

CHINA



From left: Dondrub Gyaltsan (left), captain of the Dingri county branch of the Xizang fire and rescue corps, and his colleague move things out of a damaged house at a village in Dingri county, Xizang autonomous region, after a magnitude-6.8 earthquake hit the area on Jan 7. Dondrub Gyaltsan comforts a villager at a camp site in the quake-hit area in Dingri, Xizang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Village official recalls earthquake aftermath

Kelsang Drolma, among others, ensures safety of residents after natural disaster

By **PALDEN NYIMA** and **DAQIONG** in Lhasa

More than a month after a devastating earthquake struck her home county on Jan 7, Kelsang Drolma, a village official in the Xizang autonomous region, still recalls the intense, sleepless nights spent racing against time to relocate villagers and minimize losses.

The magnitude-6.8 earthquake claimed 126 lives and affected multiple areas, including Chukhu village in Mangphu township, Lhaze county, where Kelsang Drolma has worked tirelessly to help residents recover.

She was attending a meeting when the earthquake hit. As soon as the tremors began, she ran out of the hall and tried to call her villagers but found that the communication network was down.

"I couldn't reach anyone. I became very worried and decided to return to the village immediately," she said.

On her way back, many villagers working in distant locations called her, desperate for news of their families. She reassured them that their loved ones would be fine and promised to update them upon reaching the village.

The road back was strewn with

rocks from the quake, forcing her and a township leader traveling with her to clear debris along the way. It took them about 40 minutes to reach the village, where they learned that, fortunately, all villagers were safe.

Two township officials had already arrived ahead of her to assess the situation.

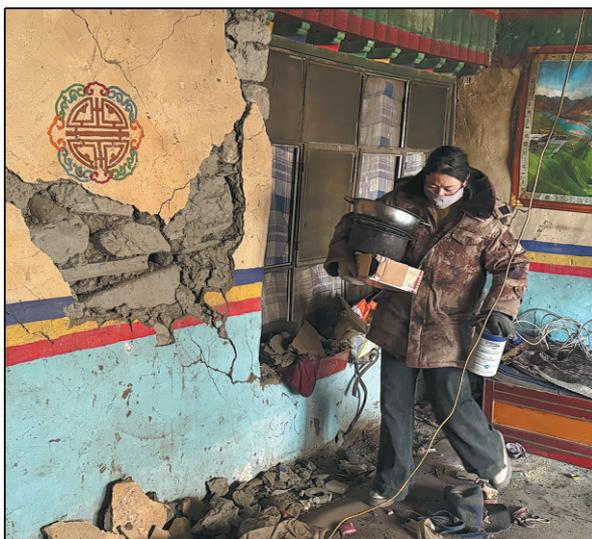
"As soon as I heard the villagers were safe, I felt so relieved," said the 28-year-old.

However, many houses had collapsed or sustained major cracks. Seeing the devastation, some villagers burst into tears, asking her what to do next. "I told them that as long as lives were safe, everything else could be rebuilt," she said, adding that the government and the Communist Party of China would help them recover.

Kelsang Drolma quickly organized relief efforts. She visited households to assess damage to homes and livestock and worked to restore normalcy.

Continuous aftershocks on Jan 7 and 8, along with falling rocks in the mountainous terrain, posed ongoing risks to residents' safety and property.

"After careful planning, we evacuated 42 residents, mostly elderly people and children, to a resettlement



Kelsang Drolma moves some daily utensils from a damaged house at Chukhu village in Lhaze county, Xizang.

site near the primary school," she said.

She arranged for 24 villagers to care for the livestock and set up 10 additional tents with quilts, winter jackets, beds, heaters and other

necessities. "Currently, food, shelter and heating at the settlement site are ensured, and residents can sleep safely in the temporary shelters," she said.

Eighteen households were relo-

cated to the township primary school, where 13 tents were set up. There were no casualties or missing persons in the village.

"I was on duty for seven consecutive days with little sleep, which was exhausting," she said.

"But when we visited residents' tents, they would express their gratitude by offering us hot butter tea. That made me feel proud of what we were doing."

Firefighters also played a critical role in rescue efforts.

They arrived in affected areas immediately after the quake, conducting search and rescue missions, clearing debris and helping residents set up tents.

Among them was Dondrub Gyaltsan, captain of the Dingri county branch of the Xizang fire and rescue corps, who led a rapid response team to the disaster zone.

"When the earthquake struck, our brigade barracks shook violently, with tiles falling as we ran downstairs," he said.

He immediately gathered his colleagues and led three vehicles and 19 personnel to the epicenter in Dramso township, Dingri county.

"When we arrived, we saw collapsed houses, immense destruction and people suffering. It was

heartbreaking," he said.

Despite the devastation, he quickly organized his team into four search and rescue squads to operate in different villages.

"In Thongley village, I was searching a house when I touched a small foot under a blanket. I realized it was a child," he said.

"When I carried her out, she was so light, but my heart felt so heavy. I have two daughters of my own."

After handing the child's body to her mother, he could offer only a few comforting words before moving to the next site.

In another house, his team found an elderly man who had been killed by a falling metal beam. Using hydraulic cutters, they freed his body and returned it to his family.

Over the following days, Dondrub Gyaltsan's team helped residents retrieve valuable belongings from damaged homes.

"Once they had salvaged their items, the villagers, covered in sweat, expressed deep gratitude for our help," he said.

"We always do our best to conduct search and rescue operations and support affected residents."

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Mountainous town sees future in drone industry

CHENGDU — The morning of Jan 20 brought two pieces of good news for Yuan Tao, Party chief of Chewang, Sichuan province — a drone company established in the town just two months ago had already secured orders through to the end of the year.

The orders were expected to bring in tax revenue nearing 600,000 yuan (\$84,000). In addition, a local bamboo processing company was planning to expand its capacity in 2025.

According to Yuan's calculations, excluding the income boost for locals, the town is projected to generate record tax revenue of over 1.2 million yuan this year, marking a substantial increase of more than 20 percent compared to 2024.

The reason behind this surge is the low-altitude economy.

Before 2024, the town, with a population of over 23,000 in Luzhou city, was primarily known for its bamboo industry. Most local farmers had never ventured outside the city, let alone seen a drone in person.

It all began in early September, when Wang Fei, head of Sichuan Honghuang Technology, a company specializing in drone operations, was informed about Chewang's bamboo resources during a business matchmaking workshop in Luzhou.

Wang then visited Chewang, intending to establish a cableway to help villagers transport bamboo from the mountains.

Surrounding Chewang are bamboo forests that span over 20,000 hectares, making it one of the core bamboo production areas in Luzhou. However, due to the mountainous terrain, transporting bamboo harvested from the hilltops is a major challenge, often leading villagers to watch their bamboo "naturally perish" as they struggle to move it.

Rather than building a cableway, Wang thought to himself, why not transport the bamboo directly with drones?

After conducting a field survey, Wang presented the idea to Yuan, pointing out that many of the bamboo groves were within 300 meters of rural roads.

In early November, Wang brought a team to demonstrate the transportation process.

Following instructions, a villager swiftly bound a 50-kilogram bundle of bamboo to a rope attached to a drone, which then flew about 300 meters before unloading it beside the village road — all within five minutes.

It was an eye-opening experience for Yuan and his fellow villagers.

"I thought this could only happen in a movie," Yuan told Xinhua News Agency. "How can such a 'big toy plane' do something like this?"

"Using drones can solve over 70 percent of the transportation challenges for bamboo in our town," he added.

Following the demonstration, Sichuan Qingmu Tianque Technology was founded in the town, with a registered capital of 3 million yuan. The company's operations cover public air transport, general aviation services and air cargo packaging.

Zhou Jiangtao, a bamboo buyer and frequent visitor to Chewang, was stunned by the changes.

He explained that, just the day before, the drones had transported four metric tons of bamboo from the mountains, and by the following morning they had a total of around 10 tons, just enough for one truck.

Previously, it took three villagers about three days to move one ton of bamboo just 200 meters.

"With a daily wage of 150 yuan per

person for workers transporting bamboo and a market price of 500 yuan per ton, our bamboo farmers were barely making any money," Yuan said.

However, with drone transport, covering the same distance means that moving one ton of bamboo requires 20 drone trips, which can be completed in just two hours at a cost of 200 yuan.

Following the delivery of an additional 30 drones, Yuan said, they plan to expand their business to surrounding areas, and will initiate training for drone operators.

Skilled workforce

At the drone pilot training base of Luzhou Vocational and Technical College, 40 retired military personnel are undergoing a three-month training program.

Meanwhile, students enrolled in the 2024 drone application technology program are learning simulated flight training at a virtual drone simulation center.

The training base boasts a standardized runway measuring 140 meters by 40 meters, and is equipped with virtual simulation training devices, along with facilities such as a drone hangar and fully equipped classrooms.

"Our college serves as a cradle for cultivating drone technology talent in Luzhou," said Bao Xuedong, vice-president of the college, adding that Luzhou is the first city in the province to launch cooperative school programs linked to low-altitude economy disciplines.

Wen Yonggang, a student enrolled in the drone application technology program since September, said, "The training is helping me become a more employable 'near-professional'."

He chose this major not only to fulfill his dream of "serving the nation through aviation" but also because of the rapidly developing drone industry, which offers vast potential and promising career prospects.

In his spare time, Wen participates in activities through the college's drone association. "By the time I graduate, I hope to earn both a certificate in drone maintenance and a drone pilot license," he said.

The first batch of 148 students began their full-day training in September.

"Acquiring an additional professional skill opens up more employment opportunities for me in the future," said Zhou Yidong, a university student and veteran who has long been interested in drones.

China's central government has identified the low-altitude economy as a key sector for developing new quality productive forces, with the Sichuan provincial government taking significant steps to promote its growth.

This year, the college has initiated partnerships with the Ordnance Science and Research Academy of China of the China North Industries Group Corporation, and China's major commercial unmanned aerial vehicle company JOUAV, based in Sichuan's capital Chengdu, to establish an industrial academy.

The college plans to expand partnerships with leading enterprises to establish a low-altitude flight school and develop productive drone training bases on campus to cultivate high-quality professionals to support the growth of smart manufacturing and the low-altitude economy in Luzhou.

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Dounan Flower Market is a popular tourist attraction in Kunming, Yunnan province. CHEN XINBO / XINHUA

Spring Festival sales soar at Dounan Flower Market

KUNMING — Freshly cut flowers added a festive air to Spring Festival celebrations this year, as well as fueling a booming trade.

Dounan Flower Market, Asia's largest fresh-cut flower trading market, has seen flourishing trade and surging prices since the beginning of the year, with a series of festivals from New Year, Spring Festival and Lantern Festival.

During the period, the average price of major categories of flowers in the market in Kunming, Yunnan province, reached about 2.5 yuan (34 cents) per stem, an increase of 40 percent compared with the same period last year.

After the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, from Feb 5 to 13, the center's average daily trading volume amounted to around 4.5 million stems, with the highest daily trading volume exceeding 6 million stems.

Zhu Qi, planning manager of the Kunming International Flower Auction Trading Center in Dounan, said the price of single-headed

roses rose sharply from 5 yuan to 7 yuan per stem. The highest under-the-hammer price of high-end roses exceeded 13 yuan per stem during the Spring Festival.

Meanwhile, the price of other festival flowers, including lisianthus, carnations, lilies and tulips, also surged.

In addition to the auction trade, during Spring Festival the transaction volume of fresh-cut flowers in Dounan's retail market reached about 190 million stems, with a sales volume registering 288 million yuan. The market is also a popular tourist destination in Kunming, attracting over 40,000 visitors on average daily.

As a barometer of China's overall flower market, the market has seen booming sales via various e-commerce platforms. Yunshe Flowers, a vendor's account on the Chinese short-video sharing platform Douyin, saw its average daily revenue topping 5 million yuan during Spring Festival.

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