

## **Quake death toll at 55 as aftershock hits Papua New Guinea**

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**Officials were waiting for more information about damage from the magnitude-7.5 quake that hit about 89 kilometers southwest of Porgera in the Pacific Island nation.**

**Wellington:** At least 55 people have been confirmed dead and authorities fear the toll could exceed 100 from last week's powerful earthquake in Papua New Guinea, as survivors faced more shaking early Wednesday from the strongest aftershock so far.

Southern Highlands Governor William Powi told The Associated Press that people were feeling traumatized from the disaster and ongoing aftershocks. The latest large temblor was a magnitude 6.7 quake that struck just after midnight local time, the strongest shake since last Monday's deadly magnitude 7.5 quake that destroyed homes, triggered landslides and halted work at four oil and gas fields.

The central region where the quake struck is remote and undeveloped, and assessments about the scale of the damage and injuries have been slow to filter out. Powi said he didn't know if the latest aftershock had caused more damage or injuries, but he said it had added to the distress people were feeling.

It is beyond the capacity of the provincial government to cope with the magnitude of destruction and devastation," Powi said. "Our people are traumatized and finding it difficult to cope."

He said provincial authorities were trying to prioritize the greatest needs by getting people with severe injuries to medical centers and providing water and medicine. He said help from abroad and from local aid agencies was slowly coming in.

It's a mammoth task. Most of the feeder roads are washed away or covered with landslips," he said. "People's livelihoods are devastated, their personal property is gone."

Powi said 39 people had died in his province after families had been crushed by their collapsing homes or buried by landslides during last week's earthquake. He said death reports were still coming in from remote places, and he feared the death toll would rise to over 100.

A spokeswoman at the National Disaster Centre said the official death toll is currently estimated at between 55 and 75 although they don't yet have firm numbers.

The U.S. Geological Survey said Wednesday's quake was centered 112 kilometers (70 miles) southwest of Porgera at a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (6 miles). Ten aftershocks in the hours since ranged between magnitude 4.7 and magnitude 5.2.

Papua New Guinea is home to 7 million people on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, to the east of Indonesia. It sits on the Pacific's "Ring of Fire," the arc of seismic faults around the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes and volcanic activity occur.

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