



As of 4 pm on Monday, 411 aftershocks had been recorded in the quake-hit region, with the strongest measuring 5.6 in magnitude, Chang Zhengguo, spokesman for the provincial government, said at a news conference in Lanzhou, the provincial capital.

President Xi Jinping called for an all-out rescue effort, with saving lives the top priority. He told local authorities to evacuate people from dangerous areas promptly and to arrange for those affected to be settled properly.

Premier Li Keqiang demanded that government departments send rescue and relief forces and aid to the area as soon as possible.

Two helicopters and about 3,000 armed police, firefighters, local militiamen and local government staff have been sent to the quake-hit region to help with the rescue efforts.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs has sent 10,000 tents, 30,000 quilts and 10,000 sleeping bags to the quake-hit region.

Services on a major railway line have been suspended because of heavy rain and landslides that have occurred since Sunday.

Ouyang Jian, deputy Party chief in Gansu, urged civilian drivers to avoid roads in or near the quake-hit area so that rescuers and goods can be delivered quickly.

In Yongxing village, the quake epicenter, more than 400 soldiers from the Lanzhou Military Command of the People's Liberation Army are joining hands with People's Armed Police officers, militiamen and firefighters to dig out residents buried in their houses, according to Lyu Ziqiang, a publicity officer with the Lanzhou Military Command.

"Nearly half of the hillside collapsed, so Yongxing village was nearly buried," he told China Daily. "The village had had continuous rain in past days, making the soil very swampy, so the quake caused the hillside to collapse easily."

He said roads leading to the village were destroyed and rescuers had to walk a long way before they reached the quake-hit area, adding that most houses in the village were built with loess, meaning they could barely resist an earthquake or landslide.

Water and electricity in the village has been cut off since the quake and the two helicopters have been transporting relief materials to residents.

PLA troops have pitched tents for the villagers, with the injured taken to hospitals outside the quake-hit area, he said.

Ma Jun, a reporter from Gansu Television, said: "I saw several landslides take place along the roadside when I walked to Yongxing. It was very dangerous." He added that he saw a motorcycle had been buried by one landslide, and the driver was missing.

Ma said that as the roads to the village have been destroyed, it will take hours for rescuers to enter it on foot.

In addition to aftershocks, falling rocks were reported in the mountainous region following the quake, posing a threat to rescuers helping villagers.

The quake occurred on a fault zone in the province, which has recorded 25 earthquakes with a magnitude of more than 5, the China Earthquake Administration said.

Residents in Minxian said the quake lasted for about a minute, with sources at the county government saying most of the townships in the area have been affected.

Wang Shan, an archeologist from the Gansu Provincial Institute of Historic Relics and Archeology, said he and his colleagues ran out of their houses in Shuzha village in Minxian when the quake struck.

"We had just finished our breakfast. I could feel the earth was shaking vertically but the horizontal tremor was not very obvious," he said.

"Almost all the villagers ran out of their houses, and as far as I know no one was injured in the quake," Wang said, adding that many houses were badly damaged and prone to collapse in the event of strong aftershocks.

He said a series of aftershocks occurred in the morning and some of them were so strong that his family members in Lanzhou could feel them.

Most of the residents later returned to their houses and the village committee asked them to assess and report their losses, Wang said.

He added that water and electricity, cut off after the quake, were restored in the afternoon.