

Tianjin hit with heavy rainfall

By ZHENG XIN
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Rainfall has battered Beijing's neighboring city of Tianjin, paralyzing traffic in downtown areas and submerging many roads, despite the city's precautionary measures.

The rain, which started on Wednesday evening, hit the northern part of the city the hardest. Dasi township in the suburban Xiqing district was the worst-affected area, receiving 34.5 centimeters of rain, according to the Tianjin Meteorological Bureau. The city received an average downfall of 14.7 cm.

Fearing a repeat of the mayhem experienced in the capital on Saturday, when the heaviest rain in more than six decades caused the deaths of at least 77 people, the Tianjin government was prepared for the predicted downpour.

According to Deng Fushun, director of the Tianjin Municipal Office of Civil Air Defense, the city practiced drills in the 16 districts and counties of the city on Wednesday to get ready for the emergency.

On Thursday the local fire prevention bureau sent 190 fire engines and 1,140 rescuers to help retrieve the vehicles and evacuate pedestrians stranded by the flood.

The rain has flooded many downtown streets, vehicles and even houses.

Dozens of vehicles were stranded on Baidi Road in Nan-

kai district where many pedestrians had to walk in knee-deep water.

"The water in Xiangyang Street is waist deep," said Ma Lin, a resident in the district.

Cui Yang, from Hexi district in Tianjin, has failed to get the water out of his home, which flooded on Thursday.

"The water in my apartment has reached my knees," Cui said. "I have encountered a similar situation a few years ago and after all these years no local authorities have ever come to check the pipelines.

"In the next three hours, according to the latest weather report, we have to pack up and go to safer places," Cui said.

He Xu, an employee of DHL Express, was driving to his office in Beichen district of Tianjin at 9 am on Thursday when his car flooded.

"I have been bombarded with text messages from city authorities and online shopping companies warning of the downpour, but I did not expect the water would be this high," the 30-year-old said.

He said most workers were allowed to go home early on Thursday due to safety concerns and his company's services were suspended for a day.

Many restaurants in Tianjin closed due to flooding.

The subbranch of Go Believe on Nanjing Road, a famous brand of *baozi* (steamed stuffed bun), from Tianjin, flooded on Thursday morning but resumed business at about 12

pm when the water receded.

All 193 pumping stations in the city along with 24 temporary pumps, have been working, to prevent flooding, especially in low-lying areas and districts with poor drainage facilities, including Beichen district, Hongqiao district and Hebei district, the drainage department in Tianjin said.

The rain has also disrupted air traffic in the city.

Some 20 flights were canceled and 34 delayed. More than 5,000 passengers have been stranded at the airport because of the downpour.

The first flight, an incoming flight from Shanghai, landed in Tianjin after the rain subsided at 11:32 am and the first departing flight took off at 12:08 pm.

Railway transportation has not been affected, according to Jin Hua, a publicity officer at the Tianjin Railway Station.

The station has increased personnel to help the stranded passengers, said Jin.

According to the Tianjin Meteorological Bureau, because the heavy rainfall saturated soil in the mountains, it is important to be well prepared for possible geological disasters in the mountainous areas in the northern part of the city.

The downpour in the city has resulted in an economic loss of more than 140 million yuan (\$22 million), with the direct economic loss in fields of agriculture reaching 137 million yuan.



Residents rest outside their tents at a community in Guangqumen, Beijing's Dongcheng district, on Wednesday. The residents once lived in basements, which were flooded in the downpour on Saturday, and have been living in tents since then.

ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Rain: Drivers urged to take precautions

FROM PAGE 2

Homes have been flooded and people are staying at temporary shelters.

Homes beneath ground level in a neighborhood at the northwestern corner of the Guangqumen Bridge were flooded, forcing more than 300 residents to seek temporary shelter.

More than 100 of the residents are now living in ten tents, donated by individuals, in the square outside the building.

"The flood rushed into the basement so quickly that you had hardly any time to clear away any of your stuff," said Zhang Junfeng, a 28-year-old saleswoman in a supermarket in Beijing.

"I only had time to grab my mobile phone and my purse as the water rose to my chest in just a few minutes.

"We hope the government can find us a place to live, instead of the tents," she said.

To protect drivers, alert lines, indicating water levels, will be put on specific highways and underpasses.

The yellow warning line will be 20 centimeters above ground, alerting drivers to proceed with caution while the red line, prohibiting further driving, is 27 centimeters above ground.

The lines will be easily identifiable, according to the Beijing Traffic Management Bureau.

The move follows the death of a 34-year-old driver who drowned when a four-meter flash flood engulfed his vehicle near Guangqumen Bridge on Saturday. The automatic windows failed to function under the water.

"Warning signs indicating water levels on all low-lying underpasses will be of great help for drivers," said Guo Mingfeng, a 45-year-old taxi driver who has been driving for more than 20 years.

Yang Qingyuan, an expert in escape training in Beijing, said it is also important to take precautionary measures such as having a fire extinguisher, a knife, some gloves and a hammer in the vehicle.

A downpour, widely forecast to hit Beijing on Wednesday, bypassed the capital but battered the neighboring city of Tianjin.

Thursday morning saw more than 300 mm of rain, Tianjin's meteorological center said with the outer Xiqing district, one of the worst-hit areas, receiving 345 mm.

There were no reports of drowning but four people suffered electric shock and were being treated at hospital, according to the Tianjin Emergency Medical Center.

Meanwhile, in Hebei province, 32 people were confirmed dead and another 20 are missing after a storm over the weekend, provincial authorities said on Thursday. More than 2.66 million people had been directly

affected by the storm that flooded 59 counties in the province, according to the provincial civil affairs bureau.

Among the victims, 13 were killed in Yesanpo, a scenic spot in Laishui county, which neighbors Beijing's Fangshan district. About 28,540 houses were

destroyed and 170,710 hectares of cropland were inundated.

Direct economic losses totaled more than 12.28 billion yuan (\$1.92 billion).

Local governments had to relocate 226,600 people to safer areas. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Civil Affairs

allotted 70 million yuan to Hebei for disaster relief.

Storms have hit 22 provincial-level regions in China since July 20.

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Cities upgrading drainage systems after fatal floods

By SHI YINGYING in Shanghai and ZHOU LIHUA in Wuhan

City governments across China are hastily ordering checks on drainage systems, and several have unveiled plans for extensive upgrades, following the fatal floods in Beijing.

Shanghai, Wuhan and Guangzhou have announced multibillion-yuan projects, as officials look to allay residents' worries about cities' ability to handle heavy downpours.

Ma Yuandong, an official at Shanghai Drainage Administration, said the metropolis will invest 10.4 billion yuan (\$1.63 billion) to improve 28 drainage systems before 2015.

Some systems will be replaced and others renovated to make them larger, Ma said.

"Most Shanghai streets can drain only 36 millimeters or less of rainwater an hour, though some areas, such as the airports, Expo site and Lujiazui financial district, can handle 50 to 57 millimeters (an hour)," said Liu Bo, a flood control official at the Shanghai Drainage Administration.

"The truth is, however, if Shanghai went through what happened to Beijing last Saturday, it wouldn't do any better."

The heaviest rainstorm in 61 years devastated Beijing on Saturday and killed 77 people, including 34-year-old Ding Zhijian, who drowned when his car got stuck in an underpass.

Authorities in the capital have conceded that the drainage system leaves much to be desired, as it can cope with only 30 mm or less rain per hour.

The capital's poor drainage system contributed directly to the death of Ding, said professor Li Tian at Tongji University's environmental science and engineering college, who is an expert on urban drainage system.

"Every underpass (in Beijing) is equipped with a water

pump and that particular one couldn't help because all the nearby sewers were full, so the pump couldn't remove rainwater," he said.

Li warned that it will take time and not just money to guarantee an effective urban drainage system.

"A city needs a lengthy period to upgrade its drainage system, mainly because of concerns about holding up traffic and disturbing residents," he said. "Shanghai has spent the last 20 years improving the system in the old city and building new ones bit by bit in the suburbs. You've got to dig out the underground infrastructure in order to upgrade it."

Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, which also receives a lot of rain, began work last year to improve its sewer system by 2015 with an investment of 12.47 billion yuan.

The city government said it is installing non-watertight terraces, instead of concrete or cement ones, in public places such as squares, parks and sidewalks to lower surface runoff on rainy days. In addition, it will use sunken greenbelts to help lower surface runoff and underground reservoirs to help recycle rainwater.

Hu Liang, of Wuhan's Huazhong University of Science and Technology, said the situation has already improved compared with last year.

"The drainage system seems to be working more effectively this year — there was no sea of rainwater," he said.

However, Liu Huizi, of Wuhan University, said she does not believe the drainage system could handle a deluge like the one in Beijing on Saturday.

"A downpour this month turned our recreation grounds into a pond," she said. "The water was 90 centimeters deep at the school gates."

Guangzhou, capital of

Guangdong province, which is frequently flooded during rainy season, is planning to build an underground tunnel stretching more than 100 kilometers into the downtown area to improve rainwater drainage.

Wu Xuewei, deputy director of the city water resources bureau, said construction cost of the tunnel is estimated at 6 to 8 billion yuan.

"We decided to build the tunnel deep underground after looking at the success of similar projects in advanced Western countries," Wu said. "City departments are conducting feasibility studies and seeking advice from experts at home and abroad."

Drainage system maintenance is also an important factor in protecting a city from floods.

Hong Kong renovates its drainage system before every rainy season from June to August.

Water cannons blast the sludge away to ensure the pipes are unobstructed. Closed-circuit TV cameras are installed where maintenance crews cannot easily reach to warn of damage or obstructions.

Hong Kong issued its highest tropical cyclone warning and had 300 mm of rain on Monday night and Tuesday morning, and there was no flooding in the city.

NASA satellite footage from Monday showed Typhoon Vicente brought mostly light to moderate rainfall, 20 to 40 mm an hour. However, some heavy rain (50 mm per hour) and towering clouds were seen around the center of the storm.

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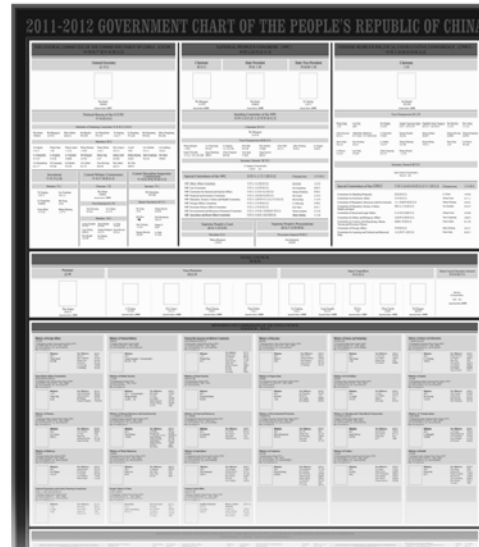
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