

# Information bulletin



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## India: Floods

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Even as increasing amounts of vital humanitarian assistance arrives in northern India, the swollen Kosi river continues to wreak additional havoc for millions of vulnerable people. According to latest official reports, more than 3.4 million individuals have been directly impacted by unprecedented flooding in a region of India not prone to this kind of disaster. A total of 69 lives have been lost and aid efforts remain hampered by limited access to approximately 1,955 impacted villages across 16 districts in the state of Bihar.

Isolated between the original course of the Kosi river and a new channel that formed when its banks were breached in Nepal, these devastated residents struggle to survive as humanitarian organizations - including the Red Cross Red Crescent - provide assistance in the face of massive logistical challenges. In Bihar alone, about 300,000 homes have been destroyed.



Flooded areas in the state of Bihar

In Bihar, even after the floods recede, large areas of the affected areas might be rendered permanently infertile because of the deposit of gravel and stones that the Kosi waters are likely to leave behind. A local media source has reported that there is a lurking threat of an epidemic in the areas where the flood water has receded. Cases of fever, pneumonia and diarrhoea have been reported in the relief camps, many of which are cramped and crowded with intense heat. In addition, tracing and psychological support are also becoming priority issues for an immediate intervention.

In the state of Assam too, the overall flood situation remained grim even as the water levels of the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries started to recede. The Brahmaputra is still flowing much beyond the danger level from Dibrugarh to Dhubri districts. Over 1.2 million people in 18 districts of the state have been reeling under the impact of the worst-ever flood of the season. According to official sources, around 20,500 people are taking shelter in 134 relief camps. A total of 33,700 marooned people have been evacuated to safer places. The district authorities have taken up relief and rehabilitation measures in the flood affected areas. Food items, fodder, clothes, housing material and medicines for purification of drinking water are being distributed to the flood affected people.

The International Federation is coordinating within and outside the Movement to support the Indian Red Cross Society in responding to the need efficiently.

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## The Situation

The situation remains very grim with serious risk of more flooding in some affected districts. According to the Central Water Commission, in Assam state the Brahmaputra river is rising at Guwahati and Dhubri and the Beki river is at the danger level. In Bihar state, the Ganga river is at danger level in Hathidah and Colgong. Further, the Ganga in West Bengal and Jharkhand states is flowing above the danger mark as well. According to latest weather predictions by the Indian Meteorological Department, fairly widespread rainfall, with isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely over the north-eastern states (Assam, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and sub-Himalayan West Bengal) during the next 48 hours. Warning has been issued of isolated heavy to very heavy

rainfall over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Kerala, coastal Karnataka and Lakshadweep.

The flood situation in the country has been changing and the weather and rainfall patterns have been fluctuating throughout the monsoon season, particularly in Bihar and Assam. In Bihar, people in the worst hit Madhepura, Supaul, Saharsa and Araria continue to reel under the impact of floods, though there is some improvement in the situation as the flood waters recede. Flood water is now spreading in low lying areas of Purnia, Khagaria and Katihar districts. The media and government sources have reported that the situation in Purnia and Bhagalpur districts has been aggravated due to isolated heavy showers in these districts. Some of the people are slowly returning to their homes, or to what is left of these. Three human deaths have been reported in last 24 hours taking the total death toll in Bihar to 69. With over 3.4 million people affected in 1,955 villages spread across 16 districts of the state.

**Table 1: district level situation in Bihar**

	District	Population affected	Villages affected	Relief camps	People in camps
1	Supaul	893,790	243	38	65,000
2	Madhepura	1,022,000	378	45	53,000
3	Araria	250,000	30	60	60,000
4	Saharsa	250,000	35	41	N/A
5	Katihar	62,015	26	N/A	N/A
6	Purnia	150,000	N/A	6	N/A

*Source: Ministry of Home Affairs*

In Assam, the flood situation seems to be worsening again with heavy to very heavy rainfall reported in the state, with extremely heavy rainfall in a few parts. Two human deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours and in total 17 lives have been lost so far in the state. Over 1.3 million people have been affected in 1,330 villages spread across 13 districts of the state. According to government owned media sources, road communication remained virtually cut off in most parts of the worst-hit Majuli river island and parts of North Lakhimpur, Morigaon and Kamrup districts. A world heritage site, the Kaziranga National Park, famous for its one-horned rhinos, has also been affected by these current floods.

According to the latest reports from the Ministry of Home Affairs, this year 18.9 million people have been affected by the floods and 1,844 lives have been lost. Approximately 566,258 permanent houses have been destroyed and 449,395 houses partially damaged.

**Table 2**

	Area of assistance	Assam	Bihar
1	People evacuated	33,700	804,996
2	Relief camps	189	284
3	People in relief camps	20,350	282,393
4	Medical teams deployed	N/A	177
5	Cattle camps	N/A	102
6	Boats deployed	85	2,743
7	Health centres	N/A	249

### Government action in Bihar

The state health department is reportedly undertaking a massive vaccination drive against contagious viral diseases in the badly affected districts of Supaul, Madhepura, Katihar, Araria, Purnea, Bhagalpur and Saharsa. A few diarrhoea cases have also been reported in the affected districts. Bleaching powder and chlorine tablets are being distributed in the affected parts of the state. Ten community water treatment plants, each with a capacity to filter 5,000 litres in eight hours, are being immediately dispatched to Bihar. A six member high level team, led by the director of the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, is visiting the flood affected areas in Bihar to assess the health situation.

In view of the shortage of ambulances in the state, the state government is airlifting 40 ambulances from different states. The central government dispatched 300,000 kilograms of essential drugs for distribution, which includes 37 different drugs, as well as 10 million chlorine tablets. A total of 100 fogging machines, along with malaria and dengue fever diagnostic kits, are being sent by the Delhi state government. The centre has also mobilized 15,000 mosquito nets and is also in the process of releasing 20,000 more. The central government is advising the state government to initiate a drive against measles in the state, especially in the relief camps, and is sending 0.5 million doses of the required vaccine.

The government deployed 19 teams of the national disaster response force (NDRF) in Bihar, along with 153 motorized boats in Supaul, Madhepura, Araria and Purnia districts, for flood and relief duties. About 37 army teams have been called for assistance and two relief teams from the navy. Seventeen helicopters have been deputed by the air force.

The Chief Minister of Bihar has issued an appeal through national newspapers and has expressed his gratitude for the spontaneous help from various government institutions, NGOs and international agencies for their support in mitigating the unprecedented devastation caused by the Kosi river flooding. According to him, the state government is equipped and unrelenting in its efforts for evacuation and distribution of relief material. He has appealed to NGOs and other institutions to supplement the efforts of the state government. While financial contribution needs to be sent to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, all relief materials from individuals will be channelized through the Indian Red Cross Society. Purnia district has been the centre/base for flood relief and response operations for the government and other organizations.

### Government action in Assam

Five teams of NDRF (about 190 personnel) have been deployed at Hailakandi, Kendukona, Dakuakhana, Golakganj and Simon Chapori, along with 07 motorized boats, for the flood rescue operation. The Chief Minister has released the State Calamity Relief Fund and delegated special powers to the deputy commissioners to utilize these funds for flood control and relief. The Chief Minister has also put special emphasis on baby food and clothes. The government has announced a compensation for INR 100,000 (approximately CHF 2,530) for each family who has lost a member, INR 25,000 (approximately CHF 630) for a permanent house destroyed and INR 10,000 (approximately CHF 250) for a temporary house destroyed. Special grants have also been announced for those families whose crops have been lost.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

### National Headquarters action

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) is playing an essential role in relief efforts throughout the affected areas, supporting rescues, evacuations and the distribution of relief supplies such as kitchen sets, mosquito nets, and basic food supplies. They have also deployed water and sanitation units that are capable of producing 5,000 litres each per hour of clean water for drinking and hygiene purposes. Trained IRCS volunteers have also been distributing basic medicines and leading health education discussions in temporary camps to help reduce the risk of disease among those displaced by the floods.



A floods coordination meeting at the IRCS' Control Room for the floods operation

IRCS is meeting daily to review the situation and to discuss the next steps. This meeting includes the head of International Federation's India Office, while several other technical meetings are being held daily between the IRCS and the International Federation to best coordinate the relief efforts and the best response to the affected areas. The control room for the flood operation is functioning and is the place for many meetings and collection of various figures needed to have an effectual operation.

National and international donations are reaching the IRCS national head quarters. A big corporate house (Nestle) has donated processed foods worth INR 1 million (CHF 25,350) for flood affected people to the IRCS, through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This

would be distributed by the Bihar state branch through its network. The World Health Organisation (WHO) office in Delhi donated INR 500,000 (CHF 12,670) to support the flood relief in Bihar. The donation will be used to cover contingencies for immediate health delivery needs.

The Australian Red Cross has offered a light water and sanitation unit with a capacity to produce 5,000 litres of safe water per hour (adequate for 5,000 persons), together with two 5,000 litres storage water bladders, two six tap stands for supplying water stored in the bladders and 2,000 jerry cans for the Bihar flood operation. The water treatment equipment will be deployed with two trained and skilled personnel. Australia Red Cross will also provide 30 squatting plates and 1 latrine sanplast mould box. This donation is highly appreciated and will be of a great assistance to ensure safe drinking water for the affected people in Bihar.

### Bihar state branch action

According to the government, all financial assistance for the Bihar floods is to be routed through the Chief Minister's Relief Fund and in-kind donation is to be routed through the IRCS' Bihar state branch. The Hindustan Times (a leading English daily) provided contact details of IRCS' Bihar state branch on its front page for the public to send in-kind donations and to appeal for family packs, with clear specifications about the contents of such packs. The Bihar state branch has been receiving the in-kind goods and the storage and distribution of these items are ongoing.

A state flood control room is functioning in Bihar's capital city Patna, manned by 20 volunteers. Three storage houses have been created in the Bihar state branch, one for medical items and two for general in-kind donations. According to the state branch, immediate needs include tarpaulin sheets and jerry cans for storing clean drinking water.

**Table 3: Immediate needs of IRCS' Bihar state branch**

1	Safe drinking water	water purification tablets
2	Shelter	Tarpaulins/tents
3	Family packs / Kitchen sets	Clothing, cooking utensils, buckets/jerry cans
4	Health and Hygiene	Water purification tablets/halogen tablets, bleaching powder, medical assistance, hygiene kits
5	Mosquito nets	
6	Distribution costs	
7	Operational costs	

Based on discussions between the International Federation and the IRCS, the International Federation will provide technical support to set up a joint assessment with partner national societies and Secretariat representatives to assess the needs of the affected people in Bihar during the coming days. The support will be provided through the International Federation's country and regional offices in Delhi. An evaluation of the current and mid-term needs will take place. The terms of reference and plan for the floods assessment were shared during a meeting between the IRCS Secretary General and the heads of the India Office and South Asia Regional Delegation. Exact dates have not been set yet for this assessment, but it was agreed that the team would comprise of IRCS trained national disaster response team members and disaster management trained personnel, together with trained staff from the International Federation and/or partner national societies.

**Table 4: Ranking of the most affected districts in Bihar**

1. Madhepura	IRCS does not have a district branch
2. Supaul	District branch exists
3. Shaharsa	District branch exists
4. Araria	District branch exists
5. Purnia	District branch exists
6. Katihar	District branch exists

Source: IRCS' Bihar state branch

### Assam state branch action

IRCS' Assam state branch is distributing relief materials to the affected people who have lost everything in the flood. IRCS members and volunteers, community health workers and personnel to provide first aid are working in coordination with the district authorities. Due to paralyzed communication, the entire assessment process has been disturbed. Trained IRCS volunteers are taking precautionary measurements to avoid the spreading of any kind of epidemic that usually strikes after a heavy flood. Health check-up camps have been organized in the surrounding areas to cope up with the health related problems. Free medicine distribution camps are also organized in cooperation with concerned health departments. Volunteers are working day and night with a team of experts. Water purification measures have been carried out so as to avoid any water borne epidemics. Awareness camps have been conducted on chlorination and filtration techniques. Relief camps have been organized in various districts where volunteers are working round the clock.

IRCS' Assam state branch and the civil administration has started an immediate flood relief operation among the affected people of Rangia district. IRCS relief materials, including water purifying tablets, have already been released. Relief material is being distributed in Majuli, Morigaon, Lakhimpur, Dhakuwakhana,

Kamrup, Mangaldoi (Darrang), Rangia and Karbi Anglong districts. The state branch has entered remote areas to distribute relief materials to the most affected people.

**Table 5: Relief material distributed by IRCS' Assam state branch**

Sl. No.	Relief Items	Quantity
1.	Mosquito net	1,000
2.	Blanket	1,000
3.	Tarpaulin	1,000
4.	Dhoti/Sari	500/500
5.	Toilet Pan	25/25
6.	Jerrycan	100

### Federation Action

The International Federation's India Office will release funds through its Funding Support Plan (2008-09) to support the IRCS to procure urgently required relief items as listed below.

**Table 6**

Sl. No.	Item	Quantity
1.	Candle packets	50,000
2.	Match Boxes	100,000
3.	Water purification tablets	2,000,000
4.	ORS (sachets)	50,000

The India Office has established twice daily meetings to discuss the most updated developments and to better coordinate the response given to the IRCS. The meetings, every morning at 9 am and every afternoon at 4 pm, are open to all Movement partners. The move has been appreciated by the partner national societies present in India.

South Asia Regional Delegation has activated the South Asia Floods Task Force to monitor, coordinate and report at the regional level on the floods in India, Nepal and Bangladesh during this 2008 monsoon season. The task force will have close communication with each country national society and International Federation country offices on their specific situations. The task will focus on the floods as a regional phenomenon and address common issues in a more united manner. The task force will meet on a daily basis as long as required and send consolidated updates to interested stakeholders.

The International Federation is in the process of arranging for CHF one million to be released from its Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) to assist the IRCS with the most urgent relief items required in the flood affected areas. The funds will be used to procure and transport relief items, such as tents, tarpaulins, kitchen sets and hygiene parcel. The procurement will be done through existing framework agreements and shipments from existing partner national societies and the International Federation stocks in Dubai or Kuala Lumpur. An evaluation is ongoing to seek the most economical way to ship the relief items to India and onwards to the most affected areas. The high transport cost could limit the procurement of essential relief items.

**The IRCS, through its Secretary General, reiterated that it is highly appreciative of any international assistance provided from the International Federation and its member national societies and external partners, and reiterated that all assistance offered by the International Federation and its members is highly valued and will be acknowledged. All assistance will be used to serve the affected people and the distributions will be done in a transparent manner and following standard Red Cross systems.**

## How we work

*All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

## Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

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