

MORAKOT: THE AFTERMATH: Ma berated by victims on visit to Xiaolin Village

Written by Taipei Times
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Twelve days after Typhoon Morakot lashed the nation, President Ma Ying-jeou yesterday visited Xiaolin Village, Kaohsiung County — one of the hardest hit areas.

Ma was confronted by angry relatives and friends of the approximately 400 people who are believed to have died when the village was destroyed by mudslides.

An unidentified woman screamed in Ma's face, saying a government construction project had contributed to the Xiaolin disaster by weakening the foundations of several surrounding mountains.

One man recalled comments Ma made to Britain's ITN News in which he appeared to blame the victims for their own fate, saying they did not evacuate storm-affected areas quickly enough.

"Why are you coming here to see us only now?" the man asked in footage broadcast by several TV stations. "You keep blaming the disaster on us for not evacuating earlier. We did not receive any instruction to leave before the storm hit."

Leading government officials in a deep bow, Ma apologized for visiting so late. After listening to grievances at a temple in Jiaxian Township, the president promised to complete reconstruction of Xiaolin during his first term of office. The project would include establishing a reconstruction fund and possibly a memorial park or plinth, he said.

He also vowed to finish the assembly of prefabricated housing a month after a suitable location had been found. Until then, Ma said the families would receive a monthly subsidy from the county government, ranging from NT\$6,000 to NT\$10,000 for rent, adding that the central government had wired NT\$1 billion (US\$31 million) to the county treasury.

The government watchdog, the Control Yuan, plans to launch an investigation into the Water Resources Agency's water diversion project, Ma said, adding that the Executive Yuan would also begin an inquest into the matter and the Kaohsiung District Court would conduct a judicial inquiry. Should the government be found responsible, Ma said national compensation would apply.

Ma also assured the survivors that the process of obtaining death certificates for their loved ones would be simplified.

As the typhoon season is not over, Ma urged victims' families to evacuate should the county government deem it necessary in future.

Before he sat down with victims' families, Ma paid respects to Chang Shun-fa and Huang Mei-chih in Taichung City.

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They were among the three crew members of a UH-1H helicopter that crashed last week in the Yila Valley in Wutai Township, Pingtung County, during relief operations.

Former vice president Annette Lu, who also attended the event, said it would not solve the problem if Ma stepped down, but the government officials responsible should be replaced as soon as possible.

Taichung Mayor Jason Hu said the government should listen to calls for a Cabinet reshuffle and deliver a satisfactory result, but the government's overall performance was more important.

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/08/20](#)
