

Quake aftermath

Villagers lose all a second time
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Surviving against all the odds
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Impossible task for counsellors
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HK medics start operating
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Flags to fly at half mast; Olympic torch relay suspended Three days of mourning for earthquake victims

Patriotic duty drives an army of volunteers



Parents burn incense paper and grieve near the tomb of their daughter who died after a school dormitory collapsed in Muyu, Sichuan province. Photo: AP

Tom Miller in Wenchuan

The devastation wrought by the earthquake has prompted a show of civil activism unprecedented in recent mainland history, with an estimated 200,000 volunteers working alongside the authorities to speed the recovery in the disaster area.

With the scale of destruction beyond anything encountered for more than 30 years, Beijing has reacted by relaxing its normally tight controls over any disaster zone, allowing ordinary citizens to play a vital role in the relief work.

Jobs once reserved for members of the People's Liberation Army are being performed by individuals dressed in T-shirts emblazoned with "I Love China" or "We Are Together" – a show of positive patriotism far removed from the ugly nationalism witnessed after March's riots in Tibet.

At Daci Monastery in central Chengdu (成都), hundreds of high-school students have set up a supply centre to receive donated food, clothes and water.

With red and yellow ribbons tied around their wrists – the colours of the national flag – they work around the clock to ensure that a constant stream of aid is available for teams of private vehicles waiting to transport supplies to the disaster area.

The students, members of the young generation often accused of being selfish and materialistic, said they now understood the meaning of comradeship.

"This is the first major hardship to hit this generation. It is the first time they have been put to the test," said Ben Geisler, an American volunteer working with the students.

Some independent and self-financed charities have sprung up to deal with the disaster. In Mianyang (綿陽), there are an estimated 10,000 members of the Red Ribbon movement helping the thousands of refugees in the town. Groups of volunteers have formed all over the country to collect money, donate vehicles and send aid workers.

"There are no obstacles from government – no checks, registration forms or fees to pay. We are all ready



A volunteer comforts a survivor in Mianyang. Photo: Reuters

to head to the disaster areas," said Chengdu native Ye Shujuan, who set up a volunteer group in Shanghai.

Television appeals and internet messaging have helped to mobilise strangers into teams.

One group of students, retired soldiers and ordinary workers from Nanjing (南京) arrived in Chengdu four days after the quake struck after forming via the Web.

"We bought medicine and plane tickets with our own money so we can help the victims," explained a student from Nanjing's Southeast University.

On the road to Yingxiu, a small town at the heart of Wenchuan county (汶川), 24-year-old insurance clerk Liu Bing said he had pulled several children out of collapsed buildings during his three-day trek through remote mountain villages.

"Too many volunteers are going to places where there are already lots of people to help. Too few are trekking into the dangerous little villages in the countryside which the PLA hasn't reached yet," he complained.

But the spontaneous show of civil responsibility has been impressive. "This is an opportunity for China to show the world that there really is a co-operative spirit here – and the response has really been incredible," Mr Geisler said.

Locals were not surprised by the scale of the response.

"It is a natural product of economic development," observed Lin Huazhou, a Chengdu native. "Once your own belly is full, you can afford to help others."

Staff Reporters

Three days of national mourning begin today for victims of last Monday's earthquake in Sichuan (四川), which is believed to have killed more than 50,000 people and left hundreds of thousands more crippled and traumatised.

The State Council said the mourning would include three minutes of silence to be observed nationwide at 2.28pm – exactly a week after the quake struck.

That will be followed by the sounding of horns of vehicles, trains, ships and air raid sirens in a symbolic wailing of grief.

The announcement of the mourning period came as the severity of the quake, the worst in more than 30 years, was revised upwards to 8.0 on the Richter scale.

All national flags will fly at half mast at home and at Chinese diplomatic missions abroad and public recreational activities will be halted.

The Olympic torch relay will also be suspended during the mourning period, Xinhua reported.

The torch relay on the mainland has already been scaled down since May 13 and includes a minute's silence at the start of each leg to honour the victims.

Life-saving

The quake has left rescue and relief workers with a formidable task

The number, to date, saved from the rubble of wrecked buildings is

36,563

Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen last night said Hong Kong would participate in the national mourning. Returning from Singapore, he again expressed sadness over the tragic event.

"Hong Kong people feel very emotional about the disaster in Sichuan. Hong Kong will certainly follow the nation [in mourning]," he said.

In Hong Kong, all government agencies and schools will fly flags at half mast for three days. Government employees will also observe the three minutes of silence.

Some business sectors last night promised that they would follow the arrangement.

Hong Kong has twice lowered the national flag to half mast: after the

Fatal force

The tremor, upgraded to magnitude 8, left a trail of misery

The number of people, up to 4pm yesterday, confirmed killed is

32,477

death of former president Yang Shangkun in 1998 and following the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.

Macau will join the three-day mourning period and stop public recreational activities.

On the mainland, the grieving public welcomed the government's decision.

"This is really the right decision. We cannot hold celebrations now with so many people dead," said Li Zhongxia, a 43-year-old supermarket worker in Beijing, referring to the suspension of the torch relay.

Ms Li, a mother of a 17-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son, said: "I have not been able to sleep or eat well since the earthquake. The dead

Sizeable problem

Death, destruction and disaster over a wide area resulted from the quake

The total area affected by the tremor, in square kilometres, is

410,000

and injured are so wretched, especially the babies and children."

Some people have gone further, saying the government should scrap the torch relay altogether.

"China should terminate the torch relay completely right now," said Bao Jingning, a student at the Capital University of Economics and Trade. But others disagreed, seeing the relay as a unifying and morale-boosting event.

The announcement came as hope of finding survivors faded.

Although the central government still pledged that rescue efforts would continue and new survivors had been found, some rescue workers said they had been told to focus efforts on recovering property.

"Our orders are to start searching for lost property and gain for local people. I heard some other troops would continue searching for survivors," a soldier from the Jinan military region said in Qingchuan.

The rescue effort was further complicated by strong aftershocks. One magnitude 6 aftershock struck Jiangyou yesterday morning, causing panic among survivors and sending rescue workers running.

At least three people were killed and 1,006 people injured in the aftershock, which brought down a large number of houses, damaged 377km of roads and six bridges, Xinhua said.

The official confirmed death toll reached 32,477 as of 4pm yesterday.

Millions of survivors, rescuers and volunteers face another danger – with many sections of the rivers in Sichuan dammed by landslides and rockfalls, creating temporary lakes.

The number of landslide lakes grew to 21 yesterday, up from 13 on Saturday. Authorities have been evacuating people to higher ground in case the lakes flood. Adding to the threat, torrential rains have been forecast for the disaster zone tomorrow and Wednesday.

The Ministry of National Defence said that all nuclear facilities in the quake region were safe.

News Digest

International

Junta orders survivors to go home

In the Myanmar town of Kyauktan, cyclone survivors thought the military officials might have come to offer food or aid. They were stunned when told to go home. "I asked them 'what home?' We have no homes," one man recalls. A monk says he has been told to send away people sheltering in a monastery in the heart of the town.

Full report A12

Business

Huawei bidders line up

Mainland telecoms equipment maker Huawei Technologies is attracting interest from phone industry giants AT&T, Verizon and Vodafone for the sale of more than half of its handset unit, which is expected to fetch at least US\$2 billion. Private equity players including Blackstone, TPG and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts could also bid.

Full report B1

City

Happy Valley for the dead

Among the snippets of history collected by Joseph Ting Sun-pao, former chief curator of the Museum of History, is the fact that Happy Valley got its name from the opening of its cemetery in 1841, a last resting place euphemistically referred to as "happy valley".

Full report C1

Sport

Jockey in drugs shock

French rider Olivier Doleuze's world has again been turned upside down after he was stood down in Singapore yesterday, ruling him out of the big race day, at the request of Hong Kong stewards after an "irregularity" was found in a drug test sample at Happy Valley last week.

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