitude quake hit the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 people throughout the region, including about 170,000 in Indonesia.

East Timor has a population of about 1.3 million and is Southeast Asia's youngest country, recently celebrating the 20th anniversary of its independence from Indonesia.

The mostly rural economy has been badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the World Bank saying 42% of the population live below the poverty line.

Source:

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