

Time out

Star attractions from Swiss watch show

Liftout Inside



Perfect pitch

Ferguson savours Euro glory, then plots more of the same

Sport C14 & C16



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80,000 dead or missing; Wen on second trip to quake area; Hu oversees tents supply

Casualties exceed the worst forecasts

Jane Cai

The number of casualties from last week's massive earthquake in Sichuan (四川) has exceeded Beijing's worst projections, with 80,000 people dead or missing.

The revised toll was announced 11 days after the quake struck – the first day on which there were no reports of miracle survivors.

The announcement came as Premier Wen Jiabao (溫家寶) flew to Sichuan yesterday, his second trip to the devastated area. Mr Wen praised the people working on the front line, saying their efforts to save lives were "orderly" and "effective".

While some search and rescue efforts were continuing for the nearly 30,000 people still missing, the work focus shifted to the 5.4 million people who have been left homeless.

"Saving people was the crucial and major task of the previous stage," Mr Wen said. "[Caring for] refugees and restoration and reconstruction are the arduous jobs for the longer term."

China Central Television showed

At last count

51,151 confirmed dead

29,328 missing

288,431 injured

2.4b yuan in donations received from home and abroad

SOURCE: XINHUA

President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) in Zhejiang (浙江省) visiting a tent factory to oversee the supply of tents.

Watching tents being tested for water resistance, Mr Hu said 900,000 tents were needed urgently in the affected areas and he urged the plants to run "at full gear" so they could be delivered within a month.

The State Council announced that as of 10am yesterday, the death toll was 51,151, up nearly 10,000 from a day earlier and above the previous



Earthquake survivors from Beichuan are housed in a tent on a town square in An county. Beichuan has been evacuated and is to be rebuilt in An county, nearly 30km away. Photo: Robert Ng

estimate of 50,000. A total of 288,431 people were injured and 29,328 were missing after the magnitude-8 earthquake, the worst to hit the country in more than 30 years. About 80,000 people had been rescued in Sichuan, the provincial government said.

Xinhua has not reported any survivors being pulled from rubble since Shifang (什邡) power plant worker Cui Changhui was brought out alive on Wednesday after being buried for 216 hours.

Xinhua said Mr Wen would check the state of a so-called quake lake in Tangjiashan, Beichuan county.

It is one of 34 lakes in Sichuan that were formed when landslides triggered by the quake blocked rivers. The lakes may burst at any time, as the river water builds up behind the blockage, particularly amid heavy rains.

The lakes, together with possible aftershocks and landslides, still threaten to take the lives of survivors.

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In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang (秦剛) said 400,000 tents were already being used in the quake zone, but 3.3 million tents were needed in the longer term.

Mr Qin appealed to the international community "to give priority consideration to donating tents".

Other items urgently needed included blankets, clothes, food, medicine, and medical, telecommunications and rescue equipment.

Tan Li (檀立), a psychologist working with refugees in Beichuan (北川) and Mianyang (綿陽), said many people wanted to return to their villages and rebuild with their own hands.

"They are very worried about the future, not knowing when and how they can build their homes. They know the government will help, but they are still at a loss," Mr Tan said.

Additional reporting by Ng Tze-wei and Raymond Li

Tsang names political assistants

Ambrose Leung

Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen yesterday appointed nine new political assistants to his ministers, opening what the government said was a gateway for aspiring politicians to rise in the leadership or join the ranks of legislators.

In a statement before joining the appointees at Government House for a reception, Mr Tsang praised the team for their "passion and commitment" – echoing words he used in appointing eight deputy ministers on Tuesday.

Among the nine assistants appointed yesterday, two were from the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, one from the Liberal Party and two

were from political groups formed by young professionals in recent years.

One was a retired senior police officer who has taken the post of assistant to the secretary for security.

Mr Tsang said he was confident the new assistants would work closely with both their respective ministers and the civil service.

A senior government source said the reason for creating two new tiers of political appointees under government ministers was to create channels through which political talent could be cultivated.

"When we were choosing undersecretaries or political assistants, their political experience, their aspirations and whether they have the potential to continue down the road of politics were most important," the

Young faces dominate A3

source said. "Political assistants have options for a future as an undersecretary or a minister, or they can consider running for the legislature."

In time, it was hoped the appointees would form a pool from which future chief executives could choose their ruling teams under universal suffrage.

The new undersecretaries and political assistants have been drawn from a pool of 100-plus candidates. Some were nominated by government ministers, others by political parties, groups and think-tanks. Vacancies for three undersecretaries and four assistants will be filled soon.

Responding to criticism that some undersecretaries lacked politi-

cal and administrative experience, a government source said the major factor in choosing them was ability.

On reports that certain ministers had been forced to accept candidates they had not chosen, the source said the selection was a collective process whereby a board, chaired by the chief secretary, interviewed the candidates. "This is not an age of blind marriage," the source said.

But the government conceded that there were bound to be problems between the bureaucracy and the new political appointees, as the system had just been implemented.

Democratic Party legislator Lee Wing-tat said: "At least these people's experiences are more in line with their positions, unlike some of the undersecretaries."

News Digest

International

Frustration builds in Yangon

Grief gives way to anger in Myanmar as people learn with each passing day more about the extent of the damage from Cyclone Nargis and the junta's failure to respond. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon tours the Irrawaddy delta, the hardest-hit area, on the first day of his visit.

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National

Taiwan offer from Beijing

A senior mainland official says Beijing is ready to resume talks with Taiwan, a response welcomed by the island's new president. Chen Yunlin (陳雲林), director of the mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office, says Beijing is willing to reconcile with the island.

Full report A9

City

Hunt for boyfriend of suffocated woman

The boyfriend of a mainland woman who was found suffocated in her Kwai Chung home is being sought by police. Officers believe a relationship problem was probably the motive behind the killing of 32-year-old Yang Xiuqiong. The landlord had noticed a smell coming from the flat on Wednesday.

Full report C1

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