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Yangtze death toll rises to 75 as China praises rescue workers despite relatives' anger

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The death toll from the [sinking of a river cruiser](#) on [China's](#) Yangtze rose to 75 on Thursday, as dozens more bodies were recovered from the overturned ship.

Over 370 [remained missing](#) in [China's worst boat accident in 70 years](#), which occurred after the Eastern Star passenger ship was hit by a freak tornado on Monday in Hubei province, central China.

Chinese officials and media have given prominent coverage to the heroism of rescue workers, with the country's premier singling out the bravery of one diver who gave his diving equipment to a trapped sailor on the first night of the rescue operation.



Chen Shuhan (C) is pulled out alive by divers and rescuers at the Jianli section of the Yangtze River (Reuters)

Guan Dong, 24, was praised by Li Keqiang for his heroic actions in saving the life of 21-year-old sailor Chen Shuhan after he reportedly gave his helmet and diving gear to Mr Chen in order to calm the panicked sailor.

- [Yangtze boat disaster: cruise ship failed safety test](#)
- [Yangtze river: how it compares to Asia's worst nautical disasters](#)

Mr Li later managed to float up to the surface on his own, while the sailor was safely rescued, local media reported.

But the Chinese central government has been accused of employing propaganda and preventing victims' families access to the scene after instructing officials to "concretely preserve social stability" while dealing with the disaster.

Dozens of relatives broke through a police cordon at the site on Thursday in bid to learn news of their loved ones.

Frustrated by the scarcity of information from local authorities, about 50 family members had hired a bus to take them from Nanjing to Jianli county in Hubei, an eight-hour journey.

- [Hundreds feared dead after China's worst boat tragedy in decades](#)

Taxi drivers in Jianli were instructed on Thursday not to take family members to the local crematorium where the dead were transported.

A taxi driver showed a Reuters reporter a message on his mobile phone which instructed drivers to say they were unable to take them there because of "traffic control measures".

An official from the Jianli vehicle management office, surnamed Liao, told Reuters by telephone, however, that there was a mistake with the text message and that it was meant to say the "rescue site".

Several family members managed to reach the crematorium and entered inside, said a shopkeeper who worked nearby.

Relatives have asked the government to release the names of survivors and the dead, and questioned why most of those rescued were crew members.



Diver Guan Dong (bottom) is pulled up to a boat after rescuing Chen Shuhan (Reuters)

Some have also demanded to know why the boat did not dock in the storm, and why the rescued captain and crew members had time to put on life vests but did not sound any alarm.

There was a heavy security presence outside one of the hotels where some family members were staying.

"Right now the government has an attitude of complete apathy towards us," said Cao Feng, 40, whose parents were on board. "We just want to be closer to our relatives."

Rescuers are not giving up their search of the ship, which was carrying many elderly Chinese tourists, despite the fading hopes of relatives.

They have begun cutting small holes through the Eastern Star's upturned hull to get better access, although no more survivors have been found, state media reported.

Chinese authorities will start righting the ship at 8.00pm (1.00pm UK time) on Thursday, state news agency Xinhua said, citing the transport ministry.

Under two huge cranes, workers have welded giant hooks onto the hull as they prepare to lift the 250 feet vessel in another delicate and risky operation that could destabilise the wreck and send it further down the river.

Work on the perilous operation to cut into the hull had been suspended early on Thursday due to persistent bad weather that has hampered the rescue effort from the start.

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