

China experiencing torrential rain and major floods

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14 July 2024

Since the beginning of the rainy season on April 1, China has experienced heavy rainfall, causing 20 floods in major rivers around the country. Dozens have been killed, tens of thousands have been forced to evacuate, and countless more have been impacted. These types of extreme weather events and floods have become the annual norm in recent years amid ongoing climate change.

As of Sunday night, 31 rivers had surpassed their warning levels with flooding expected to continue into August. The Ministry of Water Resources and the China Meteorological Administration (CMA) expect significant mountain flooding near the cities of Bazhong and Guangyuan in Sichuan Province on Sunday and Monday.

Also on Sunday, China's National Meteorological Center (NMC), a subordinate body of the CMA, re-issued a "yellow" alert for rainstorms for the province-level administrations of Shaanxi, Sichuan, Hubei, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Inner Mongolia. On Sunday and Monday, the regions were expected to experience torrential rains of up to 80mm an hour as well as thunderstorms and gales. China uses a four-tier colour warning system starting with blue and rising in severity to yellow, orange and red.

Beijing's Ministry of Water Resources has also issued a warning for flooding at Lake Tai as water levels rose to 3.9 metres on Saturday, 0.1 meters above the warning level. The lake is located in the Yangtze River Delta in Jiangsu Province and is one of the largest lakes in the country. It experienced its first flood of the year on June 30.

The Yangtze River and its tributaries are particularly prone to flooding. Last Wednesday, the flood discharge gates on the Three Gorges Dam were opened for the first time this year as continuous rain was expected for

the next week and a half in Sichuan Province and the city of Chongqing, which sit further upriver along the Yangtze. The NMC predicted that some areas of the Sichuan Basin would receive 50 to 90 percent more rain than usual for this time of year while the Three Gorges Reservoir had risen to 161.1 meters, or more than 15 metres above its usual level. It is a record high for July.

Last week, major flooding took place in Chongqing's Dianjiang county, which received 269.2mm of rain in a single day alone, setting a record for the county. As a result, at least six people were killed. Chongqing is a direct-administered municipality in southwestern China with a population of 32 million people. The rains also damaged 1,800 hectares of crops and has so far caused an estimated 82 million yuan (\$US11.3 million) in damages. The rain caused a highway to collapse in the city's Kaizhou district.

Public anger over the government's response to the flooding could develop into broader social unrest, particularly when combined with other issues such as workers' declining economic conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Aware of this, Chongqing's Mayor Hu Henghua said last Thursday, "As flood preparedness and response enter a critical period, we should strengthen warnings and monitoring, and timely evacuate people in areas at risk of geological disasters. It's better to be extra careful to prevent any potential losses."

President Xi Jinping has also emphasized this point, telling rescue workers in June that they should "guarantee the security of people's lives and property, and overall social stability."

China is no stranger to flooding. Following the Chinese Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) drew legitimacy from the ability to mitigate the

damage from floods that the previous Kuomintang government was unable to address as a result of corruption and indifference. For many people, the memories of massive floods in 1931, for example, that killed as many as two million people, were still fresh in people's minds. The party began a campaign to build dams and other flood prevention measures throughout the country while also prominently celebrating its achievements.

Today, there are approximately 98,000 dams in China as well as 320,000km of dykes. However, many dams were built between the 1950s and 1970s, and due to poor upkeep, are at risk of collapsing. In 2020, Beijing stated it would spend \$US15 billion to fix 200 large dams and 8,000 smaller dams that were described as "sick and dangerous." Dykes are in equally bad condition. A report released in April of last year stated that 70 percent of dykes in just the Hai River Basin, which includes Beijing, were in danger of collapse.

Now, under the impact of climate change, extreme weather events are growing in intensity. Higher temperatures increase evaporation and the moisture in the air, which leads to more intense rain storms. At the same time, areas that typically receive less precipitation face the increasing likelihood of heatwaves and droughts.

The NMC on Sunday also issued a heat warning, raising its warning level within its three-tier temperature warning system to yellow, with orange and red more severe levels. Some regions of China are expected to see temperatures as high as 39 degrees Celsius.

On July 5, the CMA introduced its new blue book on climate change in China, writing, "Extreme weather and climate events tend to be more frequent and severe. In China, extreme high temperatures and heavy precipitation events tend to be more frequent and severe while extreme low-temperature events have generally declined... And the average intensity of typhoons that have made landfall in China has fluctuated and strengthened since the late 1990s."

The first serious flood this year occurred on April 7 in the Bei River in the Pearl River Basin. It was the earliest since 1998 when Beijing began numbering floods. Later that month, Guangdong, which is located in the basin, began receiving a large amount of rain and flooding, leading to 52 deaths. Another 47 people died

in Guangdong in June from continued flooding.

At the end of June, Pingjiang County in Hunan Province experienced some of the worst flooding since 1954. The Miluo River, which runs through the county and joins with the Yangtze River, reached 77.7 meters, exceeding the alert level by seven metres. One-third of Pingjiang's old town and one-half of its new town were under water by July 2 and more than 5,300 people were forced to evacuate. Pingjiang is a county in the city of Yueyang, a city in Hunan's northeast. It is home to 1.15 million people.

Torrential rains caused a dyke along the Miluo River to burst. Pingjiang received 759.6mm of rain between June 18 and July 2, the most since 1961 when recordkeeping began. The county's Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters compared it to a "wartime" situation.

Beijing has for many years attempted to cast blame for climate change on the United States. Similarly, as China has become the largest producer of greenhouse gases, the US and its allies are attempting to pin blame on China. However, the issue of climate change is not a national one. The only way to successfully deal with it is to replace the existing political system, capitalism, that puts profits before the environment and prevents planned international action due to its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states.



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