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Earthquake
finds district
boss bathing
outside, flees

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FORT PORTAL/KAMPALA. Yesterday morning began like any other day for Rubirizi District chairperson Sylvester Agubashongorera as it was for other residents until about 10am.

As he took bath in an open-topped shelter on the compound, a whirlwind gathered and dumped dust in the water in a basin, prompting him to flee.

"After the dust, the ground started shaking," Mr Agubashongorera told this newspaper by telephone last night, adding, "I ran toward the house, but I feared [entering it because] it could give away."

The chairman's predicament captures the panic that spread through the district after an earthquake, which the United States Geological Surveys (USGS) said measured 5.3-magnitude on the Richter scale, struck yesterday. In Fort Portal Town, more than 100 kilometres away, Mr Joachim Mumbere felt the building housing his shop trembling and then the merchandise began dropping off shelves.

"I saw things [merchandise] fall from all corners. I ran and stood outside for about 10 minutes," Mr Mumbere said.

Mild tremors were felt in most parts of the country following the 10am earthquake, and social media users quickly shared their experiences.

"Minor earthquake at 10:04hrs [in] Kampala," veteran journalist Joachim Buwembo noted in a post on his Facebook page.

The Washington Post reported that the earthquake, with an epicentre 39 kilometers west of Rubirizi Town, was also felt in "parts of northern Tanzania".

There was no reported death or vast damage, according to local and central government officials.

"It was mild earthquake, but we are going to issue a detailed statement on a working day," said Dr Fred Tugume of Uganda's Geological Surveys and Mines Department.

Last September, a 5.7 magnitude earthquake struck near the border, killing 17 people in Tanzania and damaging an array of property in Uganda.

The rift valley is prone to seismic activity, and officials say increasing earthquake occurrence has nothing to do with ongoing oil exploration activities in the area.

EARTHQUAKE

Cause. According to USGS, an earthquake is caused by "a sudden slip on a fault, often abruptly releasing strain that has accumulated over a long period". The earth's tectonic plates slowly move over, under and past each other, but they get stuck at their edges.