240,000 people evacuated in China rainstorms

AFP – Nearly a quarter of a million people were evacuated in eastern China as rainstorms lashed swathes of the country and caused the Yangtze and other rivers to swell, state media reported Wednesday.

China has been enduring extreme weather conditions in recent months, from torrential rainfall to searing heat waves.

The country is the leading emitter of greenhouse gases, which scientists say drive climate change and make extreme weather events more frequent and intense.

State news agency Xinhua said the storms had affected 991,000 residents in Anhui province and forced the evacuation of 242,000 people by Tuesday afternoon.

“As of 4 pm Tuesday, rainstorms had wreaked havoc in 36 counties and districts in seven prefecture-level cities in Anhui,” Xinhua reported, citing the provincial emergency-management department.

It said the Yangtze, China’s longest river, has seen water levels in its Anhui section exceed warning marks and continue to rise.

Torrential rains have also pushed waters above their alert levels in another 20 rivers and six lakes in the province.

Footage on state broadcaster CCTV Wednesday showed a section of the Yangtze rising high enough to nearly cover a sculpture in the city of Wuhu that typically stands about 12 metres above the water line.

Images showed umbrella-carrying volunteers in red jackets patrolling the river’s edge and stockpiling bright red

lifejackets and lifebuoys on the shore.

More than 100 millimetres of rainfall was recorded at hundreds of weather stations across Anhui between 5 pm on Monday and the same time Tuesday, according to Xinhua.

In Hexi county, near the provincial capital of Hefei, about 266 millimetres was recorded.

Tens of thousands of officials have been deployed to monitor dams and dykes along the Yangtze in Anhui, Xinhua said.

The provincial weather office forecast more rain across swathes of Anhui from Wednesday until Friday and issued warnings for “geological disasters” in southern areas.

Intense rainfall has triggered deadly disasters in southern China in recent months.

Mountain floods in central Hunan claimed five lives last month, according to state media reports, while a landslide in the same province killed eight people.

Heavy rains and flooding also left 38 dead in southern Guangdong province in June.

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