



Tragedy revisited

Documentary focuses on the fire that still haunts survivors and victims' families

Life C3

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115 rescued from flooded mainland pit after surviving for eight days on diet of tree bark How a mining miracle unfolded



The trapped workers were smart – they gathered in groups and rotated the use of their headlamps

Chen Yongsheng, a rescue team captain



A survivor is rescued from the Wangjialing mine, while (right) the hand of a rescued miner is held as he receives treatment at a hospital in Hejin. Photos: AP, Reuters

Mini-Liu and Agencies
The tales behind the Wangjialing Coal Mine miracle are starting to emerge after more than 110 miners were brought out alive from the flooded mine in the northern province of Shanxi (山西). They tell of how the men, trapped underground for eight days and eight nights, ate tree bark and strapped themselves to shaft walls by their belts to avoid falling into the water while sleeping. Their lamps provided the only light for the trapped men – the 153 who did not make it to surface when

the mine flooded on March 28 – as they held on to the hope that rescuers would be guided to them in the pitch black shaft. Their strong will to live saw them overcome 190 difficult hours trapped in flooded shafts as toxic gas levels rose. Above ground, some 3,000 rescuers had almost given up hope. But all that changed early yesterday when a team of 100 rescue workers discovered the first nine survivors. The first to make it to the surface was 36-year-old Jin Qunhong (靳群红), just after midnight on Sunday. By mid-morning, up to 300 rescuers were in the pit looking for more survivors.

"How fantastic to be on the surface again," Xinhua news agency quoted one 27-year-old survivor as saying. The whole nation watched as the miracle survival played out on national television. One by one, 115 soaked and exhausted miners were carried out on stretchers and taken to hospital. Most were rescued from a platform above which rescuers had drilled a hole last week, ensuring those trapped had oxygen. Of the 153 initially trapped, there are still 38 miners in the shaft. Rescuers expressed confidence last night that they could be saved but did not

say whether there had been any contact with the men. "Strive will all your might and make each second count, doing everything possible to rescue the workers who are trapped," President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) said in a message issued by the Xinhua. The head of the State Administration of Work Safety, Luo Lin (骆林), told CCTV he was excited about the "two miracles" after the accident, which authorities blamed on lax safety standards at the mine. "The first is that these trapped people have made it through eight

days and eight nights – this is the miracle of life. Secondly our rescue plan has been effective – this is a miracle in China's search and rescue history," Luo said. Live coverage on China Central Television showed the rescued miners, wrapped in thick blankets and with their eyes covered, being rushed to waiting ambulances that took them to nearby hospitals. Some of the survivors were still clutching their mining lamps as they arrived at the hospital. A rescue team captain, Chen Yongsheng (陈永生), said the workers had survived on tree bark from pine

logs used as supports in the mine, and had drunk water from the pit to avoid dehydration. "The trapped workers were smart – they gathered together in groups and rotated the use of their headlamps so that rescuers could see them," Chen said, according to the China News Service. The first batch of nine rescued miners were in stable condition. One survivor reportedly borrowed a mobile phone from a medical worker to make a phone call to his wife in his home town in Henan (河南).

"I'm good. How are you and the kid?" he asked his wife, Xinhua said. All nine were conscious, but their bodies had suffered from being in the water for so long. At least two men were sent to the intensive care unit. Liu Qiang, a medical officer involved in the rescue, said the survivors had hypothermia, severe dehydration and skin infections from being in the water so long. Some also were in shock and had low blood pressure. Families of the survivors were thrilled. "He called and managed to say my sister's nickname, 'Xiaomi', so

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Green card loses allure as taxman takes bigger cut

Irene Jay Liu

Once a symbol of security in uncertain times, the US passport has lost its appeal for an increasing number of people in Asia and across the globe, who are giving up their citizenship in record numbers. For those in Hong Kong, the combination of relative political stability, growing regional economic opportunity, and increasingly complex and costly tax requirements are driving people to give up the safety net of US citizenship. In the last quarter of 2009, 502 people relinquished their citizenship or long-term permanent residency status in the United States, a nearly eight-fold increase compared with the last quarter in 2008, when 63 people did so, according to the US Federal Register, which publishes the

names of such people on a quarterly basis. In recent years, the number of people worldwide giving up US citizenship or permanent residency has ranged from 22 to 144 people per quarter. The numbers dipped to double digits in 2008, when the government created an "exit tax" on assets that made it expensive for the wealthy to give up their passports or green cards. But the devaluation of assets, along with the economic crisis, has seen the expatriation rate shoot up over the past six months. An analysis by the *South China Morning Post* found that about 150 people with Chinese, South Korean or Japanese names gave up US citizenship in the last three months of 2009, including 87 with Chinese surnames. For the same period in 2008,

only nine people with Chinese surnames did so. The rising numbers were a result of the costly and increasingly complex taxation system in the US, said Joseph Field, senior regional partner for Asia at the law firm Withers Worldwide, which works with clients from Hong Kong and Taiwan to navigate the complex American tax requirements for citizens living abroad. Field also noted that the global crackdown on offshore tax evasion has inadvertently had an impact on Americans living abroad in "dramatic and perhaps unfair" ways, especially for those who do not even know they are "US persons" in the eyes of the taxman. One example, Field said, was when people who, born of one American parent and a foreign parent, are considered US citizens. They may

have never travelled to the US, learned English or obtained a passport, but they are subject to reporting and tax laws in the US. Another common case involves people who have a green card, but have been away from the US for so long that they can no longer use it to enter the country. But if they did not file forms to formally declare their expatriation with the US Internal Revenue Service, they may still be liable for taxes and reporting requirements. "This could apply to people living in Hong Kong or Taiwan who took a green card decades ago, out of fear because of political instability in the region, who never set foot in the US, who now could owe taxes or penalties for failure to file or for taxes owed," Field said. "For immigration purposes, it's dead. But on tax

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News Digest

HK & Delta

Cathay flight attendants call off strike plan
Cathay Pacific passengers are spared disruptions as flight attendants agree to abandon plans for industrial action today – the peak time for Easter holidaymakers returning to work. But there could be more threats of chaos ahead, with negotiations on other issues between the union and the airline still unresolved. **Full report A2**

International

45 die in attacks on US consulate and rally
Islamist militants with guns and suicide vests target the US consulate in Besawar and unleash carnage at a political rally, killing 45 people. Pakistan's Taliban claimed responsibility for the consulate attack, saying it was to avenge a US drone that was targeting top militants in the nation's border areas. **Full report A5**

Sport

Police probe Malik marriage claim
Indian police seize the passport of former Pakistani cricket captain Shoaib Malik while he is being questioned at the Hyderabad home of star tennis player Sania Mirza, his fiancée, about allegations circulating that he is already married. **Full report C2**

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Political passengers take express railway line

Albert Wong and Austin Chiu

The HK\$6.3 billion express railway will get new exposure as a political issue after two former League of Social Democrats members say they plan to contest the two constituencies in May by-elections that would be most affected by the project.

Raymond Li Sai-hung and Kenneth Cheung Kam-hung said they hoped to whip up more of an election atmosphere by targeting 20-something voters with debates on the Hong Kong-Guangzhou express railway that has been at the centre of controversy.

Li, 36, will stand in New Territories West, where Tsui Yuen village will make way for a depot for the railway project and Cheung, 35, in Kowloon West, where the depot will be built. They will submit their nomination forms this week.

This means voters are likely to choose from three pro-democracy candidates in these constituencies, with league elder Albert Chan Wai-yip and Wong Weng-chiep and the 2012 student group, contesting Kowloon West. In New Territories West, the league's Wong Yuk-man and Kwok Wing-kit will contest the 2012, are the other candidates.

Wong Yuk-man and Chan are seeking re-election after resigning this year. They were among the five

endum movement to young people who strongly opposed the express railway project.

In recent weeks, we have also heard from affected residents in Tsui Yuen village that ever since the funding was passed, politicians have forgotten them," he said.

Discontent over the plan, which will require the uprooting of 150 trees, has also been a hot topic. In the past, the issue of the express railway has been a major talking point in the thousands of young protesters surrounding the Legislative Council building on January 16 when the funding bill was passed. They demanded to speak to Transport Secretary Eva Cheng, and in the ensuing mayhem, some protesters tried to charge inside, trapping her for hours.

Student activist Christina Chan Hau-man welcomed their participation. "Expect to see support for the issue of universal suffrage and abolition of functional constituencies, you still might not want to vote for Wong (Yuk-man) or Chan. The other alternative is the students but most people don't even know who they are. It's important to have people who are allowed anyone who supports the cause to come and vote," she said.

Wong, Chan and Leung Kwok-hing will be the candidates in the 2012. Leung, Leung will stand in New Territories East, Chan is a candidate in the Hong Kong Island constituency and Leung will contest the Kowloon East seat.

They are seeking re-election on a shared platform of advocating genuine universal suffrage and the abolition of functional constituencies, the two parties hope to create a de facto referendum, with supporters voting in favour of their demands.

However, surveys show that public support for the cause has been lukewarm. A protest march in support of the cause will be held today.

Li, who is a former assistant to league member Leung, has contested district council elections in New Territories East. Cheung is a prominent gay rights campaigner and has also contested district council elections in Kowloon West.

League chairman, Andrew To Kwok-hang welcomed the participation of new candidates, "especially in this political atmosphere where taking part in the by-election will subject you to severe criticism".

While the appeal of the referendum movement may now be broadening, the growing number of candidates raises questions about how the votes can be counted to assess the overall support for political reform - whether the votes for Li and Cheung can be added to those obtained by Chan and Wong and those of the 2012 candidates.

"Before we were asking whether we can add votes from Team A with Team B. Now we have to think whether we can claim to add teams A, B and C," he said.

The Civic Party and the league will discuss the political issues over governance and heritage issues.

Cheung said one of the reasons for participating was to broaden the appeal of the so-called de facto refer-

Our participation is not only to give young people a reason to vote, but also the middle-class ... voters who might think Wong and Chan are too radical

Kenneth Cheung Kam-hung, a former league member who plans to contest

lawmakers to step down in January triggering the May 16 by-elections, which they call a de facto referendum on democracy.

Li and Cheung insist that their aim is not to attack the league's "big brothers", although the personalities of the lawmakers have been a factor in their decision to quit the league.

Li and Cheung also want to give voters a more moderate option.

"Our participation is not only to give young people a reason to vote, but also the middle-class, middle-aged voters who might think Wong and Chan are too radical a focus. With their personalities and the way they are, it's hard to focus on the issues they are supposed to represent," Cheung said.

The pair said the approval of funding for the express railway project motivated 20-somethings to escalate their political views over governance and heritage issues.

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Cancer-stricken Szeto says health improving

Veteran pro-democracy activist Szeto Wah, who had late-stage lung cancer, yesterday said his health had improved since he had undergone chemotherapy.

He said he remained optimistic and had plans to continue leading all the activities of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China - a group which he founded and chairs and is branded by Beijing as "subversive".

Szeto spoke of his condition during a rest after leading fellow activists in a march on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront to mourn those who were killed in Tiananmen Square during the bloody crackdown on the student-led democracy movement on June 4, 1989.

He appeared in good spirits, although he seemed to tie easily and had to take a seat when speaking to reporters. He said he learned from his doctor that his cancer index had dropped to 0.3 from 4.0 when he was first diagnosed with it.

"I was told that when the index falls to below five, I am largely cured," he said, adding he would undergo another chemotherapy session next week. "I feel I am doing better after the treatment," he said. "I am optimistic."

Even if his health worsened, Szeto, 79, said he would not give up the fight for more democracy and human rights on the mainland. "I shall continue taking part in all the activities of the alliance. Even if my condition worsens and even if I'm in a wheelchair, I will still take part in the activities."

Szeto Wah at yesterday's ceremony in Tsim Sha Tsui. Photo: SCMP Pictures

He said he was planning a march on April 18 to protest against the recent arrest of six fellow pro-democracy activists, including five from his alliance. The activists were arrested for taking part in a protest inside the compound of the central government liaison office on Christmas Day.

Szeto said this was a "political prosecution" and he would not just "sit there and do nothing". He said he hoped to continue leading the alliance in the next five years.

At yesterday's ritual, Szeto led some 20 fellow activists from the alliance to lay flowers on an altar. The ceremony is held annually by the alliance during the Qing Ming Festival.

This year, they also called on Beijing to release author-dissident Liu Xiaobo, who was jailed for 10 years for "subversion" last December.

Li had organised a petition for constitutional reform.

Ng Kang-chung



An iPad owner is protective of his purchase in Mong Kok. Online forums were swamped with iPad reviews, some giving it the thumbs up while others highlighted shortcomings. Photo: May Te

First iPads fetch HK\$6,000 as tech-savvy mainlanders add to buying competition

Joshua Tang, Austin Chiu and Ng Yuk-hang

Apple's new iPad arrived in Hong Kong yesterday with retailers reporting almost half of the stocks they imported from the US were sold to tech-savvy mainlanders.

It was estimated that about 1,000 iPads arrived yesterday as parallel imported goods. They were met by an enthusiastic response, despite a price tag of more than HK\$6,000 for the basic model.

Retailers said mainlanders were active buyers, unlike for the release of Apple's iPhone three years ago, when the majority of buyers were Hong-kongers.

"Mainlanders are getting richer and are more interested in new gad-

gets," said Lau Chi-king of G-world Mobile, one of the first retailers in the city to sell the iPad.

An iPad with 16GB of memory went on sale in the United States on Saturday but it was not known when it would officially be released in Hong Kong. Some local retailers had the products speed-freighted to the city and sold them at a profit.

An iPad with 16GB of memory, which can connect to the internet via Wi-Fi, costs US\$499 in the US but sells in Hong Kong for between HK\$5,000 and HK\$7,000. Models with larger memory capacity cost even more - an iPad with 64GB of memory fetches more than HK\$8,000.

It is expected that Apple will release a newer model, which would also support 3G connections, by the

end of this month and these could be available in Hong Kong early next month.

Alex Tang, from Esatto, another iPad vendor, also reported many mainlanders were buying the iPad.

He said some Hong Kong buyers would resell them on the mainland

Sales beat estimates

B5

cent profit (on the exchange rate), he said.

Tang said most people bought the devices in order to stay trendy, whereas others wanted one to read e-books.

"Hong Kong is a good place to use iPads as we have a lot of WiFi access points," he said.

Jacky Lai, an Apple fan who bought an iPad yesterday

for a profit. "If they bought the products at HK\$5,500 and sell for 6,500 yuan, they can already make a 10 per cent profit (on the exchange rate), he said.

Online forums were swamped with iPad reviews yesterday. While some gave it the thumbs up, many posts pointed out shortcomings such as the absence of a camera.

"Most of iPad's features can already be found in the iPhone. Its only advantage is the larger screen, with which we can play games and read books," a user wrote. "But the iPad is too large to be a portable game console, and its configurations are too low to be used as a personal computer at home."

Jacky Lai, an Apple fan who rushed to get an iPad yesterday, was satisfied with its performance, despite it failing to support a number of applications.

"The internet speed is four to five times faster than the iPod, and it is smooth when loading high-defini-

tion videos onto YouTube," Lai said. "One shortcoming is that it does not support flash, so some animations cannot be played. Also, the interface does not support traditional Chinese characters, but I believe it could be fixed in future patches."

"The internet speed is four to five times faster than the iPod, and it is smooth when loading high-defini-

Green card loses allure as taxman gets tough

And those who made more than US\$91,400 in annual income are also subject to US taxes.

US taxpayers must also disclose the combined value of their personal overseas bank accounts if they exceed US\$10,000 at any time in a given year. Last month, US President Barack Obama signed legislation that forces foreign financial institutions, trusts and corporations to hand over information about their US clients.

The new law imposes additional reporting requirements for people with foreign assets. Taxpayers must now report foreign assets cumulatively valued at more than US\$50,000, including accounts in a non-US bank, non-US investments, and passive foreign investment companies. Failure to report could result in fines of US\$10,000 or more, on top of the previous fines and penalties.

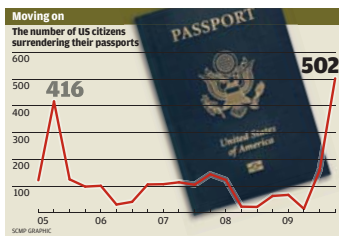
Because of the Byzantine rules, "many people think in good faith that they are in compliance with the American rules, when they in fact are not," Field said. "As a tax lawyer, I know a bit better, but it cost me a lot - three years of law school and 30 years of practice in the field - for me to understand these issues."

And for some, the cost of compliance is no longer worth the benefits. "Now that I'm spending more time overseas, I definitely feel like people with green cards don't enjoy the upside, but get all the downside," said one Hong Kong-born, US green card holder. Educated in the US, she received an Ivy League education and has worked for prominent international firms in America and

abroad. She has had a green card for most of her life, but has been benefiting whether to give up her US status.

The reasons, she said, ranged from the practical to the personal. "The universal taxation. That is actually a major disincentive. On the personal level, my family is in Hong Kong and they've decided not to retire in the States," she said.

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HK and Guangdong to sign cross-border pact in Beijing

Ng Kang-chung

Hong Kong is to sign a pact with Guangdong tomorrow in Beijing to boost cross-border co-operation in sectors including finance, environmental protection and infrastructure projects.

The move forms part of the city's campaign to be part of the nation's next five-year plan. It will also be the first deal on closer co-operation struck between the two jurisdictions and recognised at central government level.

Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, who will lead senior officials visiting the capital today, is expected to sign the agreement tomorrow with Guangdong Governor Huang Huahua (黄华华) at a ceremony in the Great Hall of the People. State leaders are expected to attend

the ceremony, according to a Hong Kong government statement.

Hong Kong has been eager to be part of the fast-growing capitalist market across the border.

While details of the pact were not made available, the statement yesterday said the agreement "translates the macro strategies on deepening Hong Kong-Guangdong co-operation... into concrete policies and measures."

This would also lay "a foundation for seeking to incorporate the agreement's content into the national 12th five-year plan".

The Pearl River Delta region, including Hong Kong and Macau, was positioned as a "reform test field" in a report by the State Council in 2008. Under the plan, the region is to become a globally competitive area in the Asia-Pacific by 2020.

Closer links

Hong Kong and its mainland neighbour seek closer ties in several key areas

The report calls for closer co-operation among service industries in cities in the region, focusing on the development of finance. It also calls for greater efforts in environmental protection.

Priscilla Lu Pui-king, a deputy to the National People's Congress and an academic at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, said yesterday: "The content of the agreement may not be too revolutionary. But the signing of the agreement in Beijing is significant because it shows Beijing is serious about Hong Kong's integration with the Pearl River Delta, and Beijing is expecting progress."

However, City University economist Li Kiu-wai questioned if Hong Kong should be part of the five-year plan, saying this could harm its long-standing status as a laissez-faire economy.

"I am not suggesting that there is no need for Hong Kong to work closer with Guangdong. But doing so does not mean we have to make it part of China's planned economy," Li said.

But Lau argued: "We should see Hong Kong taking a bigger role in the next five-year plan as a means by which the city helps open up China more to a free economy."

This year is the final year of the 11th five-year plan. In the past, Hong Kong was not mentioned in the five-year plans, but for the first time, in the 11th five-year plan, Beijing made pledges to uphold Hong Kong's status as an international finance, trade and logistics centre.

In 2006, the Hong Kong government organised a business summit to chart the course of the city's development in response to the 11th plan.

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Headline: Green card loses allure as taxman takes bigger cut

Byline: Irene Jay Liu

Once a symbol of security in uncertain times, the US passport has lost its appeal for an increasing number of people in Asia and across the globe, who are giving up their citizenship in record numbers.

For those in Hong Kong, the combination of relative political stability, growing regional economic opportunity, and increasingly complex and costly tax requirements are driving people to give up the safety net of US citizenship.

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The numbers dipped to double digits in 2008, when the government created an "exit tax" on assets that made it expensive for the wealthy to give up their passports or green cards. But the devaluation of assets, along with the economic crisis, has seen the expatriation rate shoot up over the past six months.

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The rising numbers were a result of the costly and increasingly complex taxation system in the US, said Joseph Field, senior regional partner for Asia at the law firm Withers Worldwide, which works with clients from Hong Kong and Taiwan to navigate the complex American tax requirements for citizens living abroad.

Field also noted that the global crackdown on offshore tax evasion has inadvertently had an impact on Americans living abroad in "dramatic and perhaps unfair" ways, especially for those who do not even know they are "US persons" in the eyes of the taxman.

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Another common case involves people who have a green card, but have been away from the US for so long that they can no longer use it to enter the country. But if they did not file forms to formally declare their expatriation with the US Internal Revenue Service, they may still be liable for taxes and reporting requirements.

"This could apply to people living in Hong Kong or Taiwan who took a green card decades ago, out of fear because of possible political instability in the region, who never set foot in the US, who now could owe taxes or penalties for failure to file or for taxes owed," Field said. "For immigration purposes, it's dead. But for tax purposes, it may be very much alive, depending on the circumstances.

Timothy Burns, Field's colleague at Withers, said: "We see people who are enraged when they come to us and they say, 'I never knew any of this, and you're telling me that I'm either poor or I'm a criminal. I either have to willfully ignore what you are telling me, making me a criminal, or I have to give my life savings to the IRS and I've never been to America.'

"That's why we are seeing a lot of people give up US status."

There are an estimated 60,000 US citizens living in Hong Kong, according to the US State Department. There are also many Hong Kong residents who hold a US green card, or permanent residency status, though the department could not provide a specific number.

In addition to paying local taxes, these citizens and residents must regularly declare their earnings to the Internal Revenue Service, the tax enforcement arm of the US Treasury Department. The US is one of the few countries that taxes its citizens and permanent residents living abroad, and those who made more than US\$91,400 in annual income are also subject to US taxes.

US taxpayers must also disclose the combined value of their personal overseas bank accounts if they exceed US\$10,000 at any time in a given year. Last month, US President Barack Obama signed legislation that forces foreign financial institutions, trusts and corporations to hand over information about their US clients.

The new law imposes additional reporting requirements for people with foreign assets. Taxpayers must now report foreign assets cumulatively valued at more than US\$50,000, including accounts in a non-US bank, non-US investments, and passive foreign investment companies. Failure to report could result in fines of US\$10,000 or more, on top of the previous fines and penalties.

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The reasons, she said, ranged from the practical to the personal. "The universal taxation. That is actually a major disincentive. On the personal level, my family is in Hong Kong and they've decided not to retire in the States," she said.

Last month's new tax rules were "definitely something that's on my mind", she said. "It creates the appearance that the paperwork and the hassle are going to be even more of a pain in the future."

"Most people I know living in Hong Kong with US green cards, they all give it to accountants to do it. I know some friends who make special annual trips to the US just to talk to their US accountant. It is crazy."

"A lot of people in the '80s got citizenship because they were afraid of the handover. They didn't know what awaited them in Hong Kong. But the handover has already taken place, and China is becoming more developed and stronger. And Hong Kong is so international and it's politically and economically stable. You could argue that some of us are more marketable in the labour market here than we are in the US," she said. "I actually have relatives who have moved back to Hong Kong."

"And frankly, there are people in Hong Kong with multiple citizenships ... you can argue that some countries also offer the same political clout that the US offers to its nationals overseas. The relative value of the US passport has diminished."

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