

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), of which China Daily is among its 20 leading titles.

TIME TO LEND A HAND

Myanmar earthquake survivors without food, drinking water and shelter as death toll rises

Aid groups in the worst-hit areas of Myanmar said there was an urgent need for shelter, food and water after an earthquake that killed more than 2,800 people as of Tuesday.

The death toll is expected to rise to more than 3,000, Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing said in a televised address on Tuesday. He said 4,521 people were injured, and 441 were missing.

The 7.7 magnitude quake, which hit around lunchtime on Friday, was the strongest to hit the Southeast Asian country in more than a century, toppling ancient pagodas and modern buildings alike.

"In the hardest-hit areas ... communities struggle to meet their basic needs, such as access to clean water and sanitation, while emergency teams work tirelessly to locate survivors and provide life-saving aid," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

Drinking water, hygiene, food, shelter and medicine are the most critical needs following extensive damage to buildings, roads and bridges, said Marcoluigi Corsi, acting humanitarian and resident coordinator of the UN following a two-day visit.

"Having lived through the terror of the earthquake, people now fear aftershocks and are sleeping outside on roads or in open fields," a worker from the International Committee of the Red Cross in Mandalay said in a report.

"We remain, of course, deeply committed to reaching people in Myanmar who need aid," UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. "And we must act swiftly to provide relief before the upcoming monsoon season, which, of course, will even worsen this horrendous crisis."

Huge impact

Scientists emphasized the seismic event's significant force and the factors contributing to its impact.

US geologist Jess Phoenix described the earthquake's energy release as equivalent to 334 atomic bombs, warning that aftershocks will continue to pose a significant threat for months.

She highlighted the ongoing collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates as a continuing source of seismic activity.

The Science Media Centre in the United Kingdom has compiled expert commentary, revealing a consensus on the earthquake's destructive potential.

Ian Watkinson, scholar from Royal Holloway, University of London, echoed these concerns, noting the earthquake's likely propagation along the Sagaing Fault, potentially up to 200 kilometers.

He highlighted the vulnerability



Top: Chinese Red Cross International Emergency Response Team carried out searching and rescuing work in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Monday. Above from left: A monk passes by a destroyed temple in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Tuesday. Residents line up for dinner at a shelter for disaster victims in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Monday. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

of Mandalay and other regional cities, which have experienced rapid high-rise concrete construction, often on the floodplains of the Irrawaddy River.

Giving aid

Rescue workers, sniffer dogs, paramedics and millions of dollars in aid have begun arriving in Myanmar after a massive earthquake ravaged much of the country.

China has announced \$14 million in assistance for Myanmar, including 1,200 tents, 8,000 blankets and 40,000 first aid kits.

Chinese teams that arrived 18 hours after the quake and more than 400 Chinese personnel are now on the ground in the region.

China also has multiple teams in Thailand, according to Xinhua News Agency.

According to the China International Development Cooperation Agency, the initial supplies included tents, blankets and first aid kits.

The United States pledged \$2 million in aid "through Myanmar-based humanitarian assistance organizations".

It said in a statement that an emergency response team from USAID, which is undergoing massive cuts under the US administration, is being sent to Myanmar.

Two Russian aircraft carrying 60 rescue workers, four dogs, ambulances and rescue vehicles arrived

in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw on Sunday, Myanmar's state broadcaster MRTV reported.

The Japanese government has dispatched a five-person assessment party that includes medical professionals to lay the groundwork for a larger emergency rescue team.

India sent a search and rescue team, medical professionals and a military transport aircraft filled with blankets, hygiene kits, food packets and other essential items on Saturday.

Vietnam has sent a team of more than 100 rescuers, medical staff and firefighters along with aid and sniffer dogs.

Thailand, which was also hit by

the quake, has sent 55 air force personnel, including medics and search and rescue specialists, as well as medical supplies to Myanmar.

Indonesia's military said in a statement on Monday that it was sending emergency teams, including search and rescue workers, to Myanmar, as well as tents, food and logistical supplies.

Singapore has sent an 80-member team to assist with disaster rescue efforts. The government contributed about \$112,000 as seed money to support the fundraising efforts of the Singapore Red Cross.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

China and Cambodia's 'cold chain' shipping route boosts bilateral trade

The newly-launched "cold chain + general cargo" transport route between China's southernmost port Fangchenggang and Cambodia's Koh Kong Port is set to enhance Cambodia's export capacity, according to business insiders.

Lor Vichet, vice-president of the Cambodia Chinese Commerce Association told The Phnom Penh Post on March 18 that the new cold chain system will be especially beneficial for the agricultural sector, as it ensures goods are shipped at controlled temperatures.

"This preserves their quality. In addition, direct shipping from Fangchenggang to Koh Kong will provide many other benefits, such as reduced shipping times, no need for transshipment and lower costs," he said.

He noted that this was particularly relevant as Cambodia's agricultural yields continue to grow annually.

The new route was announced on March 15. The following day, Wang Wenbin, Chinese ambassador to Cambodia, took to social media to laud the latest commercial link between the two nations.

"Congrats to the maiden voyage of the 'cold chain + general cargo' route from Fangchenggang Port in Southwest China to Koh Kong Port, Cambodia. This 7-day direct line can cut shipping time by more than 50 percent, and logistical costs by over 20 percent, compared with the transit mode," he wrote.

Vichet noted that the new route demonstrates the strengthening of diplomatic and trade relations between Cambodia and China, especially in terms of the export of agricultural products to China.

\$2.662 billion

bilateral trade volume between China and Cambodia has been reached in the first two months of this year, showing a 21.1 percent year-on-year increase, according to the General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia.

"This will help Cambodian agricultural products gain a greater presence in the Chinese market. Besides preserving product quality for longer periods and reducing transport times, it will also help lower production costs, making Cambodia's products more competitive in international markets," he said.

He also pointed out that if Cambodia's pharmaceutical production continues to grow and exports increase, then the demand for cold chain transport will also rise.

Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries reported that in 2024, the country exported 11.7 million tonnes of agricultural products, a 39 percent increase over 2023. Revenue from these goods was approximately \$4.8 billion.

Lim Heng, vice-president of the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce, explained that the annual growth of the Cambodia's agricultural production has created opportunities to increase its exports, especially with the ongoing implementation of free trade agreements with China as well as the RCEP agreement.

"I have noticed that our agricultural products are now being produced to meet export market demands such as rice, corn, mangoes and bananas, all of which are of increasingly better quality," he said.

The General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE) of Cambodia reported that in the first two months of the year, the country's total international trade value was \$9.447 billion. China remains Cambodia's largest trading partner, accounting for 28.18 percent of total trade.

GDCE said trade between the two countries reached a total of \$2.662 billion in the first two months of this year, a 21.1 percent increase over the same period last year.

New airport in Nepal's 'tourism capital' sees first passenger flight from China

The new international airport in Pokhara, Nepal, has a scheduled passenger flight — with at least one weekly trip.

On Monday, Nepal-Xizang joint venture Himalaya Airlines flight took off from Lhasa Gonggar International Airport and landed at Pokhara International Airport at 1:56 pm local time.

There were 107 passengers, including 32 Chinese and 75 Nepalis. The flying time is around 90 minutes.

It was the first scheduled passenger flight landing at Pokhara since the airport's inauguration in 2023.

Prem Nath Thakur, the general manager of Pokhara Airport, expressed optimism about future flights, stating that this is just the beginning.

According to him, to promote the new facility and attract airlines, the airport has offered waivers for landing, parking, and ground handling fees for two years. Additionally, it has waived the passenger service charge of 3,000 Nepalese rupee (\$22) per tourist on departing flight.

Vijay Shrestha, spokesperson for Himalaya Airlines, said they have started with a weekly flight and will increase frequency based on demand.

Shrestha suggested that the government should promote Pokhara airport from a tourism perspective by categorizing the airport as strategically important, as many other countries do.

He also recommended promoting Bhairahawa Airport, another international airport in the southern Terai plains, as a budget airport to attract airlines. Bhairahawa Airport is another airport constructed in Nepal with the help of a Chinese contractor.

According to Shrestha, Himalaya Airlines aims to operate flights to 10 different tourist destinations in China from both Pokhara and Kathmandu, with a mission to bring a million Chinese tourists a year to Nepal.

Tourism entrepreneurs in Pokhara have initiated efforts to promote and market the new airport. Recently, the Pokhara Tourism Council, an umbrella organization of tourism

entrepreneurs, collaborated with China's Sichuan Airlines to launch charter flights between Chengdu, China, and Pokhara, Nepal.

Baburam Pandey, acting president of the Pokhara Tourism Council, said that Chengdu-based Sichuan Airlines has committed to operating flights for 10 weeks, aiming to bring 1,250 Chinese tourists to Pokhara, with one flight arriving each week.

Pokhara's dream

Pokhara International Airport, funded by Beijing, was inaugurated on January 1, 2023. The expectation was that Pokhara, as Nepal's tourism capital, would no longer depend on Kathmandu for tourist inflow and would directly attract visitors.

Pokhara, which serves as the gateway to the world-famous Annapurna Circuit trekking route, has seen significant investments in the hospitality industry after the construction of the new airport.

Shrestha of Himalaya Airlines stated that the launch of the Lhasa flight aligns with efforts to make Pokhara Visit Year 2025 a success,



The first passenger flight from Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region in China, landed at the Pokhara International Airport in Nepal and received a water cannon salute on Monday. CUI NAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

intending to welcome two million tourists, including Nepalis.

China has announced a "Visit Nepal 2025" campaign to support Nepal's tourism industry.

"Today, the Pokhara people's dream of direct scheduled international flights has come true! The first ever direct scheduled international flight from Lhasa landed at Pokhara International Airport by

Himalaya Airlines," Chinese ambassador to Nepal Chen Song wrote on X.

"A milestone not only for Nepali and Pokhara people but also for the connectivity and friendship between China and Nepal, celebrating the 70 years of diplomatic ties between our two countries."

THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL

THE PHNOM PENH POST