

Reginans worry about loved ones

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The 7.6-magnitude earthquake that has demolished much of the Kashmir region is weighing heavily on the minds of much of Regina's Muslim community, as they gather to observe the holy days of Ramadan.

Many residents have been trying to contact their families, and depending on the fellowship at the mosque for support.

Riaz Ahmed's two cousins survived after being caught near the epicentre the earthquake, one in Islamabad, and one in Muzaffarabad in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir.

"They escaped. They were not in the house," said Ahmed, although he added that their homes had been damaged or lost.

The news that his cousins were safe did not come quickly to Ahmed, who spent two agonizing days waiting to learn the fate of his family.

"Talk about nervousness. It's very, very disturbing. Very uncomfortable," he said.

During Ramadan, Muslims fast during the daylight hours and meet for prayer regularly. Ahmed said the Islamic community has bound together for support.

"It's very sombre. We are all very concerned," he said of the mood in the mosque during Ramadan's daily prayers.

Abdul Jalil, president of the Regina chapter of the Pakistan Canada Cultural Association, found out shortly after the earthquake that his in-laws in Islamabad were safe, and now has turned his attention to members of his association who are suffering.

"The community is in shock," he said Tuesday. "There's a feeling of disbelief. It's unimaginable."

Jalil said the most disturbing thing for his community is the number of lives lost.

"Some say 20, some say 30,000, but just speaking to the community, I believe the number must be much higher," he said.

Kashif Ahmed, spokesperson with Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ), said that a special prayer time was held at the Regina mosque Monday, to pray for those killed in the earthquake and its aftermath.

Riaz Ahmed, president of Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ), has also been able to say prayers of thanks.

"I'm lucky in the sense that we haven't had any fatalities in my family ... I am

thankful to God Almighty for sparing them," he said.

The tremors were felt as far away as New Delhi and Ludhiana, about 200 kilometres away from Pakistan, where Krishan Kapila's immediate family lives.

Although the damage there was minimal, Kapila, a Regina resident, said he was still afraid for his brothers and sister.

"When I opened up the Internet, and I saw the news, I called India right away," he said.

He was able to reach his family after about four hours. His siblings reported feeling the quake, but they were not injured -- much to Kapila's relief.

"Yes, concern is there," he said, even after hearing that his family was safe. "Some of our people are still affected."

Donations can be made through the Islamic Centre of Regina and Mosque, by mailing a cheque, made out to the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan, Regina, Inc., to 3273 Montague St., Regina, S4S 1Z8.

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