

More Than 140 Feared Buried in China Landslide



Chinese military police and rescue workers are seen at the site of a landslide in Xinmo village, Diexi town of Maoxian county, Sichuan province on June 24, 2017.

BEIJING (AFP) -- Chinese rescuers scoured through rocks on Saturday in a frantic search for more than 140 people feared buried after a landslide smashed through a mountain village in southwest Sichuan province.

A couple and a baby were rescued and taken to hospital after 46 homes in the village of Xinmo were swallowed by huge boulders when the side of a mountain collapsed, according to the local Maoxian, or Mao county, government.

A fourth survivor was found but rescuers were still trying to get to him. At least 141 people were missing, the People's Daily said, citing a Maoxian government spokesman hours after the landslide.

The landslide blocked a two-kilometer stretch of river and 1.6 kilometer of road.

Rescuers used ropes to move a massive rock while dozens of others, aided by dogs, searched the rubble for survivors, according to videos posted online by the Maoxian government and state broadcaster CCTV.

Bulldozers and heavy diggers were also deployed to remove boulders, the images showed. Medics were seen treating a woman on a road. Hundreds of police, military and firefighters were taking part in the rescue.

Wang Yongbo, one of the officials in charge of rescue efforts, said the vital signs of one of the survivors "are weak".

"It's the biggest landslide in this area since the Wenchuan earthquake," he said, referring to the disaster that killed 87,000 people in 2008 in a town in Sichuan.

Local police captain Chen Tiebo said the heavy rains that hit the region in recent days had triggered the landslide.

"There are several tonnes of rock" over the village, he told the state broadcaster CCTV. "It's a seismic area here. There's not a lot of vegetation," Chen said.

Trees can help absorb excess rain and prevent landslides. More Rain Forecast Tao Jian, director of the local weather service, told CCTV that the 2008 earthquake had "weakened the mountain" and that "a weak rain can provoke a geological catastrophe". A report from the state news agency Xinhua said that the landslide occurred when the high part of a mountain in the Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture of Aba collapsed.

President Xi Jinping called for rescuers to "spare no effort" in their search for survivors, according to CCTV.

China's national weather observatory said more heavy rain was expected in parts of Sichuan and other southwestern provinces.

Landslides are a frequent danger in rural and mountainous parts of China, particularly at times of heavy rains.

At least 12 people were killed in January when a landslide crushed a hotel in central Hubei province.

In October landslides battered eastern China in the wake of torrential rains brought by Typhoon Megi, causing widespread damage and killing at least eight.

More than 70 were killed by a landslide in the southern commercial hub of Shenzhen in December 2015, caused by the improper storage of waste. One of the deadliest landslides took place in 1991, when 216 were killed in southwestern Yunnan province.

Thousands Forced to Evacuate Towers in UK



Residents leave a tower block on the Chalcots Estate in Camden, London, June 23, 2017, as the building is evacuated in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire.

LONDON (Reuters) -- Thousands of residents in a sprawling north London housing estate were forced to leave their apartments late on Friday after fire checks carried out in the wake of the deadly Grenfell Tower blaze found the buildings to be unsafe.

Amid chaotic scenes, residents clutching children, pets and small amounts of clothing and food emerged from five tower blocks to sleep on air beds in a local sports center after hearing on the news that their buildings were being evacuated.

Fire checks have been carried out on some 600 high-rise buildings across England after a fire ravaged a social tower block in west London last week, killing at least 79 people.

Twenty seven high-rise apartment blocks have failed fire cladding safety tests that were launched in the wake of the Grenfell Tower blaze which killed 79 people, the British government said.

"I know it's difficult but Grenfell changes everything," Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Council, said in a statement late on Friday. "I don't believe we can take any risks with our residents' safety."

Police investigating the cause of the deadly 24-storey Grenfell Tower blaze have said the fire started in a fridge but spread rapidly due to the use of external cladding on the building, trapping residents in their beds as they slept.

The cladding has since failed all safety checks.

The fire has become a flashpoint for public anger at Prime Minister Theresa May's record in government and cuts to local authority budgets. Grenfell Tower is situated in Kensington, one of the richest boroughs in Europe. Battling to save her position after losing her majority in a June 8 election, May has promised to do everything she can to protect those residents who survived the fire and to improve the quality and safety of public housing in Britain.

The London Fire Brigade said it had found a number of fire safety issues at the Chalcots Estate in Camden, north London, and advised that residents should leave the building until they were resolved.

Residents complained of first hearing about the evacuation from the media and getting very short notice to leave from city officials going door to door. Not all residents agreed to go.

The council's leader, Gould, said it would take up to four weeks to repair the blocks that were evacuated and said that some 4,000 residents were affected.

"It was farcical communication," 21-year-old Daniel Tackaberry told Reuters outside a nearby sports centre where the local council had laid out air beds for people for whom they could not find hotels.

"You don't get everyone to leave this quickly."

Ex-Minister Under Probe to Lead Macron's Lawmakers

PARIS (Reuters) -- Former French minister Richard Ferrand, who has been fighting accusations of improper financial dealings during most of his few weeks in office, was elected on Saturday to lead President Emmanuel Macron's lawmakers in parliament.

"I thank the deputies for their confidence... We have a strong obligation to succeed. The French people no longer want intentions, they want results," Ferrand said in a statement.

Some 306 deputies voted for Ferrand and two abstained.

Macron's year-old Republic on the Move party (LREM) won a huge parliamentary majority on June 18 that boasts scores of lawmakers never before elect-

ed - unprecedented in France and central to his promise to clean up the country's politics.

Ferrand, 54, a former Socialist who became one of Macron's key early backers, will bring his experience and authority to the newcomers who were gathering for a two-day training seminar at the National Assembly.

"Richard Ferrand is the only one who can to the job," a LREM deputy told Reuters.

Ferrand, who headed the campaign that swept Emmanuel Macron to power in a vote last May 7, left the government in a Cabinet reshuffle this week. He was named minister for territorial planning in May. He has denied any wrongdoing after a public prosecutor opened an investigation.

U.S. Police Officer in Killing of Black Man Cleared



Family and friends of Sam DuBose arrive at the courthouse for the trial of the man who killed him.

CHICAGO (AFP) -- The second murder trial of a white Ohio policeman who shot a black man during a routine traffic stop has ended in a mistrial, just as the first had a year earlier.

Former University of Cincinnati campus police officer Ray Tensing was accused of killing Sam DuBose in a case tinged with the same overtones of racial discrimination and heavy-handed tactics as other recent high-profile U.S. police shooting cases.

Tensing, 27, told investigators that he opened fire out of fear for his life after DuBose, 43, tried to drive away and dragged the officer along with him.

But prosecutors said a review of police body camera footage showed Tensing was not in danger during the July 2015 incident involving the unarmed motorist.

The first trial in 2016 ended in mistrial after the jury failed to reach a unanimous verdict. The jury in the second trial sent a note to the judge Friday that they were similarly divided.

"We are almost evenly split regarding our votes toward a final verdict. We have given this extensive deliberation, with opportunity for both sides to express their positions. We do not perceive coming to a unanimous decision," the jury wrote.

The prosecutor during the first trial,

Joseph Deters, had strongly criticized the shooting.

"This is the most asinine act I have ever seen a police officer make," he said at the time. "It was totally unwarranted."

U.S. prosecutors have found it difficult to convict police officers in high-profile shooting cases involving black victims -- despite recent incidents being captured on video.

Anger over the failure to find the officers guilty has sometimes boiled over, leading to violent protests.

Peterson Mingo, a DuBose family spokesman and Cincinnati church pastor, appealed Friday for calm.

"Right now, the family wants peace. The family wants reconciliation," he told reporters. "The family does not want any upheaval. They don't want any violence," Mingo said.

A Wisconsin jury earlier this week acquitted Dominique Heaggan-Brown in the killing of Sylville Smith, who was carrying a semi-automatic pistol during a brief foot chase.

Minnesota police officer Jeronimo Yanez was found not guilty last week in the shooting death of motorist Philando Castile, whose dying moments were live-streamed on Facebook.

And all six Baltimore officers charged over the 2015 death of Freddie Gray, due to spinal cord injuries suffered in the back of a police van, were eventually cleared.

China, U.S. Reach Denuclearization Agreement



U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis meet at the State Department in Washington June 21, 2017.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China and the United States agreed that efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula should be "complete, verifiable and irreversible", Chinese state media said on Saturday, reporting the results of high level talks in Washington this week.

"Both sides reaffirm that they will strive for the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," a consensus document released by the official Xinhua news agency said.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had said on Thursday that the United States pressed China to ramp up economic and political pressure on North Korea, during his meeting with top Chinese diplomats and defense chiefs.

China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi and General Fang Fenghui met Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis during the talks. Yang later met with U.S. President Donald Trump in the White House, where they also discussed North Korea, Xinhua reported.

The consensus document also highlighted the need to fully and strictly hold to UN Security Council resolutions and push for dialogue and negotiation, which has long been China's position on the issue.

Military-to-military exchanges should also be upgraded and mechanisms of notification established in order to cut the risks of "judgment errors" between the Chinese and U.S. militaries, the statement also said.

News in Brief

MARAWI, Philippines (Dispatches) -- One of the most wanted terrorists may have escaped a five-week battle with extremist militants in a southern Philippine city, which began with a raid to capture him, the military said Saturday.

Isnilon Hapilon, a veteran Filipino militant said to be the leader of Daesh in Southeast Asia, has not been seen in the battle zone in Marawi City, said Lieutenant General Carlito Galvez, head of the military's Western Mindanao Command. An attempt by government troops to arrest Hapilon in Marawi on May 23 triggered a rampage by militants flying black Daesh flags and backed by some foreign terrorists who seized parts of the mainly Muslim city.

THE HAGUE (AP) -- The Netherlands' foreign ministry says that two Dutch journalists who were kidnapped earlier this week by leftist rebels in Colombia have been released unharmed.

Foreign Minister Bert Koenders said in a statement early Saturday that Derk Bolt and Eugenio Follender "are doing relatively well under the circumstances." Bolt and Follender were seized Monday by members of the National Liberation Army while out reporting in the volatile Catatumbo region near the border with Venezuela. Bolt is host of a Dutch television show called Spoorloos (Without a Trace), Follender a cameraman for the show, which attempts to help people find their long-lost blood relatives.

LONDON (AFP) -- EU migrants to Britain said that far from being "generous," premier Theresa May's offer for their post-Brexit future was stingy and would leave them prey to Britain's unforgiving bureaucrats.

Some migrants worried that the proposals meant their rights would no longer be protected by the European Court of Justice after an EU membership referendum last year in which they had no say. The offer outlined by the beleaguered May at an EU summit was also criticized by London Mayor Sadiq Khan as woefully insufficient for the 3 million EU nationals living in Britain.

ANKARA (Dispatches) -- Evolution will no longer be taught in Turkish schools, a senior education official has said.

Alpaslan Durmuş, who chairs the board of education, said evolution was debatable, controversial and too complicated for students. "We believe that these subjects are beyond their (students) comprehension," said Durmuş in a video published on the education ministry's website. Durmuş said a chapter on evolution was being removed from ninth grade biology course books, and the subject postponed to the undergraduate period. Another change to the curriculum may reduce the amount of time that students spend studying the legacy of secularism.

PARIS (AFP) -- An open-top double-decker bus crashed into a central Paris bridge during an Olympic fun day, injuring at least four passengers, firefighters said.

The bus, with seating on the upper deck for sightseeing, was too high to pass under the Alexandre III bridge and scraped the roof of the tunnel before stopping after a few meters. The Paris fire service said a woman had serious injuries, though Big Bus Tours, which runs sightseeing trips around Paris on the buses, denied there were any major injuries.