



A woman takes a picture in water as flooding hits Southwest China's Chongqing municipality on Tuesday.

LI WENBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Officials say Three Gorges Dam safe despite record flood crest

By JIN ZHU in Beijing, XU WEI in Chongqing and ZHOU LIHUA in Wuhan

The Three Gorges Dam experienced a flood crest, the largest since it began storing water, between Tuesday night and early Wednesday, but flood control authorities promised the dam was safe.

The dam, the world's largest hydropower project, saw its biggest flood this year as water from the Yangtze River's upper reaches gushed at 71,200 cubic meters per second into the dam's reservoir at 8 pm on Tuesday, raising the water level to nearly 160 meters, according to China Three Gorges Corp.

The peak water level in the dam's reservoir increased from 157.34 meters at 2 pm, when water flow through it reached 70,000 cu m per second, it said. In a major effort to reduce flooding on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, water was released at a rate of 43,000 cu m per second on Tuesday afternoon, it said.

The dam began to store water in 2003, when the maximum water level in its reservoir was

135 meters, and it became fully operational in 2010, when the maximum level increased to 175 meters.

In 2010, a great flood hit the Three Gorges Dam, raising the water level in the reservoir to 161.01 meters, according to the Changjiang (Yangtze River) Water Resources Commission.

The current flood crest represents the biggest challenge the dam has faced, but it poses no threat to the safety of the dam, Zhao Yunfa, deputy director of the China Three Gorges Corp's cascade dispatch center, told China Daily.

"In preparation for the surging flows of water, the dam has increased its water release from 38,000 cu m per second to 43,000 cu m per second since Saturday, leaving sufficient room to store water," he said.

Boat traffic in the area has been suspended. All of the Three Gorges' ship locks were closed on Monday night, forcing more than 700 vessels to drop anchor, the Changjiang (Yangtze River) Water Resources Commission said at a news conference on Tuesday.

The latest flood crest came after heavy rains hit upstream

areas of the Yangtze River beginning on Friday.

Steady rains caused water levels in several rivers in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River to exceed warning levels, and the Cuntan section witnessed the most flooding since 1981, the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters said on Tuesday.

By Tuesday, downpours had forced the evacuation of about 216,000 residents in Sichuan and Chongqing, it said.

The flood peak hit 11 districts of Southwest China's Chongqing municipality on Tuesday, causing a direct economic loss of 710 million yuan (\$111 million), according to a statement from the municipal flood control and drought relief headquarters.

The flood peak is the largest experienced by the main urban area of the municipality since 1981, according to the flood control authority.

The flood submerged riverside roads and restaurants in the municipality's Yuzhong district, which is located close to the downtown area.

Although authorities issued alerts to local residents and

business owners before the flood, the flood peak still caught many off guard.

"It has been many years since the water rose this high," said Zeng Kaicheng, who runs an automobile-repair plant beside the Yangtze River in the Yuzhong district.

Zeng said authorities alerted him in advance, but he thought the floodwater would not affect him.

By around 8 pm on Monday, Zeng realized the flood was larger than normal, but it was already too late. He loaded some household appliances into his car and left. By 9 pm, floodwaters had submerged his plant.

The sidewalks along the river in Yuzhong district were packed with desks, chairs and cooking utensils from riverside hotpot restaurants, the roofs of which were barely visible.

On Tuesday, tens of thousands of people flocked to Chaotianmen Square, where the Yangtze River and the Jialing River converge, for a view of the flood peak in the Yangtze River.

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Cleanup continues as highway reopens

By LI YAO
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The Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao expressway reopened to traffic shortly before noon Tuesday after workers finished moving 81 vehicles that had been abandoned during Saturday's massive downpour.

Ten divers and hundreds of rescuers spent two days pulling submerged cars off the expressway in Beijing, rescuers said. A 900-meter-long section of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao expressway was submerged in water 4 meters deep, the municipal government said. One lane heading out of the city was still closed on Tuesday.

Saturday's rainstorm, the worst to hit Beijing in 61 years, left 37 people dead and forced the evacuation of 77,325 others.

At a late-night meeting shortly before midnight Monday with high-ranking municipal officials, Beijing Mayor Guo Jinlong said top priorities are releasing the disaster death toll as quickly as possible, returning evacuated residents after roads and houses are repaired, and compiling a detailed estimate of the damage.

The municipal government has allocated 100 million yuan (\$15.7 million) for a relief fund for those who were evacuated, families of those who died, and other affected households that are struggling financially because of the floods.

Donation centers under the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau have sent 8.61 million yuan in relief goods to the worst-hit districts, including Fangshan, Tongzhou, Mentougou and Fengtai, said Huang Yong, an official from the donation center.

Summer clothes and blankets are in short supply. Residents are encouraged to donate unused ones because distribution teams on the field are ill-equipped to disinfect old clothes, he said.

On Tuesday, the capital called for public donations to support the 1.9 million people affected by the flooding. Dozens of charitable organizations in Beijing are seeking donations, and promising to use the money exclusively for disaster relief.

The government in Shifang, Sichuan province, has donated 1 million yuan.

Damage to vehicles has been staggering. The China Insurance Regulatory Commission

Beijing Bureau said insurance companies in the capital had received 27,459 claims on vehicles that had been damaged by the floods, with total compensation claims projected to be 220 million yuan.

Meanwhile, the Railway Administration of Beijing sent more than 1,000 workers to repair waterlogged railway lines and several parts of the Beijing-Yuanping rail tracks covered by mudslides. The entire network resumed normal operations mid-Monday afternoon. Temporary passenger trains have been bringing to Beijing more than 12,000 people who were at tourist sites where transportation, telecommunications and electricity were cut.

Nationwide, torrential rains have ravaged 22 provincial-level regions since July 20, leaving 111 dead and another 47 missing, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said on Tuesday.

As of 2 pm Tuesday, natural disasters caused by the downpours have affected nearly 9.2 million people in 353 counties and forced the evacuation of nearly 1.18 million people, the ministry said in a statement.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Online sales of safety hammers soar

By CAO YIN
and ZHENG JINRAN

Saturday's heavy rains and flooding have left many Beijing residents worried about how they might escape from a submerged car and prompted online sales of safety hammers.

Such concerns began to arise after a man found himself unable to escape from a car and died after the car became waterlogged under the Guangqumen Bridge in Beijing and died. The vehicle's automatic windows had ceased working under water, leading him to try in vain to break them.

To prevent such deaths, residents, police authorities, automobile companies and media have begun using the Internet to distribute information about techniques drivers can use to get out of such situations.

The Shanghai railway police posted a video on an official micro blog on Sunday showing how a person should break a vehicle window. By Tuesday, the video had been forwarded more than 2,400 times.

"If people are trapped in their cars, they should try to use safety hammers to break the edges of the cars' side windows, not the windshields," Wang Yibo, an officer with the Shanghai railway police, said on Tuesday.

"That glass (in a side window) is thinner and can be broken more easily."

Yang Qingyuan, an expert in escape training in Beijing, said

MAN DROWNS IN CAR

Among the 37 victims of Saturday's rainstorm in Beijing was Ding Zhijian, who drowned after his vehicle became stuck in 4 meters of water in downtown near Guangqumen Bridge.

The 34-year-old editor of children's magazine *Aaxiong* was driving to his office around 7 pm when his Hyundai SUV stalled in a flooded area under the bridge.

The water quickly rose and swallowed his car and four others within a half-hour. The water pressure made it impossible for Ding to open his door.

He tried to break the windows, banging his head against the glass, but

couldn't. Ding called his wife, Qiu Yan, around 7:30 pm and asked her to call the police. He told her that when he tried to call 110, the police hotline, the line was busy.

"His wife told him to find other tools like a lifting jack, which was in his trunk, but he may be out of strength at that time," his uncle said.

Police rushed to the bridge after they received the report at 7:34 pm. "But the water was more than 3 meters deep, and it was difficult to find his car," said Cui Jinbo, from the green team of Dongcheng district.

Cui dove into the water and located two cars, but

he couldn't tell which one belonged to Ding.

"It was difficult to break the window with my feet, so we had to pull them out of the water one by one," Cui said, adding that it took more than half an hour to locate Ding's SUV.

At 10:20 pm, Ding and his car were pulled out of the water.

Ding, along with his wife, was from East China's Jiangsu province. They have both worked in Beijing for many years and have a 3-year-old daughter. Ding lived in the Ganluoyuan community in Chaoyang district.

ZHENG JINRAN

such advice should only be heeded by people trapped in personal vehicles.

"In most personal vehicles, the four corners of windows are easier to smash," Yang said. "But in public transport vehicles, such as trains and subways, the middle and top parts of windows are the easiest parts to break."

"It's very important to take some precautionary measures — such as having a fire extinguisher, a knife, some gloves and a hammer — to ensure your safety," he said.

No rule now requires car dealers to equip the vehicles they sell with safety hammers.

A salesman at Da Shi Hang Auto Co who declined to provide his full name said having the hammers is not extremely important. When customers come in for repair work, he does not recommend that they buy the hammers, he said.

Despite his and others' skepticism, the devices have become big sellers on Taobao, China's largest online marketplace.

Taobao said the number of

searches conducted for safety hammers on its website from Saturday to Monday was 1,712 percent larger than the number conducted in the entire month of June.

The number of hammer sales, meanwhile, increased by 598 percent in the same period, and the number of flashlights and lifejackets sold increased nearly 20 times.

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