Beat: Travel

Death toll from earthquake in southwest Pakistan rises to 348

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USPA News - The death toll from a powerful earthquake that struck southwestern Pakistan this week has risen to at least 348 with nearly 1,.000 others injured, the provincial government said on Thursday, adding that an unknown number of people remain buried under debris. The 7.7-magnitude earthquake at 4:29 p.m. local time on Tuesday was centered about 63 kilometers (39 miles) north-northeast of Awaran, the headquarters of the district that carries the same name in Balochistan province.

It struck about 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) deep, making it a shallow earthquake, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The districts of Awaran and Kech were most seriously affected, with more than 90 percent of all mud houses in Awaran district destroyed. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in Balochistan said the overall death toll stood at 348 by late Wednesday evening, although hundreds more could still be missing. The agency said at least 305 people were killed and 440 others were injured in Awaran district alone, while 43 people were killed and 73 others were injured in nearby Kech district. It said approximately 21,.000 houses were destroyed by Tuesday`s earthquake, but damage surveys in the mountainous area were still ongoing. Provincial officials and rescue workers warned Wednesday that the actual death toll is likely far higher. A relief worker in the area estimated that at least 500 people had been killed while Mir Qudus Bizenjo, the deputy speaker of the Balochistan Assembly, claimed the death toll was more than 1,.000. Search-and-rescue efforts were continuing on Thursday morning as the chances of finding survivors began to decrease rapidly. The army has sent 1,.000 troops and 100 personnel as medical staff to help with the rescue efforts and has established a medical center in Tarteej, one of the worst-affected villages. The rescue efforts are also being complicated by security threats. A team of doctors and paramedics, traveling to Awaran district, came under fire from unknown assailants on Wednesday, although no one was injured. It came after other gunmen attacked a security forces checkpoint in Awaran district a day earlier, killing at least one officer. Tuesday`s earthquake was felt across the region, with tremors being observed as far away as India, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The Eurasia plate boundary region is generally seismically active, but the region near Tuesday`s epicenter had not experienced a large earthquake in decades, although a nearby 6.1-magnitude earthquake killed 6 people in July 1990. This week`s earthquake is the country`s worst since October 2005 when more than 75,.000 people were killed after a 7.6-magnitude earthquake devastated northern Pakistan. Earlier this year, in April, at least 34 people were killed in Pakistan when a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck Iran near its border with Pakistan.

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