

Damage and injuries reported as quake hits off Japan's east coast

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Tokyo, February 14 (RHC)-- A magnitude 7.3 earthquake has struck off Japan's east coast, rattling a region hit by a powerful 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown just weeks before the disaster's 10th anniversary. The earthquake on Saturday produced powerful shaking along the coast and was felt strongly in the capital, Tokyo, but triggered no tsunami alert.

Its epicentre was off the coast of Fukushima prefecture at a depth of 60 km (36 miles), the Japan Meteorological Agency said. It shook buildings for some time after it hit, shortly after 11 pm (14:00 GMT).

There were no immediate reports of significant damage, though local news broadcast images of a landslide on a highway. Kyodo news agency reported at least 30 people injured, but gave no further details. Approximately 950,000 homes lost power throughout the affected region, with the blackouts appearing to be concentrated in northeast Japan, including Fukushima and neighbouring prefectures.

No abnormalities were reported at the Fukushima nuclear plant, which melted down in the wake of the 2011 disaster, or at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant, according to owner Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings.

Aftershocks continued to rattle the region in the hours afterwards and officials cautioned local residents to be vigilant. A handful of people were reported to have sought shelter at evacuation centres. "We are working quickly to collect information but we still have no details to announce. There were some unconfirmed reports about landslides but we are still checking," Mikihiro Meguro, an official from the Fukushima prefectural government, told the AFP news agency.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga was called to his office, and broadcaster NHK said the government would set up a special liaison office to coordinate with affected regions.

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