

## **6.1 magnitude earthquake rattles central Italy, at least 37 dead**

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**Rome:** At least 37 people were killed when an earthquake measuring 6.1 on the richter scale struck central Italy in the wee hours today.

The epicentre of the quake was determined at Rieti, around 170 km southwest of Rome, central Amatrice town's mayor Sergio Pirozzi said, adding that the "town isn't here anymore".

The magnitude 6 quake struck at 3:36 a.m. (0136 GMT) and was felt across a broad swath of central Italy, including Rome where residents of the capital felt a long swaying followed by aftershocks.

The hardest-hit towns were Amatrice and Accumoli near Rieti, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) northeast of Rome. The center of Amatrice was devastated, with entire palazzos razed to the ground. Rocks and metal tumbled onto the streets and dazed residents huddled in piazzas as aftershocks continued into the early morning hours.

As daylight dawned, residents, civil protection workers and even priests began digging out with shovels, bulldozers and their bare hands, trying to reach survivors.

The Italian Geological service put the magnitude at 6.0. The U.S. Geological Survey reported the magnitude at 6.2 with the epicenter at Norcia, about 170 kilometers (105 miles) northeast of Rome, and with a relatively shallow depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles).

The mayor of the quake-hit town of Accumoli, Stefano Petrucci, said at least six people had died there, including a family of four, and two others. "There are deaths," he told state-run RaiNews24.

In Amatrice, the ANSA news agency reported two bodies had been pulled from one building. The Rev. Fabio Gammarota told ANSA another three were killed in a separate collapse.

Amatrice Mayor Pirozzi told state-run RAI radio and Sky TG24 that residents were buried under collapsed buildings, that the lights had gone out and that heavy equipment was needed to clear streets clogged with debris.

The office of Premier Matteo Renzi tweeted that heavy equipment was on its way.

In 2009, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck in the same region and killed more than 300 people. The earlier earthquake struck L'Aquila in central Italy, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of the latest quake.

A 1997 quake killed a dozen people in the area and severely damaged one of the jewels of Umbria, the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, filled with Giotto frescoes. The Franciscan friars who are the custodians of the basilica reported no immediate damage from Wednesday's temblor.

- With AP Inputs