

## **13 dead, 175 injured as 7.0-magnitude quake jolts China's Sichuan Province**

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**Beijing:** A powerful 7.0 magnitude earthquake has jolted a popular tourist destination in China's southwest Sichuan province, killing 13 people and injuring 175 others, officials said today.

Authorities fear that the toll may rise.

The massive earthquake struck at 9:19 PM (local time) yesterday and the epicentre was monitored at a depth of 20 km, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Jiuzhaigou, or Jiuzhai Valley, is a national park known for spectacular waterfalls and karst formations. More than 34,000 people visited the tourist attraction yesterday.

So far 13 people were killed and 175 others injured in the Sichuan quake, the provincial government said. The injured included a French man and a Canadian woman.

Maxence Vallon, 18, was wounded in both legs; while the Canadian woman, who declined to be named, suffered slight injury in the head, the report said. Both were being treated at a hospital of Jiuzhaigou county.

The exact number of casualties of foreign nationals in the disaster was not immediately known.

"We were lying on an open ground to seek shelter when a big stone fell and hit my brother right in the leg," said Romain Vallon, who studies in Beijing.

The brothers were staying in a hotel with their mother in Jiuzhaigou when the quake struck.

Five among the dead were visitors to the Jiuzhaigou national park, China Earthquake Networks Centre (CENC) said. So far 31,500 tourists have been relocated.

Tourist coaches and private vehicles have been pressed into service to help transport the stranded tourists. Power, communication and water supply in the county seat have been restored.

So far the Jiuzhaigou county has dispatched more than 90 emergency vehicles and 1,200 personnel for the rescue work.

The county also sent consultants to hotels, rural inns and streets to offer possible counselling service to tourists.

The quake was felt in the provincial capital Chengdu, about 300 kms south of the epicentre, and other regions in the neighbouring provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi, the report said.

President Xi Jinping has called for all-out efforts to rapidly organise relief work and rescue the injured people.

Authorities should check the impact of the earthquake, evacuate and settle visitors and local people, and reduce death and injuries as much as possible, Xi said.

As the earthquake took place during the flood period and tourism season, authorities should enhance meteorological early warning and geological monitoring to guard against other disasters and try their best to protect people's lives and property, he added.

Premier Li Keqiang also urged local authorities to go all out in relief and monitoring work.

China's cabinet, the State Council, have sent a national work team to the disaster-hit area to guide relief work. Local governments have also activated top-level emergency response procedures.

The Western Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which oversees Sichuan province, upgraded aviation traffic control in the quake zone last night to make way for rescue mission flights, the PLA Daily reported.

Relief aid will be dropped in the quake zone by transport aircraft.

The province's paramilitary police has also sent out forces with life detecting equipment to search for survivors who may be buried under rubble, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

All three of the country's major telecommunications firms have sent technicians to the quake zone to fix damaged networks.

Sichuan is a quake-prone region. In May 2008, an 8.0-magnitude earthquake struck Wenchuan and killed more than 80,000 people. In 2013, a 7.0-magnitude quake hit Lushan, in which 196 people were killed.

Meanwhile, another quake struck in China's Xinjiang province in the morning.

Three villagers were rushed to hospital after their home collapsed in a 6.6-magnitude earthquake that jolted Jinghe county in Bortala Mongolian autonomous prefecture in Xinjiang province, Xinhua reported.

Many residents in Jinghe county said strong tremors were felt at the time of the quake.

Wang Xinjiang, a local resident, said his families were waken up by the continuous jolts while household articles fell from high places when the quake came. Many residents ran out of their homes to open places.

People in neighbouring cities of Urumqi, Changji, Yining and Karamay felt strong tremors that lasted 10 to 20 seconds at the time of the quake.

The quake struck at a depth of 11 kms, the CENC said in a statement.

The epicentre was 37 kms from Jinghe County seat, 93 kms from the prefectural capital of Bole city, and 383 kms from Urumqi.

According to the data analysis of mobile population carried out by the regional government, about 760 people were within 20 kms of the epicentre, and about 53,000 were within the 50-km range.

Both the state and regional earthquake administrations have activated emergency responses and sent working teams to assist earthquake relief operations.

Jinghe county has a population of about 150,000 based on the 2014 census. A total of 65 quakes greater than magnitude three were recorded within 200 kms of the epicentre over the past five years, with the current one the

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