

# Fighting China's mighty floods

**MORE THAN 30,000 soldiers, emergency workers and residents are on guard at dikes near Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei province, as the city on Wednesday braced for flood waters from two swollen rivers.**

Flood peaks of the mainstream of the Yangtze River and the Hanjiang River, the Yangtze's longest tributary, are expected to converge in Wuhan within 24 hours.

"It is very rare for the two rivers' flood peaks to arrive at Wuhan at the same time," said Hu Xiaohei, an inspector from Wuhan's Bureau of Water Resources.

The city has a population of about 9.1 million and is a major transport and economic hub in central China. It stands at the centre of China's latest battle against floods which have left more than 1,400 people dead or missing this year.

"The city's ability to control the huge amount of water is certainly being tested," Hu said.

The level of Hanjiang River, the highest in two decades, rose to 35.39 metres when it passed Xiantao City near Wuhan at midday Wednesday.

Workers were on standby as authorities with-

held an order to open flood gates to divert water from the swollen Hanjiang River to a walled low-lying area covering 600 square kilometres.

The low-lying area, stretching from Xiantao to southeast parts of Wuhan, comprises farmland and fish ponds. It is designed as an emergency reservoir during serious floods.

## protect and limit

"We will strive to protect people and limit the losses brought by the flood," said Jiang Tiebing, director of Wuhan's water resources bureau.

About 5,000 residents in Xiantao and another 25,000 in southeast Wuhan were evacuated overnight.

The water diversion system was last put to use in 2005 when the level of the Hanjiang reached 35 metres.

If the water were not diverted, dikes guarding two of the three major districts in Wuhan and nearby



• Struggling against the waters.

Hanchuan City might be breached, local water resources officials said earlier.

In Hanchuan, closer to Wuhan, tens of thousands of soldiers, armed police and residents were ordered to guard the city's 161 kilometres of dikes and flood prevention facilities around the clock.

A contingency team of 2,000 experienced emergency workers and 1,000 armed police has been stationed in Hanchuan, ready

to fix dike breaches with rocks, sandbags, earth and steel nets.

In Wuhan, the local flood control authority has raised the alert level to the second highest level, triggering the mobilisation of emergency workers and the military. The highest level signals possible closures of schools and factories and the mobilisation of millions of the city's adult residents to join the flood prevention efforts.

But officials were con-

fident that the worst scenario could be avoided as flood control systems, including the Three Gorges Dam, were working well and no major rains are forecast in the near future.

## highest flow

In Yichang City, the Three Gorges Dam experienced the highest water flow of the year – about 56,000 cubic metres per second.

The dam withstood the flow with a discharge rate of 40,000 cubic metres per second, accumulating 16,000 cubic metres of water per second in the reservoir.

After passing the dam, the flood peak is expected to flow through the mainstream of the Yangtze River and reach Wuhan before Thursday.

Rainstorms have lashed a dozen provinces this summer, including Shaanxi,

Sichuan, Henan, Jilin, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, triggering floods and landslides.

China's flood control authorities said that floods had left 928 people dead and 477 missing as of Wednesday.

In Jilin, more than 200 rescue workers have been sent to Kouqian Town to reach 30,000 residents thought to be trapped after a nearby reservoir overflowed.

The local train station was also surrounded by water with over 80 people trapped inside.

Meanwhile, rescuers are still searching for 21 missing people after a massive rain-triggered landslide buried 58 homes in the south-western province of Sichuan on Tuesday.

In Henan, thousands of rescuers searched for survivors Wednesday after a bridge collapsed after floodwater surged down the Yi River over the weekend, killing 44 people with 22 missing.

In Shaanxi, 127 people are reported dead due to floods since July.

Floods have affected a total of 134 million people in 28 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, resulting in direct economic losses of 176.5 billion yuan (\$26.04 billion), said the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters (SFDH).

A total of 875,000 homes have collapsed, 9.61 million people had been evacuated and 8.76 million hectares of crops were affected by floods nationwide.

Xinhua news agency

## Cuts threaten double dip recession

by Caroline Colebrook

**THE NATIONAL Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) attacked the Con-Dem coalition's emergency budget last week, accusing the Government of rushing the £40 billion cuts through just to "grab headlines" and give the impression that Britain is addressing its debt issues in contrast to countries like Greece.**

Yet in spite of the cuts British debt is still growing and the country's credit rating is suffering.

There is no doubt that the budget reduction will reduce economic growth in the short to medium term. And the cuts already announced are going to spread hardship and misery in hundreds of ways that are only just emerging.

The TUC has pointed out that cancelling the school building programme puts children

at risk of asbestos exposure. The TUC Asbestos Support and Campaign Group said that one of the hidden consequences of the cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future Programme is a real and increased risk of children, teachers and support staff being exposed to asbestos fibres.

## asbestos

Many of the existing school buildings were built before 1970 and almost certainly contain asbestos. As these buildings fall into disrepair the risk of asbestos exposure increases dramatically.

Teaching unions consider that total removal is the safest option. Many schools have spent little on maintenance in the promise of being part of the new schools building programme.

The number of teachers who have died from mesothelioma (cancer caused

exclusively by asbestos) has increased by over 300 per cent in the last 20 years. This is the tip of the iceberg.

Children exposed to asbestos are five times more likely to develop mesothelioma than adult teachers in the same environment.

And the cuts to this programme are likely to incur legal costs as dozens of companies involved in the programme and planning to sue the government,

## legal action

Tim Byles, chief executive of Partnerships for Schools, the quango set up to oversee the £55 billion modernisation plan, told the Commons Select Committee on Education that many of the companies are seriously considering legal action. Throughout North West England scores of projects are being hit by the withdrawal of £52 million in funding from the Regional Development Agency's budget.

Blackpool's regeneration, Manchester's international festival and theatres in Liverpool are among the 101 projects told they will not receive funding.

The North West Development Agency (NWDA) said it had now essentially "closed for new business". The pattern is the same throughout the country.

Even the UK Film Council, which supported many successful and profit-making films which earned money for the country, has been axed. The council, founded in 2000, had an annual budget of £15 million to invest in British films and employed 75 people.

Tim Bevan, who chairs the UK Film Council, said: "People will rightly look back on today's announcement and say it was a big mistake, driven by short-term thinking and political expediency."

## FUND

**Good news! We hit our target for the month with something to spare with a £840 postbag this week that pushed the fighting fund for July to £3,372. So a big hand to all who have helped us on the road like the Metropolitan NCP members who raised £32 and the Redbridge friends who sent in £20 and all our other supporters whose bankers' orders are the foundation of our fund-raising efforts.**

**But we really need to hit our £3,000 target every month. Every cheque and postal order, big or small, helps keep our communist press afloat and the more we get the more we can reach out to expand the circulation of the *New Worker* and make the case for peace and socialism in Britain and throughout the world. You can speed the day by posting a contribution to: *New Worker* Fund, PO Box 73, London SW11 2PQ.**