

From correspondents in Manokwari, Indonesia | *January 04, 2009*

Article from: Agence France-Presse

A HOTEL in West Papua collapsed when the second of two powerful earthquakes hit the region today and three people were pulled alive from the rubble, officials said.

The three guests who had been staying at the Mutiara hotel in the city of Manokwari were taken to hospital, but their condition was not immediately clear.

No other hotel staff or guests were believed to be trapped or missing.

"Those three hotel guests returned to their room after the first big quake. They failed to evacuate after the second powerful quake struck and got trapped in the hotel rubble," a hotel staffer identified as Harun told AFP.

"The three have been brought to a nearby hospital. But it's not clear what injuries they suffered," he added.

He said the hotel had failed to withstand the quake as it was old but that other buildings in the neighbourhood had received only minor damage such as cracks to the walls.

The two powerful earthquakes have rattled West Papua this morning, triggering panic among residents.

The first 7.6-magnitude quake struck at 4.43 am (6:43am AEDT), about 150km northwest of the city of Manokwari, the US Geological Survey said, triggering a tsunami alert that was later withdrawn.

It was followed almost three hours later at 22:33 GMT (9:33am AEDT) by a 7.5-magnitude aftershock, the US agency said.

Both quakes were fairly shallow, with the first hitting at a depth of 35km and the second at 45km.

Distressed residents ran out of their homes as the quake rattled Manokwari, but there were no immediate signs of heavy damage or injuries, an AFP correspondent in the town said.

Thousands of residents including children and the elderly could be seen thronging the roads of the town in the darkness of a blackout and heading away from the sea despite the tsunami warning being lifted.

Little damage could be seen initially in the town apart from cracked walls.

"The quake was quite strong and we felt it for about three minutes. The electricity blacked out after the quake," a policeman who identified himself as Ketut said.

"The police and military are working right now to help people get to higher ground due to the tsunami alert and the fact that we're on the coast," he said.

Several smaller aftershocks were also reported in the hours following the first quake, Indonesian seismologists said.

Indonesia, which sits at the meeting of continental plates, is frequently hit by earthquakes and tsunamis.

The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, which was triggered by a massive quake off the coast of Indonesia, killed at least 168,000 people in the country's Aceh province and Nias island.