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Scores Evaculated as Tremor Shakes Moscow

By Mark Lammey

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At least 9,000 people were evacuated from Moscow buildings on Friday as the capital experienced its first tremors from an earthquake in 35 years.

The scare came as a strong earthquake off the coast of Sakhalin in the Far East sent shockwaves throughout Russia, causing buildings to lightly shake in Moscow, about 7,000 kilometers away.

"In Moscow, the earthquake was felt on the upper floors of high-rise buildings," the Emergency Situations Ministry said in a statement.

There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries, but about 9,000 residents were evacuated from office and apartment buildings over safety concerns, Interfax reported, citing the police.

In other parts of Moscow, people ran out of buildings, and emergency hotline operators saw a surge in calls.The Emergency Situations Ministry opened a dedicated hotline at +7 (495) 637-22-22 for questions regarding the tremors.

Tremors are highly unusual in Moscow, and the last recorded instance occurred in 1977.

Officials were quick to offer assurances that the tremors had inflicted no damage to the nuclear power sector and that all airports, train stations and other major infrastructure were working normally.

"I ask you to keep the situation under control and to assure the people that they should not be worried," Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said at a City Hall meeting. "Nothing bad has happened," he said, Interfax reported.

A senior city emergencies official, Yury Akimov, told Sobyanin that the tremors had occurred at 10:20 a.m. and had measured less than 1.0 on the Richter scale.

The tremors were felt throughout Siberia and as far as away as Romania.

A Tomsk resident compared the shaking to that caused by a passing tram. "But nothing fell anywhere," she said, Interfax reported.

In high-rise apartment buildings in Novosibirsk, where the shaking hit 5.0 on the Richter scale, furniture trembled and dishes clattered, but there were no victims or damage, a local spokeswoman for the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

The 8.0 magnitude earthquake occurred at 9:44 a.m. about 600 kilometers below the Sea of Okhotsk, which lies between the Russian Far East and the Kamchatka Peninsula, according to the Academy of Sciences in Siberia.

Tremors shook Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, the capital of the Kamchatka region on the Sea of Okhotsk, for about five minutes. Residents fled buildings, and schoolchildren were evacuated from classes. Friday was their last day of school.

The Emergency Situations Ministry briefly issued a tsunami watch for Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands.

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