

## Twenty-three dead in wake of Morakot

Written by Taipei Times

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Residents of Xiaolin Village in Kaohsiung County's Jiaxian Township disembark from a bus.  
PHOTO: CNA

At least 23 people were confirmed dead, 32 injured and 56 confirmed missing in the wake of Typhoon Morakot, the Central Disaster Emergency Operation Center said yesterday.

Hundreds of others were reportedly missing in mountainous areas of southern Taiwan, while the military was trying to rescue those cut off by fallen bridges and raging rivers.

As of last night, the Presidential Office had not declared a state of emergency.

Floodwaters began to recede in parts of Tainan and Pingtung counties, but the Council of Agriculture warned the public of the risk of more mudslides as rains continued to batter mountainous areas of Nantou, Chiayi, Kaohsiung and Pingtung counties.

The council has issued a "red" mudslide alert for 244 rivers and creeks that posed a risk for 117 villages and boroughs in 35 townships.

Authorities in the affected areas should evacuate residents if necessary, the council said.

As of yesterday, 129 roads remained blocked and 28 bridges were out, while 849,360 households were without running water and 110,345 households had no power, tallies from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, the Ministry of the Interior, the agriculture council and the Council of Indigenous Peoples showed.

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Soldiers walk through floodwaters in Jiaxian, Kaohsiung County, yesterday, during a rescue operation.

PHOTO: AFP

As floodwaters receded, more than 2,000 people returned to their homes from shelters and 51 shelters were closed down, the interior ministry said.

A total of 3,720 people remained in 93 shelters across the country as of yesterday, the ministry said.



Nantou County Government rescue workers retrieve the wreckage of a car from the Choshui River (濁水溪) in Nantou County, Taiwan, yesterday.

PHOTO: HSIEH CHIEH-YU, TAIPEI TIMES

In Nantou County, the body of Liu Wen-yu (劉文裕), who was believed to have fallen into the Choshui River (濁水溪) with his car on Sunday when a highway along the riverbank collapsed, was found about 800m downstream.

Nine people are believed to have fallen into the river while driving on Provincial Highway No. 16 at around 6:50am on Sunday.

The other eight people were still missing as of press time. However, the wreckage of a Mercedes-Benz and a Ford have been found in the river.

Although the Central Weather Bureau lifted all typhoon warnings at 5:30pm yesterday, Central Disaster Emergency Operation Center director Fan Liang-hsiu said the center would continue

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to operate.

“At the moment, the focus of our operations is still rescuing people,” Fan said after a meeting. “Repairing public facilities and private residences should also be a priority.”

“The Ministry of National Defense, the interior ministry and all other concerned government agencies will do their best to minimize the impact of the disaster,” he said.

The Presidential Office said it would not declare a state of emergency because the devastation caused by Morakot was under control and relief efforts would be strengthened.

Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁奇) said declaring a state of emergency was unnecessary because the relief efforts were being coordinated under existing mechanisms. President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) would not call a National Security Council meeting, he said.

Wang said that the Cabinet, and not the president, was responsible for relief efforts and reconstruction, but that Ma was very concerned about the situation and in close contact with Premier Liu Chao-shiuan (劉兆玄).

Liu, who spent Sunday night at a Ministry of National Defense hotel in Kaohsiung City after inspecting flooded areas in Pingtung County, returned to Taipei at noon yesterday.

Liu called an emergency Cabinet meeting at 5pm to discuss relief measures and proposals to rebuild homes.

After the meeting, Executive Yuan Spokesman Su Jun-pin (蘇俊平) told reporters that the Cabinet would not ask the president to declare a state of emergency as was done after the 921 Earthquake in 1999.

Su said the Executive Yuan would consider asking the legislature to pass a bill approving a special budget for disaster relief and reconstruction on Thursday.

He said the government had about NT\$20 billion (US\$610 million) in available funds.

The Executive Yuan will form a team led by top officials from several government agencies by this afternoon to go to the front lines of the disaster-affected areas, Su said.

“They can help convey victims’ opinions, simplify procedures for applying for subsidies and deliver disaster-relief goods to victims,” Su said.

Earlier yesterday, Su quoted Liu as saying that the timeliness of government evacuation efforts had clearly affected the number of casualties and injuries in an area.

“Comparing the responses of counties and cities, if the same channels of communication were used to warn of potential disasters ... why were some counties and cities able to evacuate their residents and others not?” Su asked.

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Su declined to name counties or cities that did not follow evacuation orders issued by the Central Disaster Emergency Operation Center, saying that he wanted to avoid a blame game between central and local governments.

Asked by reporters about flooded areas of Pingtung County, Su said the Government Information Office (GIO) would provide documentation proving that the center issued warnings promptly.

The GIO had not provided the documents at press time.

Su said the predictions of rainfall and other information were passed onto local governments one night before the flooding, but “it was the responsibility of local governments to define the scope of evacuation.”

Su then cited Pingtung as a problem area when mentioning that Liu had praised Tainan City for its prompt evacuation of hundreds of residents.

The Chinese-language United Evening News reported that the Pingtung County Government said Linbian (林邊) and Jiadong (佳冬) townships had not been included in the evacuation warning.

It quoted the Pingtung County Government as reporting that the central emergency center only told it to evacuate three villages in mountainous Wutai Township (霧台).

Ma yesterday voiced displeasure with local government evacuation efforts during an inspection of Taitung County, saying some authorities reacted too slowly.

Ma said Minister of the Interior Liao Liou-yi (廖力宜) had telephoned “every county commissioner and city mayor” on Friday night and told them to prepare for evacuation.

“When the residents do not see [flash floods] with their own eyes, they are not alert,” he said. “Some people did not feel comfortable evacuating.”

Ma said the government would map out measures to enforce compulsory evacuation.

Ma said local governments should be responsible for relief efforts, while the central government would help.

Local governments should bear full responsibility, he said, with the central government offering assistance if they could not handle the situation.

“Only with this operating model can resources be reasonably and efficiently allocated,” he said.

Ma also accused the weather bureau of inaccurate forecasts.

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“They kept adjusting the estimated rainfall upward, so the public was not alert to the danger,” he said.

In Taimali Township (台東縣), Taitung County, Ma was swarmed by residents who jostled with bodyguards to reach him and share their stories.

A man in tears said his father was missing and his family’s rice field destroyed.

“Many people do not have food to eat. Everybody’s lost their job,” he said. “My family is not the only one suffering.”

Visibly impatient, Ma told the crowd that he was there to help, adding that the government understood the man’s situation and was looking after him.

Ma said he could empathize because he had also lost his father.

Ma also visited the families of two missing police officers. The wife of one of the officers tearfully criticized the relief efforts, to which Ma said he would look into the situation.

Wu Tsan-ching (吳三景), manager of Jinshuai Hotel in Jhihben Township (池上鄉), Taitung County, said he had petitioned Ma for help securing compensation from the central government after the hotel collapsed into the Jhihben River on Sunday.

Wu said he hoped the road in front of the hotel would be reconstructed and reinforced as soon as possible because it was a lifeline for the area, famous for its hot springs.

In related news, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) yesterday warned the public of the risk of disease in the aftermath of the flooding.

The CDC established a special task force yesterday morning with epidemiologists dispatched to help disinfect areas affected by flooding.

“Residents in Tainan County, Kaohsiung County and Pingtung County will be our priority,” a CDC press release said.

The CDC said 44,400 bottles of bleach had been sent to Pingtung County, 39,400 bottles to Kaohsiung County, 20,000 to Tainan County, 10,000 to Tainan City, 5,000 to Yunlin County, 15,000 to Chiayi County, 2,000 to Chiayi City and 6,240 to Taitung County.

The CDC sent nine disinfection vehicles with epidemiologists to southern Taiwan yesterday.

“The potential outbreak of disease is our major concern at the moment,” said Lin Ting (林廷), spokesman for CDC, reminding victims to be aware of what they drink and eat.

“Make sure that you drink boiled water or bottled water,” Lin said. “Also make sure your hands are clean before you touch your food.”

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To disinfect kitchenware, the CDC suggested mixing 10 liters of water with 40cc of bleach and soaking the kitchenware in the fluid for 30 minutes, then washing it and boiling it before use.

For cleaning flooded interiors, the CDC suggested mixing 10 liters of water with 100cc of bleach.

“The flooding will also raise the risk of an epidemic of dengue fever as there will be lots of water lying around where mosquitoes and flies will lay their eggs,” Lin said. “Our epidemiologists are ready to help prevent this.”

To help victims of the floods, the interior ministry said yesterday it would give compensation of up to NT\$800,000 per deceased person, up to NT\$250,000 for each injured person and up to NT\$150,000 for each family that has had to move from flooded areas.

With Aboriginal communities among the hardest hit by the storm, Council of Indigenous Peoples Minister Chang Jen-hsiang (蔣經國) visited the Aboriginal village of Jialan (佳蘭) in Jinfeng Township (金峰), Taitung County, and distributed NT\$10,000 in emergency assistance to each resident.

The interior ministry also opened two accounts yesterday to accept donations from the public for victims of the flooding.

The Buddha’s Light International Association donated NT\$35 million (US\$1 million) to the relief efforts.

Donors can remit funds to the interior ministry’s special account at the Central Bank of the Republic of China (Taiwan) (No. 269981) or the ministry’s Post Office account (No. 19595889), Lin said.

□ ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY JIMMY CHUANG, CNA AND AFP

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