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Address: #22, Hosseini-Rad Alley, South of
Shahid Motahari St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran, Iran

● Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 88913453
● Editorial Dept. Fax: +98 21 88930684
● ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548892, 5
● Advertising Dept. Tel: +98 21 88500617
irandaily@iranagahiha.com
www.irandaily.ir
newspaper.irandaily.ir
irandaily@icpi.ir
Iran Cultural & Press Institute

● Email:
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By Ali Amiri
Staff writer

Days after a series of earthquakes struck the western province of Herat in Afghanistan, killing more than a thousand people and injuring many more, another powerful tremor shook the same region on Wednesday morning.

"We had woken up for the morning prayers when the ground shook. It was a big quake, perhaps bigger than the last one," says Masoud Mojaddadi, a hotelkeeper based in the city of Herat. With desperation in his voice, he goes on, "They have predicted another one for tonight."

The 6.3 magnitude earthquake hit an area 28 km south of Herat's regional capital at 5:11 a.m. local time on Wednesday, leaving

one dead and at least 80 people injured. "The devastation is huge, with 11 or 12 villages completely flattened," says Mojaddadi, adding, "There have been landslides in some parts as well."

Although the city of Herat has not been much affected by the recent earthquakes, it has lost "one of the historic minarets". Aside from the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), which has responded swiftly to Afghanistan's plea for help, international aid to the natural disaster in Afghanistan has been so far meager and ineffective.

"Most of the rescue was carried out by the people of Herat themselves," says Mojaddadi, noting a widespread feeling of helplessness as they are weary of staying indoors. "The situation in Herat is critical," says Amena, a UN staff member in Afghanistan, who has been injured during the

Wednesday quake. "No one is at home. Everybody left their houses and came to the streets."

"The state of crisis management and relief efforts in the earthquake-affected areas is really weak," says Setareh Hojjati, an Iranian journalist who has been closely following the news of the Herat earthquake. She has conducted interviews with some medical staff, including the head of a hospital in Herat and several individuals affected by the earthquake.

"The crisis management in the earthquake-affected areas is severely lacking. The distribution of essential items and sanitary materials, in particular, has been incredibly slow and insufficient," Hojjati quotes the head of the hospital, who also pointed out that international aid during the initial Herat earthquake was minimal.

The journalist also highlighted the scarcity of resources for debris removal, resulting in an increase in casualties. "A Herat resident, whose wife was trapped under rubble for a day, told me that there are not even basic tools to help with debris removal and rescue efforts," she says.

Hojjati notes that the affected population is currently gripped by anxiety and fear as there are widespread concerns that the corpses remaining beneath the rubble could deteriorate and spread diseases.

"Another citizen of Herat told me that the earthquake victims have also become victims of the Afghan government and its policies," she says, adding that the citizen believed the international community has shown limited willingness to assist the earthquake victims due to concerns surrounding the Taliban.

Herat sidelined by Gaza



In the aftermath of Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, while the world's attention remains focused on Gaza, the people of Afghanistan, particularly those in the quake-stricken province of Herat, silently endure their own suffering. As the US and Europe continue to provide unwavering support to Israel, the flattened villages of Herat face the grim reality of homelessness, with their lives hanging in the balance.

It is important to point up that the current condition of Afghanistan, particularly

Herat, is a direct consequence of Western powers' meddling in the region for a long time, specifically the US-led NATO forces. Their withdrawal in 2021 after a prolonged two-decade occupation has allowed the Taliban to regain control in Afghanistan. It appears as though these same powers are now punishing the innocent people of Afghanistan for a crime they did not commit. If blame is to be assigned, it lies with the US and its allies.

However, during times of natural disasters that escalate into humanitarian cri-

ses, all differences should be set aside, and everyone should come together to provide assistance. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Neither during last year's earthquake in Afghanistan nor in the current situation have we witnessed the international community rallying to help.

On the other hand, Iran has been and continues to be the only country standing beside the people of Afghanistan, offering much-needed support during their darkest moments.

IRCS to the rescue

The specialized rescue teams of the Iranian Red Crescent Society once again demonstrated their swift response and commitment to helping victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan. Within 24 hours of Saturday's 6.3 magnitude earthquake striking western Afghanistan, Iranian rescuers entered the affected areas in Herat Province with specialized equipment and search dogs, according to rcs.ir. Last year, during the devastating 6.1 magnitude earthquake in Afghanistan, the Iranian Red Crescent Society stood as the sole national society in the world to send rescue teams to the affected areas, providing immediate relief to the victims from the very first day of the incident.

The recent earthquake in Herat Province proved catastrophic, claiming the lives of over a thousand individuals, reducing dozens of villages to rubble, and destroying hundreds of houses. There are images

that show torn-down houses, grave expressions of survivors, and empty hands of the earthquake victims. They all tell a heartbreaking tale.

Amidst the rubble, the Iranian Red Crescent Society rescuers, alongside local teams, work round the clock to save people from beneath the ruins.

Despite four days having passed since this devastating earthquake, few institutions around the world have expressed concern or offered assistance to the oppressed and suffering people of Afghanistan. In this dire situation, it is again the Iranian Red Crescent Society members, hailing specifically from the provinces of Razavi, North, and South Khorasan that answered the call for help from Afghanistan.

Mahmoud Zakerian, head of the Razavi Khorasan Red Crescent Society, who led the Iranian rescue teams to Afghanistan, detailed the efforts of rescuers provid-

ing assistance to the earthquake victims. He explained that rescue teams were dispatched from Iran to Afghanistan on Sunday, crossing the land border at Dogharun to reach Herat Province. Upon arrival, the teams immediately initiated the search for bodies and the potential rescue of survivors trapped under the rubble, working alongside emergency teams.

Recognizing the critical importance of the first 72 hours after an earthquake, every effort has been made and continues to be made to aid the survivors. Currently, the focus is on providing emergency accommodation for those affected. In

alignment with humanitarian goals, the Iranian Red Crescent Society distributed relief goods, including 500 tents, 1,000 carpets, 4,000 blankets, 500 sets of dishes, and 500 10-day food packages among the earthquake victims.

In a meeting with Zakerian, the Afghan Minister of Health expressed gratitude to the Iranian Red Crescent Society for its invaluable relief efforts in assisting the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.



● rcs.ir



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