Rescuers search for survivors after quake in China’s Tibet kills at least 126

AFP- Thousands of rescuers were searching for survivors in freezing conditions Wednesday after a devastating earthquake in China’s remote Tibet region killed at least 126 people.

Videos published by state broadcaster CCTV on Wednesday showed rescue workers pulling injured victims from the rubble of collapsed buildings and carrying them to safety.

Footage also showed a man in a dusty, thick winter coat carrying a crying child piggyback as a rescue worker draped a jacket over him.

At least 126 people have been confirmed dead and 188 others injured in the Tuesday morning quake that struck rural, high-altitude Tingri county, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Mount Everest near China’s border with Nepal.

More than 3,600 houses have collapsed and over 30,000 residents have been relocated, the official Xinhua news agency said, adding that the search for trapped victims is ongoing.

“Rescuers are also racing against time to set up tents for relocated residents in an area where temperatures are forecast to drop,” it added.

The temperature in Tingri is currently minus 11 degrees Celsius (12.2 Fahrenheit), according to the China Meteorological Administration. The county sits at an average altitude of 4,500 metres (14,800 feet) above sea level.

Authorities said more than 12,000 people, including firefighters, soldiers, police officers and professional rescuers had been deployed, Xinhua reported.

Aid including tents, quilts and cold-weather equipment had been dispatched by central authorities, it added.

When tourist Meng Lingkang arrived in the town of Lhatse, 65 kilometres from the epicentre, he saw “the buildings had cracked open”.

“Some of the older houses collapsed, and a large part of the buildings made from bricks had cracked open, with big fissures,” the 23-year-old told AFP.

“There were quite a few (rescue vehicles). One after the other they arrived,” he added.

– ‘Profoundly saddened’ –

The China Earthquake Networks Center (CENC) measured the quake’s magnitude as 6.8, while the US Geological Survey reported it as 7.1.

The area most affected is surrounded by mountainous terrain on the Chinese side of Everest.

Tingri, the epicentre, is home to around 62,000 people and much less developed than urban centres like Tibet’s capital Lhasa.

Many of the fallen houses appeared constructed of traditional materials such as stone, mud bricks and wooden beams.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for “all-out search and rescue efforts, minimising casualties to the greatest extent possible, properly resettling affected residents, and ensuring their safety and warmth through the winter”, CCTV said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was “profoundly saddened” by the lives lost in the earthquake.

“The United Nations is closely monitoring the situation and

stands ready to provide support if requested," Guterres said in a statement.

French President Emmanuel Macron offered assistance to those affected, while Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his "sincerest condolences".

Tingri is under the administration of the prefecture-level city of Shigatse, home to the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important spiritual figures in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama said he was "deeply saddened".

"I offer my prayers for those who have lost their lives and extend my wishes for a swift recovery to all who have been injured," the exiled spiritual leader said in a statement.

– Most Powerful –

In addition to capital Kathmandu, areas around Nepal's Lobuche – in the high mountains near Everest – were also rattled by the tremor and aftershocks on Tuesday.

No injuries or deaths have been reported so far in the country or in India, where tremors were felt in Bihar state.

Tuesday's quake was the most powerful recorded within a 200-kilometre (124-mile) radius in the last five years, the CENC said.

A quake in December 2023 in northwest China killed 148 people and displaced thousands in Gansu province.

AFP