

Anchor plays host to thank helpers

Actions of workers saved hundreds of people at flooded expressway

By HE DAN and ZHENG JINRAN

Cui Yongyuan, a famous anchorman from China Central Television, treated 154 migrant workers to dinner on Monday evening to show respect for their heroic behavior in rescuing about 200 people trapped in a torrential downpour.

All invited migrant workers, who work for a water treatment factory in the Fengtai district of Beijing, raced against time to transfer people stranded by floodwaters on an expressway when the heaviest rainfall in 61 years lashed Beijing on July 21.

More than 120 vehicles were submerged in a low-lying section of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway in Fengtai that night.

When several drivers escaped from their cars and rushed to a nearby factory for help, Du Jinrong, leader of a construction team, knocked on his workmates' dorm doors.

The factory staff gave out clothes, food and bottled water to all people rescued and allowed them to rest in two meeting rooms or in the dormitory, Du said.

"Some of the rescued wanted to give us money as a reward but we refused. We did not help for money," Du said.

More than 180 people were stranded on the roofs of three buses in the inundated section of the expressway when the rescue team, equipped with buoys, ropes and flashlights, reached the site around 9 pm.

He Xuezhong, who has been working in Beijing for more than 17 years, joined the rescue work with his wife and 20-year-old son.

"I did not worry about my son's safety in that urgent moment although I knew that he can't swim," He said. "He can cope with the help of ropes and buoys."

He Ming, his son, also took part in the rescue at about 9 pm on July 21 and saved a 9-year-old boy at 3 am who was grasping an iron fence so the current wouldn't sweep him away.

"I heard the boy saying 'I want my mom' but after I took him to a safe place, my workmate immediately took him to change his clothes, so I didn't know whether he found his mother until yesterday," he said.

About 60 people who were rescued visited the migrant workers on Sunday to express their gratitude and He Ming said he saw the boy and his mother there.

After a brief opening speech, Cui, the anchor, asked everyone at the dining hall for a minute of silence for people who died in the rainstorm.

Li Chuannan, a 23-year-old from Southwest China's Sichuan province, had to restrain himself when he saw spicy fish, an authentic Sichuan dish.

"The doctor told me that I should stay away from spicy food before my wound recovered, that's killing me," the young man said.

Li's right foot was scratched by iron when he rushed back and forth to save people trapped in the water.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard a few days ago that Cui Yongyuan was going to treat us to a dinner," Li said. "I often saw him on television, but never expected that I could meet him in real life, I like him because he is humorous and eloquent."

Cui responded to an online campaign at Sohu Weibo, a popular micro-blogging site, to take them out for dinner after he read about the life-saving stories.

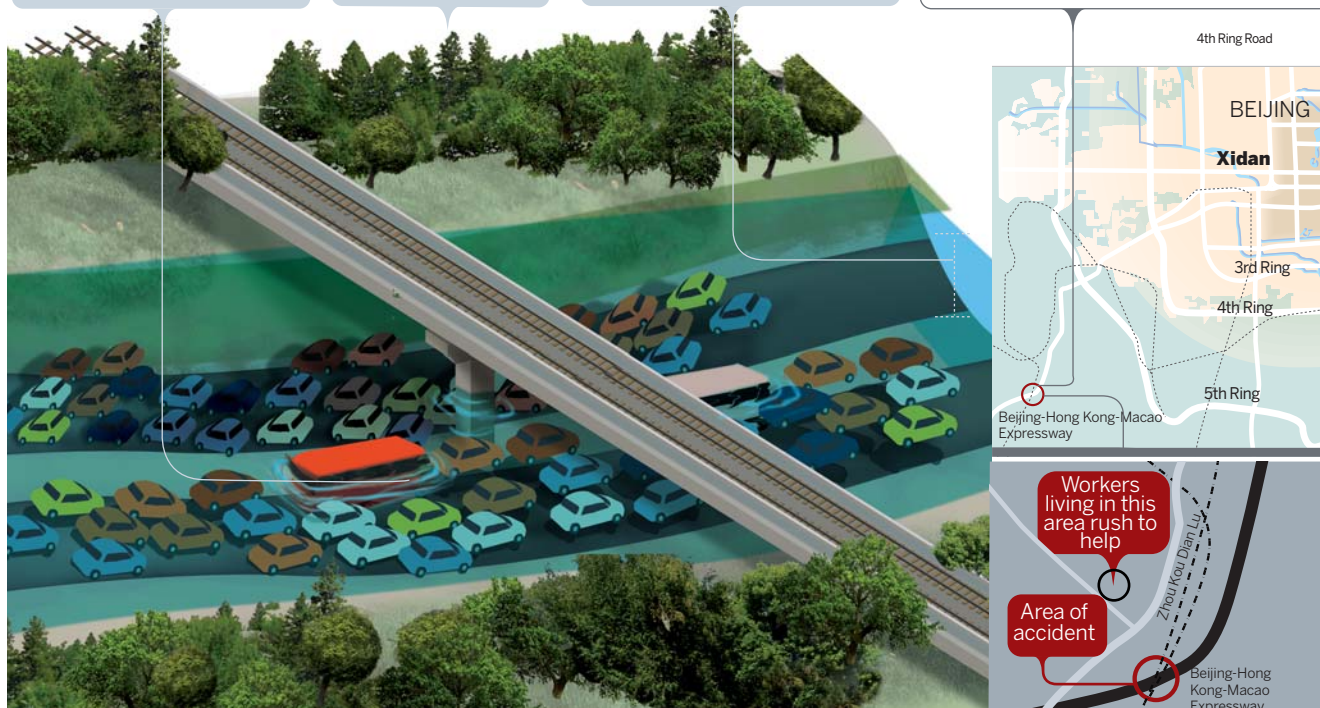
The campaign, launched by three scholars in May, called for urban residents to treat migrant workers to dinner as a way to promote equality among different social groups and eliminate

3 buses carrying nearly 200 passengers become stranded

3 deceased in the tragedy

4 meters average depth of the rainwater flooding the expressway. The deepest was 6 meters.

150 migrant workers rushed to the scene to rescue the trapped people from their dormitories in Nangangwa



Source: China Daily

GUILLERMO MUNRO / CHINA DAILY



CUI YIFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Vehicles that were submerged and damaged at the submerged section of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway are stored in a parking lot in the Fengtai district of Beijing waiting for their owners to claim them.

discrimination against manual workers.

Cui handed a pennant to Li, who was chosen as the representative of the migrant workers participating in the rescue work, with words saying "You offered a hand in an emergency, I drink a toast to show my respect."

Cui then toasted all the migrant workers who sat at

18 tables. He paid 14,400 yuan (\$2,250) for the dinner, which was held in the Jingxi Nangong Hotel, a restaurant in Fengtai, 10 minutes drive from the workers' residence.

Yang Tuan, a social policy expert from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and another initiator of the campaign, attended the dinner party.

"The rainstorm removed the misunderstanding and the gap among people, and you (migrant workers) treated those stranded people as brothers and sisters," she said.

In addition to the migrant workers' heroism, Beijing residents have also been moved by the bravery of two young firefighters in the rescue operations following the heavy rain.

Shi Bingbing and Wu Tian, both 20, together with their two teammates, were sent to the section of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway where a 900-meter section was submerged on July 22.

They were ordered to dive into the water to help rescuers get a whole picture of how many cars were inundated and if there were any people trapped.

"The situation there was very complicated, deep water and floating cars, you couldn't believe that you were at an expressway," said Shi, a deputy commander from the fire squad in Xiwenzhuang township.

The water was 6 meters at the deepest point and the average depth was 4 meters.

"It was too cold and dark to see clearly, so we had to fish for the vehicles one by one," Shi said, adding that they bumped against them occasionally.

After one hour, the other two teammates asked to dive in turn, but they refused.

"They are unfamiliar with the situation, and we don't have enough time (to take the shift)," he said, "We started diving at 3 pm and were asked to finish the search mission before night, leaving us only four hours."

The two finished the mission on schedule, reporting that 127 vehicles were inundated. Shi got eczema because the water was not clean and Wu got a fever.

Shi said he didn't tell his family after the mission though he lay in bed for days. "I don't want to make them worry about me."

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Free dinners battle bias against migrants

By HE DAN hedan@chinadaily.com.cn

Socializing around food at mealtimes is important for Chinese people. And the people who started a campaign asking urbanites to treat migrant workers to dinner understand that very well.

Three scholars in cooperation with Sohu Weibo, one of China's major micro-blogging websites, on May 18 started a charity project called Treat

Migrant Workers to Dinner. The campaign aims to organize 10,000 dinner parties in 100 cities nationwide in a year.

Urban Web users and migrant workers who sign up online for the events will have dinner together with the former footing the bill.

The campaign also encourages urban residents to invite migrant workers in their communities to dinner.

"It's not just dinner, it's a social movement to fight

against discrimination," said Sun Liping, a professor of sociology at Tsinghua University and one of the people who started the campaign.

Yang Tuan, a researcher specializing in social policy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and another of the campaign founders, said she believes that the dinners offer a self-teaching opportunity for people to learn about social justice and to respect manual workers.

China has more than 250 million migrant workers, who left their hometowns in rural areas to contribute to the country's economic miracle and urbanization, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

The people who started the campaign are calling for more respect and less discrimination toward migrant workers, which they believe is needed after some recent media reports.

In Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province, a male passenger on

a bus asked two migrant workers to get off because he said they smelled of sweat. The bus driver and other passengers intervened and the migrant workers stayed, a report said on Sunday.

About 20 dinner parties have already been held across the country, Xie Jian, a publicity officer for Sohu, told China Daily on Monday.

Many enthusiastic netizens, including celebrities, artists and officials, attended the events.

Chen Li — deputy director of the Shaanxi provincial public security department and a user of Sohu Weibo — caught the attention of thousands of netizens after he posted an online invitation on May 25 saying: "I want to treat several migrant worker brothers to dinner."

Two days later, Chen treated eight migrant workers and some of their family members to dinner at a restaurant in Xi'an, the provincial capital, the Huashang Daily reported.

Drivers seek compensation for damage

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Scores of drivers whose automobiles were submerged in floodwaters on an expressway on July 21 have asked a highway company to pay them compensation.

The drivers went to Beijing Capital Highway Development Group, a State-owned enterprise in charge of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway's construction and operation, on Friday to request compensation. They claimed the company should be responsible for the loss of their vehicles because its toll station created a traffic jam, causing many cars to become stuck on the flooded expressway.

A Capital Highway employee who did not want to be identified said on Monday that they reported a compensation plan to higher authorities last week but have not received a reply.

He declined to provide additional details about the plan

and said the city flood control authority will soon publish relevant information.

Yu Yaping, head of the flood control authority's information office, said now is not the time to debate whether the drivers should be compensated because his office is still preparing to cope with new floods.

"The compensation is not our job. We're responsible for informing residents the time of future downpours and coordinating departments to prepare for floods," Yu said. "In other words, our role is more like a publisher, not an enforcement department to specifically solve the drivers' problems."

During the heavy rain, the toll station at the Nangangwa section of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway collected tolls, causing a traffic jam, said Lu Hong, a businessman who was trapped on the expressway and participated in Friday's compensation request.

Lu, 49, said he paid about 200,000 yuan (\$31,360) for

his car two years ago, and now the engine is damaged beyond repair.

Lu said his insurance company has agreed to cover the damage, but he still wants the group to compensate him with a new car of equal value.

"The toll station forced me to slow down, and I witnessed the water flood my motor. Otherwise, I might have passed the section as quickly as I could."

A worker at the Zhaoxindian toll station declined to confirm whether they were told to stop charging drivers during the heavy rain.

"If the station had stopped collecting tolls and realized the risk for flooding, my car wouldn't be broken and the tragedy could have been avoided," Lu said, adding his car sat in floodwaters for three days.

Luo Jinfang, 50, a full-time bus driver who was also trapped on the expressway, said he was anxiously waiting for a reply from the company

because his vehicle was his only source of income.

"The company should have checked the expressway's safety facilities when they realized the rain might bring danger," he said.

Luo's bus was carrying 47 passengers. "The company has the responsibility to pay for the loss of belongings that passengers left on my vehicle, such as luggage and laptops," he said.

"There's a contract between drivers and the company. As cars pass the highway, the group should provide safety services, while the drivers have an obligation to pay. So those poor drivers with submerged vehicles have a right to claim their damage from the company," said Tang Junfen, a lawyer from Jiazi Law Firm in Beijing.

However, the group can be exempted from paying for damage because the rain was an uncontrolled element, Tang said.



WATERY RIDE

PHOTO BY PENG ZHAOZHI / XINHUA

Two residents in Yinchuan, capital of Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, make their way on a flooded road on Monday. Torrential rain hit the city on Sunday, collapsing some houses and trapping commuters and tourists.

Capital issues fresh warning of rain

By JIN HAIXING and WANG XIAODONG

The Beijing meteorological center issued a blue alert for rainstorms on Monday night as the capital's areas experienced heavy rains.

The average precipitation in eastern Fangshan district, Daxing and Tongzhou districts and central areas of Beijing were expected to reach 30 mm, said the alert, issued at 7:35 pm.

The center had previously forecast heavy rain in the capital from Monday night to Tuesday.

The Ping'anli Subway Station was closed at 7:50 pm because of heavy rain, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport said on its micro blog.

The commission asked residents to be on guard.

Due to bad weather, 23 flights were delayed and 26 canceled at Beijing Capital International Airport as of 8 pm on Monday.

The capital has been hit by several downpours over the past 10 days, particularly on July 21, when the heaviest rainfall in six decades lashed Beijing, causing 77 deaths.

"As soon as the meteorological center issued the warning we broadcast it to residents," said Zhai Ruisheng, Party chief of Beicheying village in Fangshan district, on Monday, which was worst hit by the deluge on July 21.

"Village officials were also dispatched to inform every household and advise them to go to higher places in case the rainfall got worse."

After the deadly rainstorm on July 21, the local government of Beicheying erected dozens of tents on a school playground to house people whose homes were destroyed in the storm.

"On Sunday, we brought eight more tents for backup," said Gao Zhuang, a village official.

"The village mobilized people to stay alert outside the tents to monitor the rain at night," said Yang Qinglin, a Beicheying villager. Her house was nearly destroyed in a flood caused by rain on July 21.

"If the rain gets too heavy, we will move to the school building behind the tents," she said.

Chinese meteorological authorities use a four-tier color-coded weather warning system of "blue", "yellow", "orange" and "red", with "red" being the most severe.

On Monday, the National Meteorological Center issued a blue alert for a rainstorm. Heavy rain was expected to hit central and southern Shaanxi province, Shanxi province, central and southern Hebei province, central and southern Beijing, Tianjin, western Liaoning, northern Shandong and northern Henan, from 8 pm on Monday to 8 pm on Tuesday, it said.

Flooding caused by the rains has killed 11 people in Yulin, Shaanxi province.

Seven people were killed and three missing in Linxian county, Shanxi province, on Thursday and Friday after torrential rains dropped 197 mm of water within 3 hours.

Zheng Jinran in Beijing and Ma Lie in Xi'an contributed to this story.

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