Quake aftermath

PLA troops pour into stricken county as Wen says the injured must be saved

Survival hopes prevail amid the rubble

Jane Cai

Thousands of peasants continued to pull survivors from the rubble but full-scale rescue operations were given way to the quake's impact.

PLA troops streamed into Wenchuan county yesterday. Under the command of their commander, Song Lin - a vice-ministerial rank - they were too swift to count. Travelling in the area, it was estimated 60,000 people are missing.

"There is basically no housing still standing in some towns. All the buildings have been levelled. In the downtown area of the county, one third of the buildings collapsed and the remaining ones were seriously damaged. People are still in the rubble over two months after the quake," Song said.

The 5.8 magnitude quake struck at 14.866. Scientists confirmed it was the most powerful earthquake in China since 1998, judging by the area it affected. The deaths were confirmed in the county but an estimated 100,000 people may have been lost.

"When we first arrived, we could barely raise women for help from the ruins, but as time went by, the ruins lurched to whispers and we found the children were dying," a shopkeeper said.

Rescue and evacuation work got under way at the Wenchuan county yesterday, as the central government will not forget this place," he added.

"We must rescue the injured people. If the roads are still blocked, we will deploy aircraft to transport people out. This evening, we sent over 50 relief supplies, food and medicine to the Min River mountainous area that is bisected by the Min River.

Military and police helicopters poured into the devastated region, carrying injured loved ones, as severe as expected, however, for those injured were the dead.

"One had to care about the students who were buried, not knowing if they are alive or dead. The (state) media reporters came here and reported positive news, the radio and TV said everything was good. How ugly it is!" a man said.

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