WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE

# Damaged University Mourns Its Dead—and Plans Fast Recovery

**MIANYANG, CHINA**—At 2:28 p.m. on 12 May, Gao Kun was relaxing in his fifth-floor dorm room at Southwest University of Science and Technology (SWUST) when the building began to shake violently. The 23-year-old computer science major scrambled down the stairwell. Outside, people were screaming. As the ground convulsed, some students jumped from dorm windows. Gao, ducking chunks of falling masonry, helped a young woman who had jumped and broken her leg to limp away from the building. He ran back and dragged a more severely hurt jumper to safety. Minutes later, several professors arrived to aid the injured and soothe the terrified students.

Mianyang, a sprawling science city with a population of 5.2 million, was one of the worst hit by the rupture of the Longmenshan Fault, 50 kilometers to the west. As *Science* went to press, the number of local dead had climbed above 20,000, and the overall official toll for the Wenchuan earthquake stood at 67,183. In addition to SWUST, Mianyang has several institutes, including the China Air Dynamics Research and Development Center, and a high-technology R&D park anchored by the Sichuan Changhong Electronics Group. Mianyang may be best known, however, for China's main nuclear weapons design laboratory, the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics. Although damage assessments at "China's Los Alamos" and nuclear weapons–fabrication facilities northwest of Mianyang are not publicly available, there have been no reports of radiation leaks. In the meantime, a lake formed by a landslide in the mountains west of the city is rising (*Science*, 23 May, p. 996), prompting the evacuation of more than 70,000 Mianyang residents as *Science* went to press.

North Mianyang, where SWUST is located, suffered heavier damage than other parts of the city. The campus is mourning the loss of three students—one who jumped from a dorm window, one hit by a falling brick, and one who disappeared and is presumed killed on a field trip in devastated Beichuan County. Another 99 students and staff were injured, 13 severely. "We are deeply shocked by the loss of life," says SWUST President Xiao Zhengxue, a professor of rock mechanics. The quake, he says, severely damaged scientific equipment and a quarter of the buildings; losses could tally $72 million.

A week after the earthquake, SWUST was picking up the pieces. Administrators were working out of temporary offices in a medical clinic and other lightly damaged single-story buildings. At least two-thirds of the university's 24,000 students have gone home. "Officials urged us to leave if we could," says Gao, who was planning to return to Jiangsu Province. Others pitched tents on campus.

When the earthquake struck, only a few weeks were left in the spring term at the technical university, which specializes in engineering, computer science, and agriculture and is jointly managed by the nuclear weapons lab. Officials hope that students who have returned home will complete the term's work online. "One of our strengths is distance education," says Xiao. Striving for normality, professors and students remaining on campus have been holding classes outdoors. Psychologists are counseling traumatized students.

School staff have organized students to assist relief workers aiding the thousands of injured in Mianyang and refugees who lost homes in devastated areas along the fault. Some good has come out of the tragedy, Xiao says: "Professors and students have banded together. They are closer than they ever were before." Reconstruction will begin as soon as possible, he says. "We are determined to restore the campus by September," when the next term starts. **–RICHARD STONE**

With reporting by Chen Xi.

**Badly shaken.** Students camp outside a damaged SWUST building.

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## Push for Antimatter Search

A controversy over whether to put an experiment to detect antimatter aboard the space station has reached a high boil. The NASA authorization bill approved by the House Science and Technology committee's space subcommittee last week proposes $150 million for the launch of the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer aboard the space shuttle. NASA last year knocked the experiment out of the shuttle queue, arguing that its first priority is to finish construction of the station. But several House lawmakers say that NASA's failure to carry out the international project would jeopardize the reputation of the United States as a reliable science partner. The bill is expected to be considered by the full House this summer.

**–ANDREW LAWLER**

## Dream Teams to Tackle Cancer

The London-based charity Cancer Research UK (CRUK) has begun appointing scientist "dream teams" to collaborate with pharmaceutical companies on emerging cancer therapies. The handpicked teams will include up to five experts from different fields and will receive $1 million over 2 years, after which CRUK hopes industrial partners will take the therapies to market.

CRUK announced this week that its first team, led by Nicol Keith of the University of Glasgow, will focus on cell senescence, the mechanism by which aging cells stop dividing. Although the group includes only U.K. researchers, CRUK says future teams will enlist scientists from around the world and tackle topics such as cancer stem cells and chromatin modification. The goal, says CRUK's Simon Youlton, is to fill the gap between "what's coming out of academic research and what's being pursued by the pharmaceutical companies."

**–LAUREN CAHOON**

## NIST Funds Bricks and Mortar

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has announced a competition to give out $29 million for the construction of science facilities at two or three academic or nonprofit institutions. Federal agencies generally don't like giving universities grants for bricks and mortar, but Congress inserted the provision in a spending bill last year.

Such funding has ordinarily come only in the form of earmarks. But Tobin Smith of the Association of American Universities says the competition is a good idea in view of tight state budgets. If the idea catches on, he says, it could help replace some science earmarks with grant competitions. **–ELI KINTISCH**





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