

Geologist says no heightened risk after deep quake rocks Sabah

By MUGUNTAN VANAR

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KOTA KINABALU: A powerful deep sea 6.8 magnitude earthquake off northern Sabah does not increase earthquake danger in Sabah similar to the 2015 deadly Ranau earthquake, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) geologist Prof Emeritus Dr Felix Tongkul (*pic*) says.

“At this stage, there is no evidence that these deep earthquakes mean increased earthquake danger for Sabah,” Tongkul, who is with UMS’s Natural Disaster Research Centre, said when contacted Monday (Feb 23).

An earthquake measuring 6.8 magnitude was recorded at a depth of 678km, about 49km west of Sabah’s northern Kudat waters at 12.57am Monday.

According to Tongkul, the strong earthquake was initially measured at 7.1 magnitude beneath the sea north of Sabah.

“Although the magnitude was high, the earthquake happened very far below the Earth’s surface — about 620km deep. Because it was so deep, the shaking felt on the ground was generally mild and spread over a wide area. There was no tsunami threat,” he said.

He said this was not the first deep earthquake in this area.

Tongkul said similar deep earthquakes were recorded in April 2023 (magnitude 5.5) and in August 2019 (magnitude 4.5)

“All three earthquakes happened very deep underground, more than 600km below Sabah.

“These earthquakes are not caused by faults near the surface in Sabah. Instead, they occur deep inside the Earth where one large piece of ocean floor is slowly pushing underneath northern Borneo.

“As this slab of rock sinks deep into the Earth, it bends and adjusts under extreme pressure. Sometimes, the stress becomes too great and a deep earthquake occurs,” he explained.

He explained that these deep earthquakes differ from shallow earthquakes such as the 2015 Ranau earthquake.

“Deep earthquakes usually do not cause serious damage at the surface because the shaking energy weakens before it reaches the ground,” Tongkul said.

A Sabah Fire and Rescue Services Department spokesman said they did not receive any distress calls immediately after the earthquake though people shared on social media that they felt mild movements lasting between three to 10 seconds.

Some people living in some high rise buildings in Kota Kinabalu and its greater areas of Putatan reported feeling the earth movements but many brushed it aside until they read reports of the earthquake.

According to a Bernama report, residents at the multi-storey People’s Housing Project in Putatan felt strong tremors. One resident, Jalius Majin, 45, said he felt his sofa suddenly shaking and the ceiling fan swinging in his fifth-floor apartment.

He said woke up his wife and three children and rushed down the emergency staircase to the car parking area.

On social media, many residents in southwestern Membakut and Beaufort, as well as neighboring Brunei said they felt a brief tremor but there were no further aftershocks.

The latest quake is the dubbed the strongest registered Malaysia in 11 years, since the 2015 Ranau earthquake (magnitude 6.0) which claimed 18 lives.