

Fresh floods in central China as typhoon heads towards east coast

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Rescuers used excavators to evacuate people trapped by this week's floods as they began the clean-up [Noel Celis/AFP]

Beijing, July 23 (RHC)-- Villagers were evacuated over makeshift bridges on Friday as floods submerged swaths of central China, and a clean-up began in Zhengzhou where at least 33 people died earlier this week after days of torrential rain.

Millions have been affected by the floods in Henan province, trapping people without fresh food or water, and submerging roads and railways.

Zhengzhou, home to 12 million people and the capital of Henan, has borne the brunt of the extreme wet weather – deluged by the equivalent of a year's worth of rain in just three days. Firefighters on Friday continued to pump muddy water from tunnels including the metro system where at least 12 people drowned inside an underground train.

In neighbourhoods still immersed in waist-high water, rescuers used excavators, inflatable boats and other makeshift rafts to pull some residents to safety and deliver food and supplies to people still trapped in high-rise apartment blocks.

One of the volunteers, Li Kui, said the demand for basic goods and foods was immense. “We start our day at 8am and go on until 2am. Besides having lunch and using the bathroom, we just go up and down the streets all day,” the 34-year-old told Reuters news agency. Asked if he was exhausted, Li said: “Yes, but compared to the people trapped inside, they must be feeling worse.”

Heavy rain overnight in more northerly parts of the province left Xinxiang and vast swaths of surrounding farmland inundated as the Wei River burst its banks. Ariel footage showed rescuers using temporary bridges on Friday to move hundreds of residents to safety, with treetops poking above the water the only sign of land for miles.

“Presently, nearly 9,000 people have been safely transferred,” state broadcaster CCTV said, adding authorities were evacuating “the remaining 19,000 people”. The local water conservancy bureau said 29 of 30 reservoirs were overflowing in a situation it described as “grim”.

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