

Climber: 'Scary experience'

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KOTA KINABALU: It was a scary experience for first time Mount Kinabalu climber Thiery Brethes, 44, as an earthquake shook the Ranau district on Thursday night.

The Frenchman who came here with his family said they were preparing to sleep at the Panar Laban rest-house, some 3,200m above sea level when they felt severe shaking and noises.

"I was wondering what was happening and only a few minutes later we realised it was an earthquake.

"There was a lot of commotion as many of us came out of our rooms, and we were immediately told to pack up as we would all head down the mountain," he said.

Brethes said it was scary in the darkness as they were guided to the gathering point at Laban Rata helipad.

"We were worried but I am thankful we are safe though I feel a little disappointed because I couldn't make it to the summit," he said.

"I have been preparing hard for this climb, and was really looking forward to conquering the peak but I know this is for our safety and am glad that no harm came to us," he said when met at the Timpohon gate at about 4.30am Friday.

Brethes said overall, apart from the scare and disappointment, the visit to Mount Kinabalu was a good experience for them all.

He was among the 130 climbers who had been up the mountain and reached Timpohon gate safely at 4.30am Friday as Sabah Parks temporarily closed the park for safety reasons.

The others with them were 42 mountain guides, four porters, 11 Sabah Parks staff and six Mountain Search and Rescue (MoSAR) rangers.

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The move to halt operations at the mountain came amid Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) geologist Prof Dr. Felix Tongkul's warning where he urged people to brace themselves for aftershocks from the 5km deep earthquake that hit about 15km north of Mount Kinabalu, towards Kota Marudu district.

The relatively shallow earthquake triggered a very strong jolt that was felt in Kota Belud, Tamparuli, Kiulu and the city here, while residents in areas like Penampang and Papar also reported feeling the tremors.

According to the Malaysian Meteorological Department website, at least three aftershocks were detected in the area from 9.27pm (2.8 magnitude), 10.53pm Thursday – 3.2 magnitude, and another at 8.09am Friday (3.1 magnitude).

Prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in a tweet said he hopes all those affected by the quake were fine and that the government was prepared to provide assistance if needed.