

Highway may be free on holidays

By TAN ZONGYANG
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China is expected to waive tolls for vehicles on four important national holidays, as part of an attempt to ease congested traffic during annual travel peaks.

The State Council approved the plan on Wednesday, and the Ministry of Transport, which initiated the idea, is now busy trying to figure out how to implement the waiver, according to an industry insider who did not want to be identified before an official announcement.

Passenger vehicles with seven seats or less will be exempt from tolls during Spring Festival, Qingming Festival (Tomb Sweeping Day), Labor Day on May 1 and National Day on Oct 1, China Land and Resources News, a newspaper under the Ministry of Land and Resources, reported on Tuesday.

"The policy will apply to consecutive holidays of the four vacations. Highways as well as toll bridges and tunnels will be all free to the public," according to the paper's micro blog. It added that the government will also decide whether fees for airport expressways should be waived during those holidays.

The move echoed a previous statement made by He

Jianzhong, spokesman for the Ministry of Transport, who said at a news conference in Beijing last week that progress had been made on the issue as ministries had reached consensus, and the initiative was awaiting approval from the authority.

This year, authorities in eight provinces waived tolls on expressways during the Spring Festival to speed up traffic for millions of travelers heading home for family reunions.

The latest move, which boldly expands the program nationwide, is expected to save travel time and money for more people.

Teng Xuebei, a Beijing motorist who usually drives to her hometown in Heze, Shandong province, for the holidays, hailed the policy.

Teng said the trip from Beijing to her hometown takes about six hours. "But on national holidays, an additional three to four hours is needed because of the congestion caused by traffic jams at toll gates on the borders between provinces," she said.

Li Yunwei, chairman of the Beijing Car Owners' Society, said the move will potentially boost tourism in suburban districts as people will be more likely to take short driving trips on holidays.

"The cost of short-distance travels will be greatly reduced

after tolls are exempted, which makes the travel more economic," he said.

But the policy could also create more congestion on highways.

"The policy brings pressure too as there is a possibility that more people choose to drive on highways, which are already overcrowded on holiday seasons, instead of choosing public transport," said Li Zheliang, an official with the road network monitoring center under the Shanghai Road Administration.

"I'm also worried about the traffic safety at toll stations if vehicles pass through them at high speeds, which are originally designed to make drivers touch their brakes."

Li Yunwei also believes the policy will increase the number of cars on highways during holidays. Whether the policy is a good idea won't be known until it's implemented and used on a holiday, Li said.

Yu Ying, an official at Liaoning province's transport department, said on Wednesday that the department has not received any notices about exempting tolls on holidays. The waiver must first be approved by the province's price department, Yu said.

Shi Yingying in Shanghai and Wu Yong in Shenyang contributed to this story.



LIFE ON A STRING

PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Firefighters rescue a man stuck in a mudslide in Jinggu county, Yunnan province. The region was hit with heavy rains, causing flooding on Tuesday. By Wednesday morning, four people were confirmed dead and 10 missing.

Pavement collapses in heavy rains

By CAO YIN
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With persistent rains battering Beijing, the number of collapsed pavements has been soaring, the city's road and bridge maintenance authority said on Wednesday.

Since the floods on July 21, the Beijing Municipal Bridge Maintenance Management Group, a State-owned enterprise that repairs bridges and roads, has received nearly 300 calls reporting collapses.

"Our hotline operators have received about 25 calls a day after the heavy downpour," said an employee in the emergency information department of the group, who declined to be identified.

On Wednesday morning, a pavement on the crossing between Huajiadi Street and Wanghua Road, in Chaoyang district, caved in, leaving a hole 2 meters deep by more than 10 square meters wide.

No one was injured, the employee said.

According to the maintenance group, the collapse was caused by loosened soils that were eroded by the persistent rains and by leaks in underground water pipes.

A 30-year-old driver named Tang said that even though the collapses are not frequent, he is constantly anxious due to the



WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Workers repair a section of collapsed road in Chaoyang district in Beijing on Wednesday.

recent heavy rains.

On Tuesday afternoon, a man was slightly injured after he fell through a collapsed pavement on the northern part of Baiyun Road, 400 meters from the Muxidi subway station on Chang'an Avenue in Xicheng district, according to the district government's micro blog.

The collapse is believed to be linked to recent repairs of underground electricity pipes in the area, the micro blog said.

The employee with the Beijing maintenance group said that they have dispatched 2,561 workers to deal with collapsed pavements or waterlogged areas in business districts.

"Our workers can repair small holes, with about 1 or 2 square meters, within 24 hours, but for bigger ones we need to work up a plan and think about the underground pipes for natural gas and water," he said.

The group's patrol teams have covered the whole city, paying special attention to lower-ground sections under bridges or on roads, he said.

"We've also used radar vans to estimate underground conditions and help maintenance workers," he added.

In addition, the Beijing government also posted a message on its micro blog providing the maintenance group's hotline and asking people to call the police if they spot dangerous areas.

However, Jiang Zhongguang, a city planning professor at the Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, said the key problem behind the collapsed pavements is lack of regular maintenance.

"Workers didn't fill holes thoroughly and left some gaps, which caused soil erosion," he said, adding the gaps become potential risks in heavy rains.

"The weather is out of our control, but other problems can be solved with regular maintenance," Jiang said.

Li Yu contributed to this story.

Country braces for 2 typhoons

By JIN ZHU in Beijing and SHI YINGYING in Shanghai

East China's coastal regions have begun emergency preparations as two typhoons approached the country on Wednesday.

The center of typhoon Saola, the ninth typhoon this year, was about 210 km southeast of Hualien, Taiwan, at 1 pm on Wednesday, the National Marine Environmental Forecasting Center said.

Typhoon Saola would make landfall over Taiwan's coast or the northeastern waters of the island on Wednesday night or this morning, the center said.

Heavy rains and strong winds from Saola are forecast to hit coastal areas in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces on Thursday night or Friday morning, it said.

The center of the 10th typhoon, Damrey, was about 1,230 km southeast of Rizhao city in East China's Shandong province at 1 pm on Wednesday. The typhoon may land on coastal regions in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces on Thursday night or Friday morning, according to the center.

Premier Wen Jiabao on Wednesday urged local governments to closely monitor the typhoons and their effect on major rivers, and publicize relevant information in a timely manner.

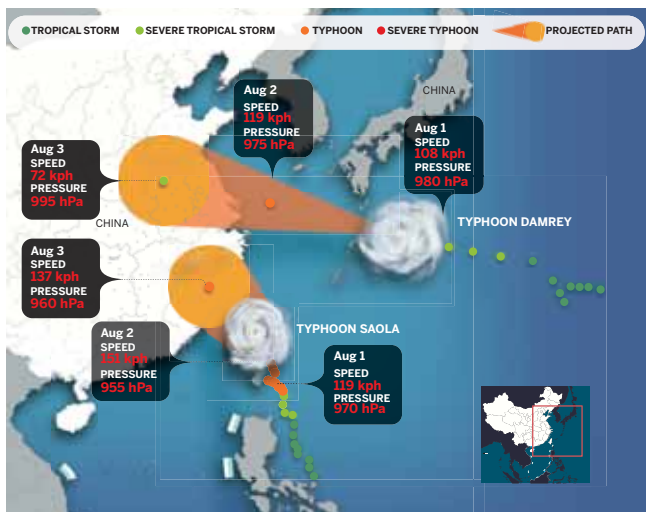
Wen made the remarks in Zhengzhou, Henan province, during his inspection of efforts to prevent flooding in the Yellow River, according to Xinhua News Agency.

"Ensuring people's safety should be prioritized," he said, adding that local authorities should intensify efforts to guard residential areas, schools, factories, mines, railways, highways, and tourism spots from floods.

The State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters said on Tuesday that the upcoming two typhoons are very likely to move further inland after landing on the coastal regions.

Strong winds and heavy rains from the typhoons may

TYPHOONS APPROACHING MAINLAND PROBABLE ROUTES



cover more than 10 provinces in the days ahead, and that would test the country's flood-control capabilities, it said.

On Wednesday, Taiwan issued torrential-rain and strong-wind warnings for most of the island in preparation for Saola after it passed through the Philippines, leaving at least 14 people dead.

Heavy rain fell in Taipei on Wednesday, where authorities were expected to decide whether to order businesses and financial markets to close, Reuters reported.

The Maritime Safety Administration of Fujian province issued a maritime alert on Monday, updating the typhoon information via VHF communication radio and short-message services to warm boats.

The Fujian provincial department of ocean and fisheries said on Wednesday that more than 41,000 fishing boats had been ordered to return to port. It said 8,094 people have been relocated as the typhoon approaches.

On Tuesday, flights between Xiamen and Jinmen, and Quanzhou and Jinmen, have been canceled because of Saola.

The operation of the passenger liners Haixia, which links Fujian province's Pingtan county and Taiwan's Taichung city, and Cosco Star, which travels between Xiamen and Keelung, were also suspended for safety concerns.

In Shanghai, emergency preparation is in place. "It's quite rare that Shanghai will be influenced by two typhoons (Saola and Damrey) at the same time," said Zhang Zhenyu, a spokesman for the city's flood prevention department.

He added that the government of Shanghai is speeding up improvement to the city's drainage system, and that special attention has been paid to the underground metro.

"Every entrance of metro station has been blocked up for a few steps, and we've prepared boards made by aluminum alloy (for further blocking up) and extra drainage pumps just in case," Zhang said.

Feng Hao, spokesman for Shanghai Shentong Metro Group Co, said speed restrictions would be applied to Shanghai's metros if the average speed of the wind reaches 17.2 meters per second or above. "Metro stations may be even temporarily shut down if necessary," he said.

Wind meters were installed for the first time at some of the metro's Line 2 stations, Feng said. The wind-meter readings go directly to the station control room, he added.

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Fishing ban lifted over South China Sea

By JIN HAIXING in Beijing and HUANG YIMING in Haikou

Fishermen in Hainan and Guangdong provinces have resumed operation after the annual fishing ban in the northern part of the South China Sea was lifted on Wednesday, said local fishery authorities.

The fishing ban started on May 16 and ended at midday on Wednesday. The ban is part of ongoing efforts to protect marine resources and promote environmental awareness among fishermen, Huang Zuoping, an official from the South China Sea fishery bureau under the Ministry of Agriculture, told China Daily.

In Yangjiang, a port city in western Guangdong province, more than 1,000 fishing boats headed out to sea on Wednesday for the first time since their forced two-and-a-half-month break, after Liu Kun, a deputy governor of Guangdong, announced the opening of the province's fishing festival.

From Wednesday, more than 14,000 fishing boats registered in Guangdong province will start their journey to the South China Sea to fish, Liu said.

In Hainan province, about

9,000 ships holding 35,611 fishermen affected by the ban are going to fish in the South China Sea, according to Hainan provincial fishery authorities.

Lin Lijin, captain of Qiong Sanya 11181, plans to start fishing offshore from a port in Sanya, Hainan, on Saturday.

"During the past two and a half months, small fish grew large. Every year we will have a harvest of 10 to 20 tons after the fishing ban is lifted. After September, we will fish near Beibu Gulf of Guangxi, and then go to the Xisha Islands in Sansha city," Lin told China Daily on Wednesday.

Lin's ship had just finished an ocean fishing operation in the Nansha Islands from July 12 to July 29 as part of a trial to develop the industry in Nansha, which has abundant fishing resources. Most of the area is excluded in the annual fishing ban.

According to fishery authorities in Hainan, the 18-day operation to Nansha marked the beginning of the province gradually moving from offshore fishing to ocean fishing.

Chen Yiping, who owns a 110-ton ship Qionghai 03889, started his ocean fishing operation on Wednesday afternoon

in waters off the Xisha Islands from Tanmen port in Hainan province.

"Sailors in my ship prepared all the stuff for the operation in recent days. As the voyage is about one month long, we also stored enough vegetables and food," Chen said.

Popular sea products like lobsters and sea snails could be easily found in the Xisha Islands, and fish in the area are much larger than those in offshore areas, the captain said.

Chen said with more ships fishing because the ban is lifted, the price of sea products will drop in the short term.

With the establishment of Sansha city in July, Chen hopes more processing factories will be established in the new city, which could save fishermen time and money.

The fishing ban in the South China Sea, which has been in place since 1999, has been imposed for two and a half months since 2009, and covers areas north of the 12th parallel north, including Huangyan Island but excluding most of the Nansha Islands.

Fishermen who ignore the ban will face punishments such as fines, license revocations, confiscations and pos-

sible criminal charges, according to a statement issued by the fishery bureau under the Ministry of Agriculture. The fishing ban is also applicable to foreign ships.

According to Zheng Weiji, director of Guangdong Administration of Ocean and Fisheries, none of the fishing boats in Guangdong broke any rules during the ban period.

And more than 20,000 law enforcement personnel and 4,000 enforcement vessels patrolled the Guangdong waters to prevent local fishermen from violating the fishing ban, Zheng said.

In East China's Fujian province, a fishing ban was also expected to end on Wednesday, but as the coast is expected to be battered by gales and rainstorms brought about by typhoon Saola from Wednesday to Sunday, the ban was extended in order to protect local fishermen, the fishery authorities of Fujian said.

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