

Comments that President Ma Ying-jeou made to an international news crew about the rescue efforts following Typhoon Morakot yesterday angered some of the storm's victims after they were translated into Chinese.

While inspecting Jiaxian Township in Kaohsiung County, where Xiaolin Village was completely wiped out, Independent Television Network (ITN) reporter Rahit Kachroo asked Ma if Taiwan should have been better prepared for the storm, to which Ma replied, in English, that the villagers were caught by surprise, which contributed to the losses.

"No, in this area, this is the first time [there was such heavy rain] in many years. That is why [the victims] were not fully prepared. If they were, they should have been evacuated much earlier. Just because they stayed where they lived ... but you see, they didn't realize how serious the disaster was," Ma said.

After hearing the Chinese translation of the comments, some survivors were angry.

"It's not because we didn't want to evacuate, it's because we didn't have enough time," one survivor said.

"[Ma said] it's all because we didn't want to evacuate. I'd say we didn't want this government," another survivor said.

Meanwhile, Ma yesterday apologized to Tainan residents for not being able to visit them earlier.

Inspecting Matou Township in Tainan yesterday morning, Ma said in broken Hoklo (also called Taiwanese) that he had planned to visit on Aug. 9, but the county government had been preoccupied with the relief effort and could not make the arrangements.

"I am here today to understand your problems," he said. "We will do our best. Please don't worry."

Ma visited Matou to inspect the agricultural losses to pomelo and pig farms. He also sat down with residents to hear their grievances.

Ma said farming and livestock bore the brunt of the damage, followed by agriculture. Compensation would be made in accordance with the Agricultural Natural Disaster Relief Regulations, he said, and could be dealt with on a case-by-case basis if reimbursements were insufficient.

One resident complained that the flooding was worsened by the release of water from the Tsengwen Reservoir in Tainan County. In response, Ma said he would take note of the

MORAKOT: THE AFTERMATH: Ma media comments anger disaster zone survivors

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problem, but added that he thought the main reason for the flooding was the torrential rain. His response did not satisfy the crowd and he was booed.

Before going to Tainan, Ma visited Yunlin's Kouhu Township to pay his respects to a village warden who lost his life in the line of duty.

Miao Jung-tang fell to his death on Sunday night after braving the heavy rain and strong winds to close a water gate to prevent the river from flooding his village. Miao is survived by his wife, four children and an ailing father.

After the family asked Ma to help them receive compensation by relaxing application criteria, Ma said he would make the suggestion to the agencies concerned.

The Yunlin County Government yesterday issued a certificate commending Miao's honorable conduct and renamed the gate after him. The county also promised to establish a special account to take care of his children's educational expenses.

First lady Chow Mei-ching, meanwhile, yesterday visited Jiadong Township in Pingtung, one of the hardest hit areas. Television footage showed her hugging tearful family members of victims, distributing food and singing with children.

□ ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY LOA IOK-SIN

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