

Afghanistan hit by second strong earthquake in days

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Online Desk: Another strong earthquake shook part of western Afghanistan on Wednesday morning after an earlier quake killed more than 2,000 and flattened whole villages. The latest 6.3-magnitude earthquake was about 28 kilometres (17 miles) outside Herat, the capital of Herat province, and 10 kilometers (6 miles) deep, according to the US Geological Survey. The epicenter of Saturday's quake was about 40 kilometres (25 miles) northwest of the provincial capital, and several aftershocks have been strong, including another 6.3 magnitude Saturday, AP reports.

Taliban officials said more than 2,000 had died across Herat after the earlier quakes. They subsequently said the quakes killed and injured thousands but didn't give a breakdown of casualties. Information on damage from the latest tremor was not immediately available. But there is little left of the villages in the region's dusty hills besides rubble and funerals. In Naib Rafi, a village that previously had about 2,500 residents, people said almost no one was still alive besides men who were working outside when the quake struck. Survivors worked all day with excavators to dig long trenches for mass burials. On a barren field in the district of Zinda Jan, a bulldozer removed mounds of earth to clear space for a long row of graves. "It is very difficult to find a family member from a destroyed house and a few minutes to later bury him or her in a nearby grave, again under the ground," said Mir Agha, from the city of Herat, who had joined hundreds of volunteers to help the locals. Nearly 2,000 houses in 20 villages were destroyed, the Taliban have said. The area hit by the quakes has just one government-run hospital.