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Kamchatka Capital Declares State of Emergency as Earthquake Aftershock Threat Looms

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The collapsed facade of a kindergarten in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. **Valeria Kosilova / TASS**

Authorities in the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky declared a state of emergency on Wednesday after a powerful magnitude 8.8 earthquake struck off Far East Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, triggering tsunami waves and dozens of aftershocks.

The quake, one of the strongest ever recorded globally, struck at 8:24 a.m. local time off the coast of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. The epicenter was located 149 kilometers (93 miles) southeast of the city at a depth of 17 kilometers (10.6 miles), according to geologists at the local branch of Russia's Academy of Sciences.

More than 50 aftershocks followed the initial quake, and seismologists warn that tremors up to magnitude 7.5 could occur in the coming days or weeks. A tsunami warning issued in Kamchatka earlier in the day was later lifted.

Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky Mayor Yevgeny Belyaev said public services were on high alert and damage inspections were underway. A portion of a kindergarten facade collapsed, he said, but no injuries were reported. Most damage so far has been cosmetic, although elevator outages were reported in some newly built residential buildings, Belyaev added.

Temporary shelters were set up for residents unwilling to return home due to the continued risk of aftershocks. Officials advised people to avoid beaches and shorelines around Avacha Bay, a popular spot for locals and tourists.

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Kamchatka, known for its active volcanoes, geysers and rugged wilderness, is a major tourist destination. According to the Russian Tourism Union, around 7,000 to 8,000 tourists were in the region at the time of the quake, but none have been reported injured.

Local media reported that national park authorities in Kamchatka closed off a number of areas for tourists due to the risks of landslides and rockfalls.

At Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky's Yelizovo Airport, all flights were delayed until Thursday. Videos shared on social media showed parts of the airport's interior ceiling collapsing during the quake, with passengers seen rushing for safety. Some reported difficulty accessing emergency exits.

Kamchatka region Governor Vladimir Solodov criticized the airport's response to the earthquake, calling the situation "unsatisfactory." He said he had ordered new oversight measures, including improvements to emergency preparedness and staff training.

Russian seismologists had warned of increased seismic activity around Kamchatka as early as July 20, following a series of tremors up to magnitude 7.4 that prompted earlier tsunami alerts.

In the neighboring Sakhalin region, officials said they were undertaking recovery efforts in the city of Severo-Kurilsk on Paramushir Island, part of the Kuril chain, which experienced major flooding due to tsunami waves.

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