

6.4 quake rocks Taiwan

At least 64 injured in Kaohsiung area

TAIPEI: A powerful earthquake jolted southern Taiwan, injuring 64 people, toppling farm houses and derailing a carriage on a high-speed train.

Panicked residents fled shaking buildings in the 6.4-magnitude quake yesterday, which also momentarily cut off electricity to more than half a million homes.

The US Geological Survey said the tremor struck about 70km from the island's second-largest city Kaohsiung, but it was felt as far north as the capital, several hundred kilometres away.

"We are monitoring the aftermath for any potential damage," President Ma Ying-jeou told reporters during a hastily arranged trip to Tainan, a city north of the epicentre.

Out of the 64 officially counted as injured at 6.00pm (local time), 33 were in Tainan county, the national fire agency said.

The quake struck in a sparsely inhabited mountainous area in Jiahsian township in Kaohsiung county, an area still recovering from a massive typhoon that triggered floods and mudslides in August, killing about 700 people.

"It felt like the buildings were going to collapse," said Chen Pei-chi, a teacher in Shiaolin Elementary School in a village close to the epicentre.

"I tried to get out, but my legs



Safe from danger: Evacuated pupils sitting outside a school playground while covering their heads to protect themselves from falling debris after a 6.4-magnitude earthquake shook the island in Chiayi county yesterday. — AP

failed me because I was so frightened. Many children were screaming while they were running out of the classrooms."

It was the biggest earthquake to hit the Kaohsiung area in recent years, the weather bureau reported, and followed massive killer quakes in Chile on Saturday and Haiti in January.

The bureau said the initial quake at 8.18am (local time) was followed by 19 aftershocks. The strongest, with a 5.7-magnitude, hit eight hours later.

Local television showed footage of collapsed farm houses in Kaohsiung county as well as cracked walls and falling ceiling panels in buildings in the nearby Chiayi area. Islandwide, 540,000 homes were left temporarily without power.

The quake derailed a train carriage on the high-speed rail connecting the north and the south of the island, leaving passengers stranded for two hours, the national fire agency said, but there were no casualties.

A fire broke out in a textile facto-

ry in Tainan county, with one worker slightly hurt during the evacuation, the agency said. Television footage showed thick black smoke billowing from the building.

"The building was shaking violently and I was really scared. It felt just like a typhoon lashing out," said Chang Shu-yuan, a resident of Kaohsiung city, which has a population of about 1.5 million.

No tsunami warning was issued from the quake, which the USGS said struck at a depth of 35km. — AFP

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