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YAUMATI BOAT PEOPLE UP IN ARMS

21 boats go down as typhoon roars past

TWENTY-ONE boats sank in Aberdeen and Yaumati yesterday at the height of Typhoon Hope.

Eleven boats sank in Aberdeen, and 89 boat

dwellers, mostly women and children had to be rescued.

Another 10 boats sank in the Yaumati typhoon shelter but there were no casualties.

The sinkings prompted the Yaumati boat people to hold a news conference in

which they accused the Government of not doing enough to resettle them on land.

It was reported that the rescue mission in Aberdeen took about three hours and two boat people were admitted to hospital suffering from minor injuries.

Sixty of the 89 were later taken to the Marine Department's Aberdeen Licensing Station where they were given hot meals.

Another nine dwelling boats housing 83 other people were also seriously damaged.

At least six pleasure craft moored at the Aberdeen typhoon shelter were reported to have been seriously damaged during the typhoon.

A spokesman for the Marine Department said that the 'Adventure Ship', broke her mooring at Aplichau and drifted about 100 yards to Pochongwan.

Another boat, reported to be a former ferry moored in an Aplichau boatyard, was also said to have gone adrift.

The government moved nearly 200 people from the Yaumati typhoon shelter during the week, and another 40 others were taken off their vessels yesterday.

Marine Department officials declared a total of 23 boats in danger of sinking during the week, and the people living in them were told to move out.

More than half of the people were accommodated at the Chatham Transit Centre and the others were placed in the Pakshawan centre at Chaiwan.

But families interviewed yesterday said there was a danger that many boats might capsize because of the crowded conditions in the shelter.

"Our boat sank this morning only minutes after we came ashore," Yeung Kai said.

Yeung, who works as a dockyard labourer said even boats that are in good condition could capsize if the seas became rough.

"We have heard that a number of children could have drowned without anyone knowing because no-one keeps any record of the number of people at Yaumati," he said.

"I think many people

will suffer as a result of the typhoon because there is no way of finding out the number of casualties as most people there do not like talking to government officials," he added.

"We were given a lot of empty promises by Government people and we don't trust them any more," Mr Yeung alleged.

Another Yaumati dweller, Lam Tat-wing said half of his family managed to get ashore and he was worried what had happened to the others.

"The younger children were taken off first because they are more likely to get into trouble than the older ones," he said.

Mr Lam, who has three grown-up sons and four younger children said: "I have been living in the shelter for about six years, but conditions there are really bad."

"I think my sons would be able to take care of themselves, but I am still worried about their safety," he said.

The Government has moved a total of more than 1,700 Yaumati boat people ashore, but there are about 3,000 still living in the shelter.

About 700 are staying in transit camps and the others have been moved into temporary housing areas.

The Yaumati boat people have been demanding public housing from the Government for many years, and were recently in the news when about 50 were arrested by the police during a protest march.

In the press conference the Yaumati boat people criticised the Housing Department for not resettling them on land.

Lam Kei, 42, a father of six, said as Hope approached Hongkong his boat was sinking and he had to brave the wind and rain to carry his children to shelter in a nearby school.

He accused the authorities of turning a deaf ear on their demands and urged the Government to take immediate steps to resettle the 47 boat families.

Another representative Cheng Sam-tse, 46, said more than 10 boats sank as Hope roared past Hongkong.

It was most fortunate that there were no casualties, she said.