

After 9 days trapped in flooded Thai cave, boys soccer team is found alive

BY KRISTINE PHILLIPS

Twelve members of a boys soccer team in Thailand and their coach have been found alive nine days after being trapped in a cave in the northern part of the country.

The governor of Chiang Rai province, Narongsak Osatanakorn, said all 13 were found safe at about 10:30 p.m. local time Monday, but the days-long rescue operation isn't over, as rescuers still need to figure out how to get the team out of the cave, Thai News

Agency reported.

The next step would be to check on the team members' health, Narongsak told reporters.

"We will take care of them until they can move," he told reporters, who applauded at the news that the boys and the coach were safe, according to Agence France-Presse. "We will bring food to them and a doctor who can dive. I'm not sure they can eat as they have not eaten for a while."

ABC News foreign correspondent James Longman tweeted that one of the rescuers told

him that the boys and their coach are weak but not in critical condition. A doctor will spend the night with the group and determine when the 13 are strong enough to be taken out.

"They're 2 miles in, it's an arduous trip. And the rain is coming. But they're alive," Longman wrote in the tweet.

A video obtained by CNN shows the group barefoot and huddled together inside the dark cave.

The boys, ages 11 to 16, and their coach, 25, disappeared June

23 after entering the flooded Tham Luang Nang Non cave in a national park in Chiang Rai.

Dozens of local and international rescuers, including a team of Thai navy divers and several cave experts, spent the past few days helping to locate the team, but rising and muddy waters that showed no signs of receding stymied efforts and blocked access to chambers of the cave. According to the Associated Press, rescuers drilled a hole into the side of the cave to try to drain the water, while others attempted to find

alternative routes inside.

"There's not much we can do right now. We have to wait for the water level to decline. [Divers] can't do anything right now," Interior Minister Anupong Paojinda said Thursday, the AP reported.

On Monday, however, a brief break in the weather allowed rescuers to go farther into the cave and kept water levels from rising, according to AFP. They had hoped to find the group, members of the Wild Boar soccer team, on an elevated ledge called Pattaya Beach, but that area also has been

submerged. The group was found about 1,000 feet away, Narongsak told reporters.

The cave system is at least four miles long, and waters can reach 16 feet during the rainy season, from June through October, Police Col. Kam Saardluan told the AP.

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Fred Barbash contributed to this report.

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New direction for Mexico is possible

MEXICO FROM AI

ressed in white forming a human chain along the length of the U.S. border. On Sunday night, after his victory was announced, he said any relationship with the United States would need to include a defense of "our migrant countrymen" living north of the border.

Yet members of López Obrador's team recognize that they will need to approach their early conversations with the U.S. administration carefully, with a sense of how they might engage Trump. The stakes are high for Mexico, which last year exported \$340 billion in products to the United States, its top trading partner, and imported \$276 billion in goods. A trade war with the United States could have devastating consequences for Mexico.

López Obrador "doesn't see Trump as a lunatic. He sees him as a leader making a political plan," said Marcelo Ebrard, a top adviser to the incoming president. "Our goal now is to look for common ground, to see what we can put on the table."

One major question is how López Obrador will treat the tens of thousands of Central American migrants who transit through Mexico on their way to the United States each year. Last year, Mexico detained and deported 76,433 Central Americans — part of a more aggressive policy carried out in recent years, at least partially at the behest of the United States. Compared with many previous Mexican presidents, López Obrador has focused more on the plight of migrants.

"The priority of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's policies will be that all of migrants' rights are respected, without restrictions. We want Mexico to be a country of refuge," Olga Sánchez Cordero, one of his top advisers, said in May.

Trump has adopted an aggressive strategy to try to reduce illegal migration, including a "zero tolerance" plan that resulted in the separation of migrant parents and children. He canceled the separations after a national and international uproar.

On Monday, López Obrador said the North American Free Trade Agreement is among the top issues he plans to discuss in his first post-election meeting with President Enrique Peña Nieto. Trump has called for revising the deal to gain more benefits for U.S. workers, but talks hit an impasse over cross-border auto production. Although the new president doesn't take office until Dec. 1, members of his team will be joining Peña Nieto's negotiators, López Obrador said in an interview with the Milenio newspaper.

"We will support the current negotiators so that this agreement can be signed, a good negotiation will be made for the benefit of Mexico," he said.

Even though López Obrador voiced his support for NAFTA throughout his campaign, he has also said the death of the agreement "cannot be fatal for Mexicans [because] our country has a lot of natural resources, a lot of wealth."

López Obrador has moderated his economic policy proposals in recent years, but he rose to prominence as a politician who frequently derided the impact of free trade. Many supporters of López Obrador have been adversely affected by the 24-year-old deal, as Mexico began importing billions of dollars' worth of agricultural products such as corn, leaving thousands of small-scale grain farmers unemployed.

On other issues, too, there would appear to be sharp differences between U.S. policy and López Obrador's guiding values. The U.S. government provides crucial support for the Mexican military's campaign against drug cartels, and sometimes dispatches its own drug enforcement agents on missions across the country. It's unclear how those relations would jibe with López Obrador's overarching security plan of putting more emphasis on social programs to keep youth away from cartels, and putting less focus on military campaigns — something he's dubbed "hugs not gunfire."

López Obrador is likely to have strong backing for his domestic and foreign policies. On Monday, as election results trickled in, it became clear his Morena party was within striking distance of a majority in both houses. If it falls short, Morena could form an alliance to get the same result. A majority in Congress would give López Obrador broad authority to increase the scope of the welfare system, a key campaign promise.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled the country from 1929 to 2000 and returned to power in the last six years under Peña Nieto, was crushed in both national and local races. The party appeared to capture just 15 percent of congressional seats, a staggering loss.

Peña Nieto, who was constitutionally barred from running for reelection, is among the most unpopular presidents in decades, having been caught up in a series of corruption scandals.

While some analysts debated whether this might be the beginning of the end for the PRI, its leaders attempted to reassure their constituents.

"To the millions of PRI-istas and supporters who voted for the party: Keep your head up," Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, an interior minister for much of Peña Nieto's government, wrote on Twitter.

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Joshua Partlow contributed to this report.



ABOVE: Drivers of motorcycle taxis in Valle de Chalco, outside Mexico City. BELOW: Inés Villa, 34, at her store in Valle de Chalco. "The PRI did a lot for this town," Villa said. "... But as the years have passed you see how they have robbed, cheated, lied and failed."

Working-class suburb tells story of Mexico election

Results show the diminishing influence of pocketbook politics

BY DUDLEY ALTHAUS

VALLE DE CHALCO, MEXICO — Inés Villa has been waiting since childhood for a president like Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has been swept into office in a landslide by millions of the working poor like her.

Growing up in Valle de Chalco, a once forlorn squatter settlement on the fringe of Mexico City, the 34-year-old shopkeeper and mother of two remembers carrying water from a single community tap, walking to school on muddy, unpaved streets, helping her mother wash clothes in a drainage ditch.

All that began to change when Valle de Chalco was made the poster child of the federal government's social investments programs three decades ago, by a president accused of winning his election fraudulently. A torrent of money paved streets, installed sewer, water and power lines, built schools.

Such largesse long kept Valle de Chalco and thousands of communities like it across Mexico



loyal to the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, and later to its political rivals that emerged through a fitful generation-long transition to democracy.

But that fealty was buried in Sunday's election — perhaps for good — as voters overwhelmingly shunned the PRI and its traditional left and right rivals to place their faith in López Obrador, a leftist nationalist who is sharply critical of what he calls the "mafia of power" — career politicians and their allies in the business community.

The vote provided a clear signal of how pocketbook politics have become less powerful as the country has experienced rampant corruption, unhinged criminal violence and deep inequality amid an industrial boom.

"The PRI did a lot for this town over the years, really improved things," said Villa, whose tiny grocery stands across the street from the field where Pope John Paul II once celebrated Mass to underscore the plight of Mexico's poor. "But as the years have passed you see how they have robbed, cheated, lied and failed. A change has to happen," she said.

Still-incomplete returns Monday had López Obrador winning some 53 percent of the nationwide vote in a four-way race. He was ahead by a slightly larger margin in the state of Mexico, which envelopes the capital and includes Valle de Chalco and other raw bedroom communities.

The coalition led by López Obrador's National Regeneration Movement, or Morena, also won the largest bloc in Congress, probably giving him a clear mandate to implement the policies he

says will be aimed at lifting the fortunes of people in places such as Valle de Chalco.

López Obrador's closest rival, with the center-right party that held the presidency for the first dozen years of this century, trailed by 30 points. The candidate of the PRI, which autocratically ruled Mexico state for most of the past century, had won just 16 percent.

Sunday's vote accelerated the long decline of the state of Mexico as a bastion of the old politics and vote-piggy-bank PRI. President Enrique Peña Nieto's political machine, based in his hometown in the state, was considered Mexico's most adept. The PRI has held the statehouse since the party's founding 89 years ago.

"The same parties that assured Mexico a gradual transition to electoral democracy are today roadkill," said Federico Estévez, a political scientist in Mexico City who has tracked the country's political transition for the past three decades. "A majority of the electorate has said, 'Good riddance!'"

"Mexico faces stormy times as government and business duke it out for several years," Estévez said. But, he added, with luck, the election results can lead to a "long-term foundation for sustained support of the political system on the basis of a new social contract."

That new contract has begun to flower here, political activists say, as neighborhood groups that long bartered votes for the PRI — and more recently the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution — for public works have been replaced by politics waged on social media by teens and grandmothers alike.

"When you reach a certain level of well-being, the old politics don't work anymore," said Evaristo Lopez, a 53-year-old electrician who joined the Morena party at its founding four years ago. "People have many more sources of information, opinion and organizing now. The old ways don't have the same power."

Poverty still prevails here, certainly.

But the flood of government money through the past three decades has transformed most of Valle de Chalco from tin-shackled squalor into a bustling city of 400,000.

Shops selling everything imaginable line streets clogged with late-model cars and death-defying motorcycle taxis. Rows of one-story raw-cinder-block homes sit aside the well-kept, multistoried houses of the wealthier residents. Gleaming shopping malls, technical schools and a state university branch underscore the community's middle-class aspirations.

But dissatisfaction with the status quo has grown along with the greater prosperity. Freed from worrying about a roof, a bed and a daily meal, many residents have turned their sights to larger issues. López Obrador's nationalist message and criticism of Mexico's globalized economy struck a nostalgic nerve with many.

"We don't love our traditions. We don't love our culture. We have given up our economy," said David Villarreal, 31, a dreadlocked bicycle-shop worker who stood two hours under a hot sun Sunday to cast his vote for López Obrador. "It's a question of national identity."

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