

Information bulletin



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

India: Floods

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The state of Bihar is facing one of the worst floods in 50 years, as the river Kosi in Nepal has discharged huge levels of water, running down to the bordering districts of Bihar and inundating them. A two kilometre long breach in the mud embankment has led to a change in the course of the river Kosi, which has caused this flooding, including inundation of those districts in Bihar which have not been affected by floods in past 50 years.

So far, 2.6 million people have been affected in the state and 47 people killed¹ since the breach occurred earlier this week. The state administration was not adequately prepared to handle such a situation. Presently the inter-agency group in the state and the government are mobilising resources to combat the situation in the state and to set up an emergency relief operation.



A group of women and children, marooned due to the floods in the state of Bihar, move out of a flooded area.

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) has taken a lead, with its trained volunteers and staff at the state and district levels. The IRCS national headquarters has been in regular contact with its branch, monitoring the day-to-day development of the floods.

The Prime Minister of India has declared the Bihar floods a national calamity. He undertook an aerial survey of the affected areas and declared a relief package of INR 100 million (CHF 2.5 million or USD 2.3 million), along with the release of 0.1 million tonnes of food grain for the state. He has given an assurance that a high-level committee will interact with the Nepal government regarding control measures for the Kosi flooding.

[<click here to view a map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)

The Situation

On 18 August 2008, a major breach (about 2 kilometres in length) occurred in the eastern embankment of the Kosi river in Kusha (Indo-Nepal border). More than 3.7 million litres of water was discharged through the breach, flooding hundreds of villages in the districts of northern Bihar. Government sources (National Disaster Management Division) have indicated the following figures so far:

No. of district affected	16
No. of villages affected	1,598
No. of people killed	47
No. of people affected	2.6 million
No. of houses destroyed	227,969

The 16 affected districts include Muzaffarpur, Supaul, Patna, Katihar, Nalanda, Araria, West Champaran,

¹ Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

Shekhpura, Saharsa, Purnea, Saran, Begusarai, Bhagalpur, Madhepura, Vaishali and Khagaria. Due to this huge breach in its embankment, the Kosi river has changed its course and is now flowing through areas that have not experienced major floods in the recent past. Since the affected areas were traditionally not flood prone, people as well as the local administration were not adequately prepared to deal with the floods.

In the affected districts, the road linkages as well as water and electricity supply are badly disrupted. Railway tracks at several places have also been submerged. Another major area of concern is that due to continued flow of water from the breached embankment, displaced people will not be able to go back to their original locations for at least another two or three months. As the water will not recede until the embankment is repaired, until then people will have to stay in relief camps being run by the government. Most of the displaced population that is staying in the open does not have temporary shelter material and very few have plastic sheets. Therefore, they have to make do with bed sheets and sarees (women's clothing item).

The general hygiene conditions in the camps are very poor. As toilets in the camps are inadequate, people are resorting to open defecation. This poses a great health risk with water and vector borne diseases. A few cases of diarrhea have already been reported, which has the potential to increase given the scorching heat, unsafe water and poor environment conditions.

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The Indian Meteorological Department has forecasted scattered to widespread rainfall and isolated heavy showers over parts of some north-eastern states of India (Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Meghalaya), sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Bihar and along the west coast during next four to five days.

According to Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) sources, the flood situation in the state of **Assam**, on 28th August, also turned grim with vast tracts of land inundated by the rising of the Brahmaputra river and three of its tributaries to danger levels in several districts of the state. This posed a serious threat at Morigaon, Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Nameri and Dhuburi districts. Morigaon district was inundated with fresh floods, with 80 villages and 6,800 hectares of paddy fields being severely affected.

According to IRCS sources, the states of **Punjab** and **Uttar Pradesh** have been receiving light to moderate rainfall with intermittent heavy rains in some parts of the state. So far, 1.6 million people have been affected from 3,686 villages in 21 districts in Uttar Pradesh and 194,675 people have been affected from 849 villages in 11 districts in Punjab.

A total of 12 million people have been affected throughout the country this year and approximately 1,600 people have been killed in 19 states² (Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab).

Government action in Bihar:

The government is focusing on the provision of food packets to the affected population. They are confident of meeting the food requirement of the displaced population with the help of local traders association, youth groups and NGOs. Special magistrates have been appointed in the state by the government to report on the ongoing flood operation. Government agencies are reviewing the water availability in all camps; the water is being provided through hand pumps, which are insufficient given the scale of the displaced population. In many relief camps run by the government, local agencies like traders associations and local NGOs are providing a combination of both cooked and ready-to-eat material. The government has sent essential medicines to the affected areas but there are very few doctors available in these locations. The Ministry of Home Affairs has provided the following information on government action so far:

No. of relief camps set up	155
No. of health centres functioning	117
No. of veterinary centres functioning	55
No. of food packets air dropped to date	16,540
No. of polythene distributed	9,055
No. of boats in use	1,491
No. of motor boats in use	53

² Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

No. of national disaster response force members deployed	371
No of helicopters is use – three helicopters have been successful in dropping 40 sorties. In total, 16,540 food packets have been dropped.	

UN action in Bihar:

UNICEF

- Pre-positioned supplies of essential items are being distributed in flood-affected areas of Bihar.
- UNICEF continues to be on alert and maintain close monitoring and assessment of the situation, along with the government and NGO partners.
- UNICEF considers the flood situation in Bihar grim and is scaling-up its intervention to fulfill the needs of the flood affected population, especially women and children.

UNDP

- UNDP personnel deployed at the state and district levels have been supporting the state and district administrations in flood coordination, including of relief activities in flood-affected areas, as well as in information management.
- Around 150 volunteers trained under the UNDP-government of India disaster risk management programme have been engaged at the relief centers and in rescue and evacuation in Supaul district.

The Sphere India meeting (inter-agency forum) was called to plan a unified response on 28th August in Patna (capital of Bihar). The recommendation of the meeting was that an immediate emergency assessment is required and, since many of the affected areas are presently inaccessible, the compilation of secondary information should be stressed on in order to draw conclusions.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The IRCS leadership has exhibited deep concern on the flood situation in Bihar. The IRCS national headquarters has been in constant dialogue with its state branches to take stock of the emerging needs. The pre-positioning of disaster preparedness stock by the national society, at the state level, proved beneficial. The Bihar state branch had received 5,000 non-food family packs as reserves in the year 2007 that were pre-positioned all over the state for immediate mobilisation at the time of a disaster. The Saharsa district branch in Bihar immediately forwarded its 200 non-food family packs to one of the worst affected Supaul district in the state, which were distributed to the affected families by trained IRCS volunteers from the district. In addition, the IRCS national headquarters has released 5,000 non-food family packs, 1,000 tarpaulin sheets and 250 family tents from its regional warehouse in Bahadurgarh (state of Haryana) and will also deploy three water purification units in Bihar.

The IRCS relief committee meeting was held on 22nd August in Patna, and it was decided to immediately despatch relief packs to the six most affected districts in Bihar, viz. Araria, Khagaria, Madhepura, Saupaul, Purnia, Kathihar. IRCS staff and volunteers are playing a vital role in providing First Aid, rescue and evacuation services, along with awareness raising on the preparation of oral re-hydration solutions (ORS), organising free health check-up camps and distributing essential medicines. These volunteers also facilitated the distribution of 400 tarpaulin sheets in Supaul district, provided by the local administration to the district branch of the IRCS for further distribution. The district chapters of the IRCS' state branch in Bihar are working closely with the district magistrate in the flood response operation, as they are the key decision makers.

Two district level disaster preparedness supervisors appointed by the IRCS are assessing the flood situation in Khagaria district of Bihar. In addition, these supervisors are also forming teams and visiting the affected communities to raise awareness on water and sanitation and hygiene promotion through printed information, education, communication (IEC) material.

Good coordination is visible among the IRCS' district chapters in Bihar, and they are sharing financial and technical resources. For instance, the secretary of the Bhagalpur district branch was deployed for an assessment in one of the worst affected areas in Supaul district. In addition, IRCS volunteers have been mobilized from the district headquarters to provide First Aid and rescue and evacuation of marooned people, as well as to undertake emergency assessments in the worst affected areas. The IRCS' state disaster management centre is also in touch with all the affected district branches.

The district branches of Supaul, Purunia, Araria and Khagaria have medical centres with doctors and para-medical staff, which have been kept in readiness to support the government health teams that are awaiting deployment. The St. John's Ambulance has also mobilised its volunteers for rescue and relief work. These teams are proactively supporting the Madhepura district as this district has no past experience of flooding. A total of 300

evacuated families from Madhepura have been provided shelter in relief camps run by the Saharsa district. The Saharsa district branch is coordinating with the district administration to provide food to these evacuated families.

The IRCS' state branch in Assam is also continuously monitoring the situation, is in touch with the district authorities and is keeping the national headquarters informed about the developing flood situation.

The IRCS national headquarters, along with the International Federation, is closely monitoring the flood situation and is in regular contact with the affected state branches. The International Federation's India office is closely following up, with the IRCS national headquarters, on the latest situation and arising needs of the state branches and is willing to extend technical support in carrying out emergency needs assessment in the flood affected areas. The International Federation has been coordinating information flow within and outside the Movement and supporting the national society in its efforts. The Head of the India office is maintaining coordination with all partner national societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The International Federation attended the emergency meeting called on Bihar floods by the Sphere India managing committee in Delhi this week, and shared the IRCS' action with the other humanitarian agencies. The International Federation will attend the UNDMT meeting on the Bihar floods to share the IRCS' action and be exposed to more information from the other UN bodies.

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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[map below; click here to return to the title page](#)



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