

Jinhuang village in Funan County of East China's Anhui Province, as the biggest floods since 1991 hit the area last week. **Below:** Houses inundated in flood. After 12 years without floods, many local farmers moved back to the lowland areas, to be close to their farm plots.

Photos by ZHANG WEI/China Daily



Fluid future for flood victims

Homes, crops lost in Huaihe River Valley

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

FUNAN, Anhui Province: Lang Shimin, 86, leaning on a walking stick, put his right thumbprint on a receipt.

In return, he and his wife Zhang Xiuzhen, 80, have three 50-kilogram bags of flour delivered to their makeshift tent.

The tent, their temporary home, is one of 50 erected on high ground in the village in Funan County of East China's Anhui Province, which is suffering from its biggest flood since 1991. Lang's old house, now submerged, is only about 500 metres away from his tent.



Food aid: Lang Shimin, 86, receives three 50-kilogram bags of flour.

Lang was the first villager to receive aid. "The aged, orphans and the poor get the food aid first," said Lang Kang, the village head.

Lang Kang's voice is husky. He hasn't slept for two days. He's been too busy overseeing the relocation and relief work.

Wild rivers

Jinhuang village lies at the fork of several branches of the Huaihe River.

Dubbed the most erratic river system in China, the Huaihe River stretches for some 1,000 kilometres from Henan in the west, through Anhui Province, before its water is diverted into lakes and canals leading to the Yellow Sea in the east.

Continuous rain in the Huaihe River valley, especially in its upper reaches, last week caused the river system to swell.

The more densely-populated industrial cities in the middle and lower reaches of the Huaihe River and major railways have been under constant threat of flooding.

Ever since New China was founded, engineers have worked out and upgraded contingency plans to protect the cities and national transport routes from flooding in the capricious Huaihe River system.

Because of its low elevation, Jinhuang village is among 75 villages designated as the Mengwa Diversion Area in Anhui's Funan County on the upper middle reaches of the Huaihe River. Dams have been built and houses erected on higher ground since 1991 for local villagers, although they

continue to farm in the lowland areas.

However, after 12 years without floods, many local farmers moved back to the lowland areas, to be close to their farm plots.

The central and local governments last week jointly decided to carry out their flood contingency plan, to open the sluice gates at Wangjiaba Dam to ease rising water levels upstream. Local governments took immediate action to evacuate the farmers who had moved back to lower ground.

As a result, 19,142 people in the diversion area, including Lang Shimin and his neighbours, who were living in flood at 1 pm last Thursday.

It was the first such diversion in 12 years, according to the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters.

Altogether 12,000 hectares of farmland were submerged.

The sluice gates were closed at 6 am on Saturday, after the heavy rain stopped for several hours and the water level dropped to 28.91 metres, 0.09 metres below the safety line.

Temporary homes

Jinhuang village has 120 households with a total population of about 500. Lang Kang said some 50 families on the flood plain have lost their houses.

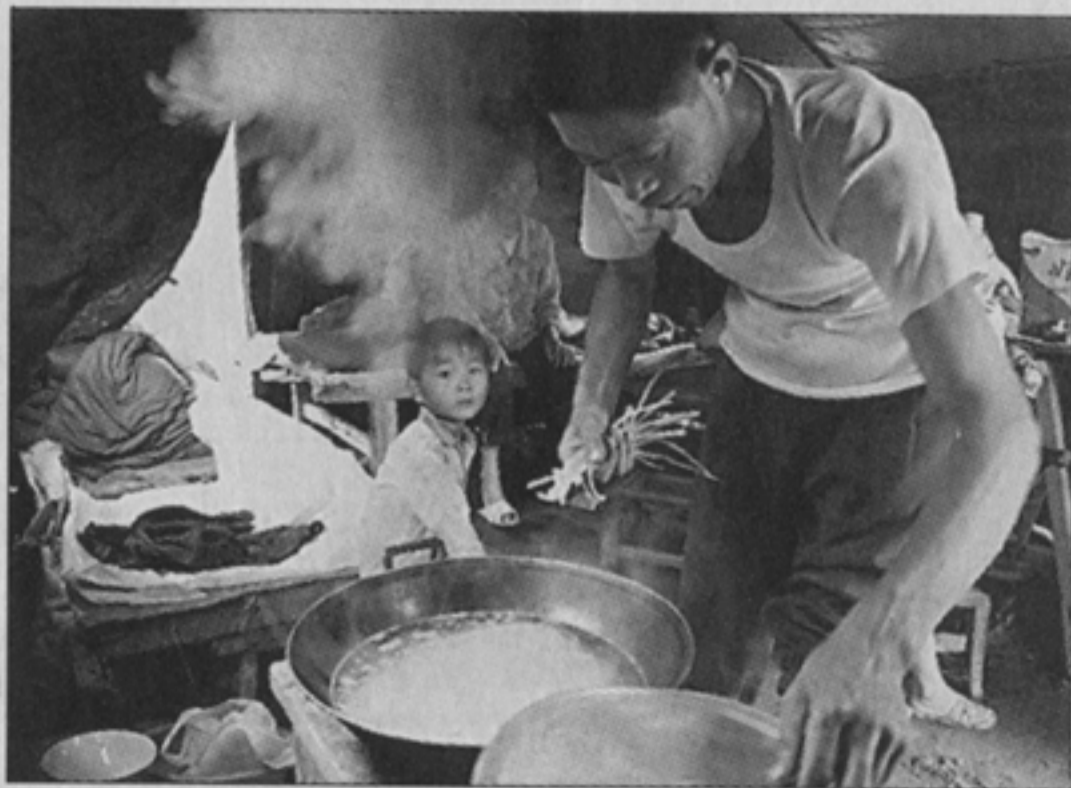
But Lang Kang said with pride that all the villagers and most of their valuables and livestock were safe and sound. Local militia members helped with the evacuation.

"All the residents were on safe ground by the time the sluice gates opened, but there has been major short-term damage to their farmland," said Yang Wenjiu, vice-director of the local flood control headquarters, who also has had little sleep over the past few days.

Yang said he and his colleagues worked around the clock on the emergency relief work and to ensure the flood diversion proceeded smoothly. Although tired, he and his colleagues are pleased no one was injured or killed.

He said the flood plain was under almost half a metre of water over the weekend — too deep for cars and too shallow for motor boats.

Three thousand members of the local



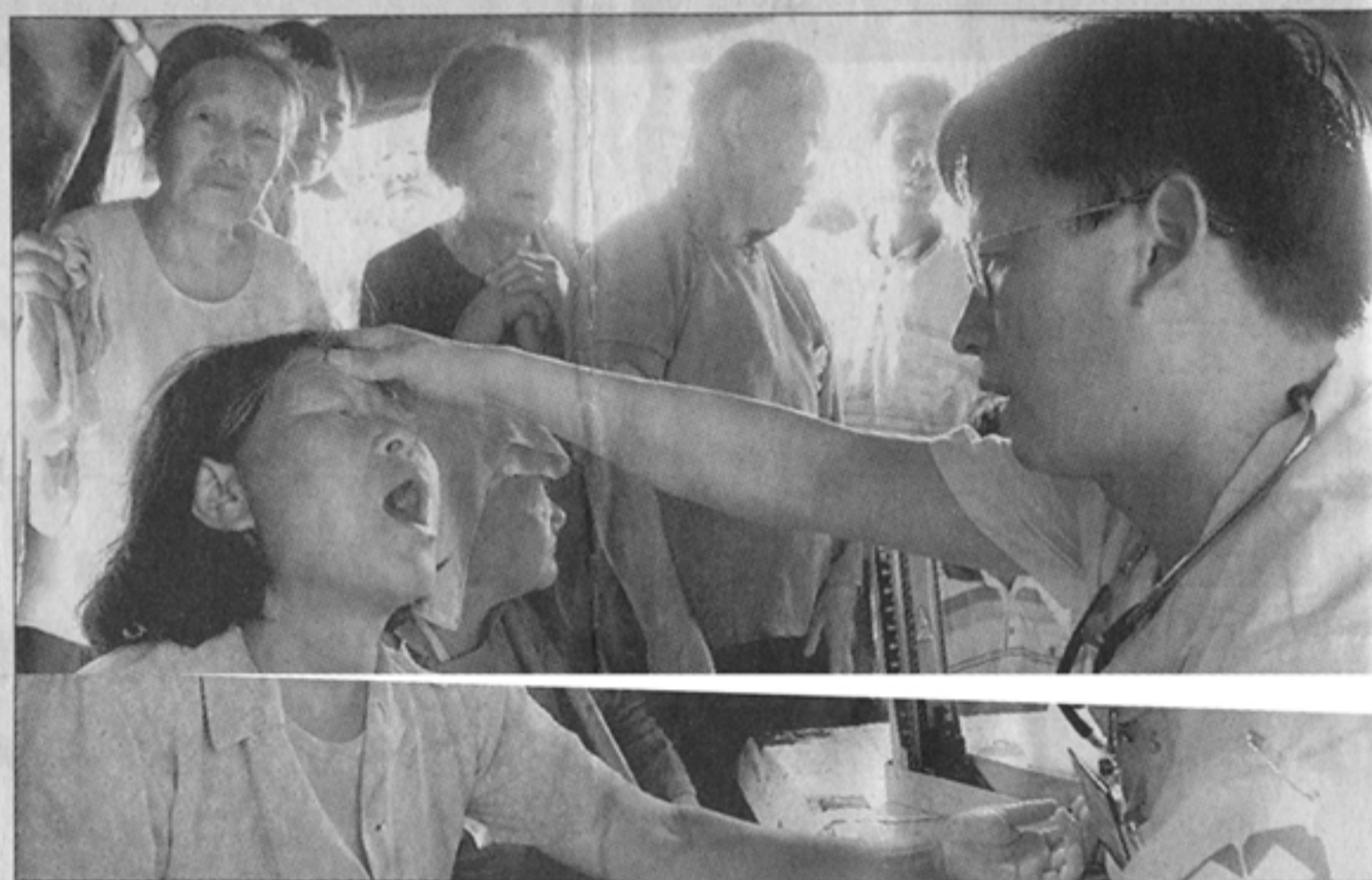
Inside the tent: Life goes on as villagers make do with their pots and pans. They'd saved all their valuables before the sluice gates were lifted.

militia are in charge of delivering aid packages to the homeless, using small wooden boats.

They also helped erect nearly 2,000 tents on higher ground in the diversion areas.

"About 20 per cent of the people who lost their homes are living in tents. The rest are living in the homes of their relatives and friends," said Yang.

"Local people had prepared some food



Say 'Ah': Dr Li Zongyou from Fuyang People's Hospital gives local villagers their daily medical check.

before the floods hit and, with the extra food the local government has provided, they will have enough for at least one month."

The local militia also sent 120 tons of flour, 8 tons of rice and 2,000 boxes of instant noodles to 75 villages in the diversion areas before Monday.

"More relief food, including flour, rice, instant noodles and bottled water, will be delivered to local residents in the diversion area soon, when the flood ebbs," Yang said.

Medical aid

Disease control and prevention in the diversion area is now the major concern of the local governments, said Yang.

About 80 doctors — eight from the city of Fuyang, eight from Funan County, plus village doctors — are now providing day-to-day medical treatment and check-ups in the diversion areas.

"These two-member teams went to each village by boat to check on the health conditions of the villagers here every day," said Zhou Hongxiang, a doctor from the department of paediatrics with the Fuyang People's Hospital.

Located about 110 kilometres from Wangjiaba, Fuyang is a major city in the

area. The doctors from Fuyang People's Hospital arrived at Wangjiaba at 3 am last Thursday, two hours after the sluice gates opened.

Zhou said he and his colleagues take instant noodles with them while they visit the villages, working over 14 hours every day.

"Most of the local people are in good health," said Zhou. "Some have developed common diseases like colds, slight fever and indigestion."

Staff from the local disease control and prevention centres (CDC) are closely monitoring the situation for possible spread of infectious diseases.

"No infectious diseases appear to be spreading in the area," Zhang Chunfen, a medical worker from the Funan CDC said. "We only found eight cases of dysentery, and the patients are recovering."

CDC staff also distribute tablets to

clean the local drinking water, an effective way of preventing the spread of such diseases as diarrhoea.

Zhou said they would stay in the diversion area for at least one month in line with the demands of local medical treatment.

For Li Xizhong, 50, another resident of Jinhuang village, it is the loss of income this year that worries him.

Altogether about half a hectare of his farmland planted with soybean, peanut and maize is now inundated, from which he had expected to earn at least 3,000 yuan (US\$364) this year.

Several villagers with fish farms watched their fish washed away by the rising flood waters.

Most took to the water in small boats soon after the sluice gates were closed. They hoped to catch some fish to make up some of their losses.

"It will take at least three years for the farmers to entirely recover from the flood," said Cui Xianrui, a technician at a local agriculture service station.

He was sent to Jinhuang village to coordinate and help with the relief work.

Although the crops were not totally submerged, their roots rotted after being soaked for several days, according to Cui.

"I will direct and help the farmers plant some sweet corn in autumn so they can recoup some of their losses," he said.

Yang Wenjiu said he will try harder to persuade local villagers not to rebuild their homes on lower ground after the flood recedes.

Before this flood season, some farmers moved back to the flood plain because they were not satisfied with the housing conditions in areas on higher ground.

Yang said a detailed reconstruction plan for the area, being developed by the local government, may accommodate more of the farmers' demands.

"No one should build houses on low ground in the future," he said. "We will expand and improve the living areas on higher ground."

Sources from the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters said on Monday that although there has been less rain in the upper reaches of the Huaihe River in the past two days, experts warn that flood preparations must be stepped up during the respite.

"We are ready at any time to deal with the challenges of a second influx of flood water," said Yang Wenjiu.