

Twin tragedies: S'poreans chip in \$23m

Donations in cash and kind are still pouring in to help those hit in Myanmar and Sichuan

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Snap a photo posing with a beauty queen or buy a panda-shaped bun – it all will add to the \$23 million raised so far for the twin tragedies that struck Myanmar and Sichuan, China in the past few weeks.

The final tally will probably be much higher.

The \$23 million estimate made by The Sunday Times includes only what the big aid agencies have collected, and also sizeable contributions made through other avenues.

Donations in cash and kind are still rolling in, said aid agencies and the Chinese Embassy here.

China's Ambassador Zhang Xiaokang said that since the May 13 earthquake that hit Sichuan, an endless stream of people have been offering the embassy help.

More than 23,000 donations totalling \$8.7 million in all have been made so far.

"That's huge. And still, the money is coming in," she said as she welcomed Singapore's rescue workers home from Sichuan on Thursday night.

An embassy official could not give details on who gave how much, but said the \$8.7 million collection ranks among the highest raised throughout China's network of embassies worldwide.

Groups such as Mercy Relief have already surpassed their targets for both countries.

It said yesterday that about \$425,000 had been raised for China so far. It has also stopped collections for Myanmar, with total

funds raised at \$560,000, well over the \$300,000 target set for both countries.

The speed at which the donations have come in this time round has also outpaced other major donation drives in previous years.

For example, it took fewer than 10 days to raise \$17.1 million for Sichuan alone. In 2003, it took seven weeks to raise \$10 million for the Courage Fund, set up for health-care workers battling the Sars virus.

As in previous donation efforts, aid agencies continue to receive individuals who turn up at their centres with huge donations.

Just last Friday, a man dressed in shorts and a T-shirt handed \$300,000 in cash to the Red Cross. The man, who had made an earlier contribution of the same amount, did not want to give his name to staff there.

The tragedy in China appears to have opened more wallets than the cyclone devastation in Myanmar.

The Myanmar Embassy has remained silent on donations it has collected, even as the Myanmar community here and aid groups send out appeals for help.

The Sunday Times estimates that, so far, \$5.8 million has been collected since the cyclone hit on May 3.

Another factor which tugged at purse strings: The Chinese government's quick help for victims and its unabashed request for aid.

The New Creation Church has given \$100,000 to the Chinese Embassy here and \$50,000 to Myanmar via international group Feed The Hungry.

Said Deacon Matthew Kang of the difference: "We are able to hear more about China in the media and so are more informed...In our opinion, the devastation and needs there are greater."

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