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Millions on the mainland and in HK bow in grief during three minutes' silence

Unprecedented show of unity set to bind the country together, come what may

THE NATION MOURNS



PLA soldiers and villagers searching for survivors of last Monday's earthquake pause and bow their heads in silence in Wenchuan (汶川), the epicentre of the disaster, joining hundreds of millions across the nation in a three-minute tribute to the victims. Photo: CNS

The nation came to a standstill yesterday in a deeply moving display of respect and remembrance for victims of the Sichuan earthquake. Millions, from state leaders in Beijing to rescue workers toiling amid the rubble to find survivors of disaster, marked an emotional three minutes' silence in an unprecedented show of public mourning. Many in Hong Kong took part.

Traffic on busy roads came to a halt, construction work stopped, stock exchanges ceased trading and flags flew at half-staff. The only sound to be heard was the haunting wail of air-raid sirens and car horns symbolising the suffering caused by the country's worst natural disaster in 60 years.

The widespread outpouring of grief, at the

beginning of three days of national mourning, reflects the terrible scale of the tragedy which befell Sichuan and its impact on the country. But it also demonstrates a newfound feeling of togetherness - a people united not only in grief but in support for all those affected by the earthquake. There is a determination to overcome adversity. This will be needed in the hard months which lie ahead.

The 50,000 dead, 200,000 injured and 4.8 million left homeless will not be forgotten. The best tribute to the victims would be to rebuild their stricken communities and make them stronger, so that a catastrophe of this magnitude can never occur again.

Editorial A14

Quake Aftermath 7 pages inside

Grief and giving

Tribute paid across nation
From bustling Hong Kong to the desolation of the Gobi desert, more than a billion people stand in silent tribute at 2.28pm. Meanwhile, donations received from home and abroad top 10 billion yuan. **Full reports A2-5**

The clear-up

PLA steps up efforts; Wen issues order
PLA troops try to extend rescue efforts to remote Quhe township in Qingchuan county as Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) orders sanitation workers to reach all villages in the quake zone. The quake has caused losses totalling 67 billion yuan in Sichuan (四川). **Full reports A6-7**

Coming days

Torch relay appeals heat up
Calls mount for the Olympic torch relay to either be scrapped or radically altered out of respect for the earthquake victims as authorities begin sending the injured to other provinces for further treatment. **Full reports A8**

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