

Bihar Floods: Appeal for Relief Funds

Friday 5 September 2008, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 4 September 2008).

Dear Friends,

Some 12 districts of Bihar - Muzaffarpur, Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura, Katihar, Araria, West Champaran, Khagaria, Sitamarhi, Patna and Nalanda are reeling under the worst flooding of the Kosi in the last half century. Millions are affected and many lives lost.

The Bihar Government launched rescue and relief operations a full week after the first breach in the Kosi embankment - and even today, affected people remain stranded due to an acute shortage of rescue boats, and starved of basic emergency necessities like food, polythene sheets, medicine and medical care. Activists of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation [CPI (ML)] and the All India Agricultural Labourers Association (AIALA) on the ground, particularly in some of the worst-affected areas of Supaul, Araria and Madhepura, as well as in all other affected districts in Bihar, are at the forefront of organising rescue and relief operations. They are organising volunteers, and are guiding Government agencies and getting them to heed the voices and needs of the affected.

Contributions are urgently called for, ideally in the form of cash to procure food, polythene sheets and medicine. We are conducting a nationwide campaign for flood relief in Bihar. We appeal to you to make your contributions by cheque/draft in favour of "CPIML". Also indicate that the donation is for "Bihar Flood Relief".

Please mail your donations to:

U-90, Shakarpur

Delhi 110 092, India.

It is also important that we realise that the present tragedy, as well as the yearly devastation of floods in Bihar, are not a divinely decreed 'Deluge,' as Bihar's ruling political class has tended to declare. It is a man-made tragedy, caused by callous negligence in basics like maintenance and repair of embankments, and also in the failure of successive Governments in Bihar and Delhi to implement comprehensive plans for flood-management. These Governments must indeed answer why the flood-management plans made for the Kosi river right since India's independence and even discussed on the floor of Parliament, are yet to be implemented 61 years later - when rural poor are forced to bear the cruel brunt of this neglect year after year.

CPIML (Liberation)

In addition to contributing towards the relief effort, please sign the online petition to the President of India. The petition demands a judicial enquiry into the deep-seated and long-standing institutional apathy and criminal negligence of governments in both Patna and Delhi towards the floods which wreak havoc in Bihar every year. The URL is:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/Floods08/petition.html>

Click here:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/Flood...>

To: President of India

Smt. Pratibha Patil,

Hon'ble President,

Republic of India

Rashtrapati Bhavan

New Delhi

Urgent Appeal for Intervention in Man-Made Flood Disaster in Bihar

Dear Madam President,

As you are aware, the people of large tracts of Bihar are facing devastating floods. Several million people have lost their homes. The situation is grim in over 900 villages with the districts of Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura and Araria the worst affected.

Bihar is one of the most flood-affected states of India. This has been a longstanding problem, but half-hearted flood control measures, and haphazard development plans have aggravated the problem.

The Chief Minister of Bihar Shri Nitish Kumar and the Prime Minister Shri Manmohan Singh have both termed the floods to be a natural calamity - in Nitish Kumar's words, a 'pralay' (mythical apocalyptic deluge). Nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that the flood disaster which is devastating the lives of millions, is entirely man-made - a creation of decades of criminal callousness and negligence on part of governments both in Patna and Delhi. We the undersigned wish to draw the following to your attention:

- The Bihar administration launched relief and rescue operations more than a week after the first breach developed in the Kosi embankment, and till date, there remains an acute shortage of basic facilities like rescue boats and polythene sheets, and food is yet to reach most of the affected people.
- Repair and maintenance work on the Kosi barrage and the embankment along the Kosi river were supposed to be the responsibility of the Bihar Government, according to the bilateral agreement with Nepal in 1954. Any attempt on the part of India to escape responsibility by blaming Nepal is baseless, and cannot in any way help the people of Bihar.
- The notion propagated by the Bihar Chief Minister that this year the discharge of water was of 'catastrophic/deluge' proportions is a myth: it is poor maintenance and consequent weakening of the

embankment that is at fault. This year the Kosi embankment has broken with the discharge of less than 1.5 lakh cusecs of water; in 2004, it broke at 2.68 lakh cusecs; in past years, it has been known to withstand up to 9 lakh cusecs.

- Plans for flood management, chalked out right from independence, have not been implemented in 61 years. Ever since 1947, flood control measures for the Kosi river have been debated even on the floor of Parliament. The 1951 Bhabha plan for the Kosi suggested developing an integral planning framework embracing all the major rivers of the region and evolving measures like dams, check dams, barrages, reservoirs, canals and reopening the old natural links among the rivers. Unfortunately the Flood Control Policy of 1954 was restricted to building embankments, and the original Bhabha plan was subsequently discarded on the pretext that funds were not available, and that the electricity which would be generated was not needed! Today the Indian government is going for a Nuclear Deal in the name of power shortage; why has the Bhabha plan not been implemented in all these years? The Central and Bihar Governments must answer for the failure to implement any comprehensive flood-management strategy despite yearly tragedy in Bihar.

- Each year in the name of maintenance of the old embankments and construction of many more unnecessary new embankments, crores of rupees are spent to serve the interests of a nexus of engineers, politicians and contractors. The Government of Bihar has, over the years, constructed 3438 km of embankments on various rivers. But a permanent resolution of the problem has never been seriously addressed, either by the Centre or the State government.

- Successive Bihar governments have retrenched thousands of seasonal and casual workers in the department responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of embankments. These workers are local inhabitants whose job was to collect information regarding the piping, breaches and erosion on the embankments. Now embankment security has been abandoned with the retrenchment of these workers. Due to silting, riverbeds have become higher, while the height and strength of embankments remains unchanged. No steps are being taken to overhaul the riverbeds. Such neglect of basic preventive measures is nothing but criminal negligence.

- The recommendations of the Sanyal Committee have been ignored. Following the devastation caused by floods in 2007, an expert committee set up by the Bihar Government and headed by N. Sanyal recommended restoration of existing embankments to their proper profiles and levels as a top priority; and observed that there is an urgent need to enhance the funds for maintenance of embankments to the required standards. In addition, it had suggested that the Government procure driving sheet piles and geo-textile bags to be air-dropped during floods as emergency measures to boost the embankments. None of the suggested measures were acted upon.

- Relief operations during floods have been a source of loot for successive Bihar governments. This year, too, people deprived of relief have angrily accosted the few leaders of ruling political parties who have toured the villages (most have confined themselves to aerial surveys) - because they are starved of relief while corrupt officials make hay while the rain pours!

We appeal to you to intervene urgently in the matter, and ensure that

a) Immediate relief (rescue boats, polythene sheets, food, and medical care) is made available to the people of the affected areas

b) Comprehensive measures are adopted for river management and flood control

c) Proper maintenance of embankments with the latest materials and equipment be taken up as a priority

In addition to this, we appeal to you to order a judicial enquiry into the negligence by Governments at the Centre and State which have resulted in the devastating dimensions of the recurrent flood problem in Bihar.

Hoping for your urgent attention and intervention,

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

Bihar Floods: Criminal Negligence, Not Divine Deluge

** From ML Update, 2-8 September, 2008.*

The Nitish Kumar regime's boasts of 'Bihar Shining' are now submerged by the cries of Bihar Drowning. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's claims of 'good governance' have proved a washout in the face of the floods, and now the Chief Minister is trying to paint the floods as a 'natural' calamity or divine 'Deluge' ('Pralay'). Nothing could be further from the truth. The flood devastation was highly preventable - and is a direct result of callous negligence of basic flood-prevention strategies by Governments both at Patna and Delhi. Despite the fact that every year breaches in embankments cause floods in the State, maintenance and repair of embankments were rampantly neglected. It took the Bihar Chief Minister two weeks after the first breach appeared in the Kosi embankment to begin the most primary initiatives for evacuation, rescue and relief. As the Kosi changed its course and flood waters covered entire villages, affecting over 25 lakh (250, 000) people in nearly 12 districts of the State, the desperate pleas for help were ignored by the State Government. Even today - in all the flood-affected areas, there is an acute shortage of rescue motorboats and boats, as well as food, drinking water, polythene sheets and other emergency essentials. At the Centre too, the Prime Minister apparently woke up late to the magnitude of the calamity. And United Progressive Alliance (UPA) leader and Rail Minister Laloo Yadav (whose home constituency Madhepura is one of the worst-affected areas) has been fiddling as the floods swallow Bihar. His gesture of donating his 'earnings' at a TV reality show Paanchvi Pass mocks at the misery of the flood-affected people. Of course, that's nothing new. When Laloo Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) ruled Bihar, he is the one who made the remark (worthy of Marie Antoinette) that floods are good for the poor because that's when fish from the ponds of the rich swim into the homes of the poor.

In the mirror of the Bihar's flood waters every year, the rot in Bihar's polity and society can be seen starkly: its nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and middlemen for whom the floods are a bonanza; criminalised goons governing and monopolising the structures of rescue and relief; and state repression on protesting people. Even last year, there were instances of police firing on protesting flood victims. A few years back, Time Magazine had lionised a young Bihar District Magistrate Gautam Goswami for his sterling work in flood relief - later it came out that he, along with thugs backed by ruling politicians, had siphoned off crores of funds meant for flood victims. This year too - the same story is unfolding. Recent reports in papers indicate that thugs are cornering rescue boats for themselves and are snatching and hoarding relief materials.

In the same mirror, we can also see clearly the sordid reality behind the Central Government's

boasts of '9% growth', of India being a 'rising Asian superpower', and 61 years of planning and development in independent India. Chronic hunger and starvation in India, we know, is not due to 'natural' drought and famine but due to deliberate institutional callousness and skewed priorities. The same is the case with floods too - plans for flood control on the Kosi river have been shelved and sidelined year after year for half a century. In 1951, the people of eastern Bihar had faced the fury of the Kosi's floods - and as a result, comprehensive plans had been chalked out to tame the floods. In keeping with these plans, a treaty was signed with Nepal in 1954 and the foundation laid for the Kosi Barrage in 1959. But subsequently the other dimensions of the Kosi Project were forgotten and neglected by successive Governments at Bihar and the Centre. Under the bilateral agreement with Nepal in 1954, maintenance and repair of embankments on the Kosi were the Bihar government's responsibility. Today, in order to explain away its neglect of that responsibility, Governments of India and Bihar are seeking to shift blame for the floods onto Nepal.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the underbelly of the superpower USA - the mightiest Army in the world failed to protect its people; racist callousness of the Government towards the (largely Black) poor of Louisiana was on display; and the myth of corporate 'efficiency' was exploded. In contrast, Cuba (David to the US' Goliath) did a far more creditable job of protecting its people when the same hurricane hit its shores. The episode proved that in dealing with such crises, it is the priorities of nations and administrations that are more decisive than actual affluence or wealth. It is concern for and participation of common people which is actually effective and 'efficient', while corporatized governance displays efficiency only in greed and loot. The floods in Bihar prove the same.

As the people of Bihar battle the floods, the first priority must of course be rescue, relief and humanitarian helping hands. But our concern also demands that we take Governments at Patna and Delhi to task for their apathy and negligence, so that the yearly recurrence of the tragedy can be prevented. Activists of our party and mass organisations in the affected districts of Bihar are at the forefront of rescue and relief activities. Apart from rescue, relief and rehabilitation as well as compensation for the flood-affected, we are also demanding that a time-bound judicial enquiry be set up to investigate the many instances of negligence by Governments in the matter of flood-control.

View online : [To sign the petition](#)

P.S.

* From ML International Newsletter, September-October 2008.