

Flooding remains a concern

Water levels rise in major rivers; more rainfall is being forecast

By JIN ZHU
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China is facing considerable flood control challenges, after torrential rains simultaneously raised water levels on the Yellow and the Yangtze rivers, authorities have reported.

Water flow at the Wubu Hydrologic Station in Shaanxi province, for instance, reached 7,580 cubic meters per second at 8 am on Saturday, the second flood peak to hit the middle reaches of the Yellow River this year.

Flowing at the lower reaches of the river, the peak took the water level at the Longmen Hydrologic Station in Yulin above its warning level, the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters said on Sunday.

And water at Wubu Hydrologic Station was reported to be flowing at a rate of 10,600 cu m per second at 1 pm on Friday, its highest level since 1989.

Some 40,800 residents in Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces had to be relocated on Saturday because of the threat of flooding, the headquarters said.

On Sunday, the Hukou Waterfall Scenic Area in Shaanxi's Yichuan county reopened to the public, two days after an emergency closure on Friday due to the year's first flood peak to hit the Yellow River.

"Some visitors were allowed back in the morning, but they were not allowed to walk close to the waterfall for safety concerns," said a staff member named Song at the scenic area.

He said water levels at the upper reaches of the Hukou Waterfall are now being monitored full time.



A section of the 218 National Highway, in Hejing county, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is severed by floods on early Saturday after continuous rainfall.

GAI NIMAN / XINHUA

According to China Three Gorges Corp, water was released from the Three Gorges Dam at a rate of 45,100 cu m per second on Sunday in an effort to reduce the flood risk on the upper reaches of the Yangtze.

"But controls will not be eased back any time soon, as rainfall is again expected on upper reaches of the Yangtze," the headquarters said.

On Sunday, part of Jiangxi province's Poyang Lake, China's largest freshwater lake, saw water levels exceed warning levels, as flooding on the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze raised heights.

The level at the lake's Xingzi Station had risen to 19.01 meters by 8 am on Sunday, its highest in two years, and 1 cm above its official warning level, Tan Guoliang, head of the Jiangxi provincial hydrographic bureau, told

Xinhua News Agency.

Also affected by rising water on the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze, levels at the Jiujiang section of the river in Jiangxi had risen to 19.54 meters by 8 am on Sunday, more than a meter higher than six months ago, and the water was still rising, he said.

Meanwhile, train services resumed on the flood-hit Nanjiang Railway in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Sunday morning.

Five trains operating on the line on Saturday were ordered to stop at the nearest station due to flooding and mudslides unleashed by continuous rain. No casualties were reported, the Urumqi railway bureau said on micro blog on Sunday.

Heavy rains and storms are again expected to hit most areas of the country from Sun-

day to Tuesday.

During the same period, torrential rain is being forecast specifically for central parts of Heilongjiang province, south-eastern parts of Hebei province, and southern parts of Tianjin, bringing precipitation of up to 120 mm in some regions, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

At the other end of the scale, a heat wave is now being forecast for regions along the Yangtze, Huaihe and Hanjiang rivers, as well as Chongqing, with temperatures rising to 38 C from Sunday to Tuesday, it said.

Zheng Guoguang, director of the China Meteorological Administration, urged his department to ensure the accuracy of weather forecasts to minimize the damage brought by changes in the weather in coming days.

Meteorological monitoring in areas especially prone to flood and other weather disasters need to be strengthened, he said.

"North China will face changeable weather conditions in the near future, and the Haihe River basin is likely to see more challenges on flood control," he said at a working conference on Saturday.

"At present, relief work is still continuing in many regions after torrential rains hit in the past few weeks. Therefore, any weather change will have an impact on local relief work," he said.

The State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters has urged its branches in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Inner Mongolia to strengthen efforts on flood control.

Families mourn loss of their loved ones after the fatal storm

Editor's note: The heaviest rainfall in 61 years lashed Beijing on July 21. It triggered flooding, landslides and other damage, causing 77 deaths, of which 38 were found in Fangshan district. There are many grieving families, still in shock.



He sacrificed himself to support my study. No matter what has happened, I'll find him and take him home."

BROTHER OF
WANG JIANGSHENG

Jia Xiaohan, 19, a university student from Fangshan district, had finished her first day at a new part-time summer job at 5 pm on July 21 and was on her way home in Xiapozi village with her stepmother and 10-year-old sister in their car when the storm hit Beijing, triggering flash floods.

As the water hit, she and her sister managed to get out of the car and climb up a small tree nearby before the floodwater swept away the car, with her stepmother inside.

But her sister later fell into the floodwater.

Jia called her father and other relatives for help about 7:30 pm, crying: "Dad, please help me."

A friend of her family's arrived at the scene in half an hour and heard her cries for help, but couldn't reach her due to the depth and speed of the floodwater.

A little later, she too was swept away, after the tree fell.

Her stepmother was rescued miles away, hours later, as was her sister, who was found on another tree 3 km away on the morning of July 22.

"She had told me to hold tight," said her sister.

More than 30 people searched for three days, in boats, and searching the river bank inch by inch, day and night.

They found her body on July 24.

Wang Jiansheng, 30, had just driven his friends home, but would never return to his own. He was swept away, just 2 km from his house on July 21, and found dead on his daughter's birthday.

He had called his brother around 10:30 pm asking him and their father to bring another car to pull him out of floodwater, which had swallowed his car, after a river had burst its banks and submerged farmland in Dongnanzhang village, Fangshan district.

But the water had risen too high, and he had to abandon

the car. When they arrived, he was holding onto a tree. He shouted at them not to come close; but after a couple of hours, they got no more answers to their calls.

More than 50 people from his family searched for him around the site.

His brother fractured his index finger in the search.

"He sacrificed himself to support my study. No matter what has happened, I'll find him and take him home," said his brother.

His body was found in a ditch on July 23.

His wife said he had bought the car to take her to hospital when she was pregnant three years before.

"I don't know how to tell our daughter about his death."

Zhang Kaixiang, 63, and Zhang Jingwang, 40, lost their lives when the high winds blew down a wall being built in Tongzhou district on July 21.

The two brothers, from Shandong province, had been working on a construction site in Zaolinzhuang village for six months.

When the wind hit, completely without warning, at 2 pm on Saturday, the brothers stopped work and escaped to a shed nearby.

But the 70-meter-long brick wall was blown down and smashed onto the shed, killing them both.

Zhou Jibin, who worked with them, said no words can express how he feels, adding that they didn't drink or smoke, just worked long hours to provide for their families.

"They always sent most of their salaries home," he said, adding that they liked their jobs because the money they earned in six months was equal to what they could earn in two years at home.

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Temporary housing being set up for victims

By ZHENG JINRAN
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More than 6,700 makeshift houses will be erected for Beijing residents whose homes were destroyed in the floods on July 21, marking the start of reconstruction efforts.

"Some families will live in the temporary houses for at least three years, the standard time it takes to construct new permanent houses," said Zhang Nongke, an official from the capital's commission of housing and urban-rural development. Residents whose homes can be repaired will live in the makeshift dwellings for three months at most, the city government said, adding that it is making every effort to guarantee reconstruction is finished by the end of October.

The construction of 6,783 temporary houses began on Thursday at 59 sites that have passed safety inspections by experts in Fangshan district. Fangshan suffered a heavier loss than other districts in Beijing due to its large mountainous areas, where 38 people died.

The construction of the temporary houses is expected to be finished before Aug 5.

"Major parts of these makeshift houses have been made in factories in advance, so they can be set up quickly at the site," said Chen Lu, from Beijing Urban Construction Group, one of the two construction companies working on the project. "This construction is going day and night. Another 2,000 workers will arrive on Monday, ensuring it can be finished as scheduled."

"Though they will be used temporarily, the building standard is quite strict. For example, the makeshift houses where people can live for three years

can stand for at least 30 years," he said.

In Chengguan sub-district in Fangshan, 1,000 temporary houses for 500 families are under construction.

"First, we allocate them to 419 families whose homes were destroyed," said Li Zhi, an official from the sub-district office, adding that the latest rainfall on Friday damaged five more houses. "The number of families needing the units may increase in the future, because more rain may come in August."

Yang Qingli, a resident of Beicheying village, has been living with her mother in a tent for the past week. She said the lack of electricity made the tent hot and dark, but her mother does not want to move into the makeshift houses because they are too far from their former home.

However, other residents who are not qualified to live in the temporary housing, would be happy to move into the new houses.

"It's very convenient, with a clean environment, electricity and clean drinking water," Yu Xiangju, 62, another resident from the village, said when cleaning up the thick mud in her house.

The government and the construction companies said who will cover the cost of the houses will be decided after the temporary housing program is finished.

Measures to restore normality to life in this district, such as making sure the drinking water safe and preventing the spread of disease, have already been conducted.

Nine emergency response teams from Beijing Health Inspection have been established in Fangshan to check the drinking water over 10



A villager carries a sleeping board retrieved from his damaged home to a tent on Saturday in Fangshan district in Beijing.

WAN XIANG / XINHUA

CITY ON ALERT FOR HEALTH THREATS

Beijing has activated a city-wide epidemic reporting system to try to prevent possible health threats resulting from the rainstorms.

Local health authorities, including hospitals and clinics, have been told to report any cases involving three or more people with symptoms such as fever, diarrhea, pink eye and dermatitis. The public is also encouraged to report to health departments any such cases, according to the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

No intestinal infectious-disease outbreaks have been reported in the districts that were worst hit by the heavy rainfall, including Fangshan and Fengtai, the

Beijing CDC said.

The most urgent task is to monitor drinking water supply in affected areas, which are mostly in the countryside, Deng Ying, director of the Beijing CDC, was quoted as saying by the Beijing News on Sunday.

Unlike running water pipes that are usually leak-proof in urban areas, wells in the countryside are sometimes half-open and more susceptible to pollution, Deng said.

Water taken from such wells is still muddy, even if some village doctors have used disinfectants. Samples of the well water will be taken and tested. If confirmed polluted, the water sources

will be disinfected until they are safe to be used as drinking water for residents, she said.

The municipal food safety office has tightened checks on meat, water and vegetable products to prevent livestock killed in the storm from being distributed in Beijing's markets, as many livestock have died from drowning in the rainstorms.

In addition to strengthened quarantine tests on livestock products en route to the capital, more screening equipment has arrived in some markets in affected areas to conduct free on-site tests.

LI YAO

days. Forty water-purifying units have been sent to the district to guarantee the safety of drinking water.

To prevent the spread of dis-

ease, 19 ambulances, two sterilizing vehicles and one vehicle for microbial tests have been operating on the streets of the district.

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Airport gets new customer service hotline

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The Beijing Capital International Airport will launch a new customer service hotline from Aug 1, with access guaranteed even under extreme weather conditions. The new hotline, 010-96158, has expanded handling capacities so that fewer callers will have to wait when the line is engaged.

It will offer more customer-friendly services, such as flight timetables, lost and found inquiries and special arrangements for vulnerable people such as seniors and pregnant women, according to the airport.

The old service number, 010-64541100, was activated in 2006 and has attracted complaints for being too long and difficult to remember. It was also difficult to access during peak periods.

In 2011, the line answered on average of 25,000 calls a day and peaked at 34,100 calls a day.

The airport's ability to respond to passengers' inquiries has been tested over the past week, when many people were left stranded by the heavy rains which hit Beijing on July 21.

Hundreds of flights were canceled or delayed because of the rainfall that day and subsequent thunderstorms.