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Americans remember September 11 under Katrina's shadow



Courtney Ball, 19, of Sommerville, New Jersey, cries at the Flight 93 Temporary Memorial just outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Reuters

The United States has paused to remember the horror of the September 11 attacks four years ago in ceremonies overshadowed by the death and destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina.

On the lawn of the White House, President George W Bush led the nation in a minute of silence that began at 8:46am local time - the time when the first of four airliners hijacked by Al Qaeda members slammed into New York's World Trade Centre.

At Ground Zero, the focus of the day's remembrance events, the moment's silence was followed by brothers and sisters of the victims reading out the names of the 2,749 people who died in the attacks on the twin trade centre towers.

"Again, we are a city that meets in sadness," said New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

"We come here to remember the names of those we lost four years ago. The greatest honour we can do them is to remember them, not just as they were in death, but as they were in life."

Mr Bloomberg also paid tribute to those killed in the recent terrorist attacks in London.

Hundreds of relatives gathered at the site, many of them holding pictures of their loved ones with messages like: "Always missed, never forgotten," and "God bless my son."

During the roll call of the dead, family members descended into the pit of Ground Zero to lay flowers in two small reflecting pools representing the footprints of the twin towers.

This year, the thoughts of many Americans were focused on other victims: the estimated one million left homeless and the thousands feared killed by the hurricane which devastated the US Gulf coast nearly two weeks ago.

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"To Americans suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, our deepest sympathies go out to you, this day," Mr Bloomberg said.

Mr Bush, under fire for the sluggish federal response to the disaster, was scheduled to visit the hurricane-devastated region later in the day.

Both tragedies served to highlight the vulnerability of the world superpower, but where September 11 forged a sense of national unity out of trauma and anger, Katrina highlighted divisions of race and class and triggered accusations of government indifference.

Ceremonies were also held at the Pentagon for the 184 people who died in the attack there, and in the field in Pennsylvania where a fourth airliner carrying 44 people crashed after passengers staged a rebellion against the hijackers.

Among the senior officials attending the Ground Zero ceremony were New York Governor George Pataki and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who read a work by 19th century poet British Christina Rossetti.

Since the emotional intensity of the first September 11 anniversary, subsequent annual memorials have aimed for a more low-key, personal tone and other events - once cancelled or postponed - have crept back onto the calendar.

Three years ago, television networks devoted their programming to a day of remembrance. This Sunday they offered live coverage of the start of the American football season, including the opening game of the New York Giants, and the season premiere of the cult cartoon sitcom *The Simpsons*.

Broadway shows were open as usual and the fashion industry converged on Manhattan's Bryant Park for the third day of the annual Fashion Week.

On the eve of the memorial, more than 500 relatives of the September 11 victims held a rally to protest plans for a memorial museum at the site that will include an International Freedom Centre highlighting freedom struggles around the world.

The demonstrating families, who held up photos of their loved ones and banners that read "Preserve Sacred Ground," complain the centre will shift the focus away from those who died in the twin towers.

- **AFP**



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