

India: Government negligence responsible for flood disaster

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The floods that have devastated the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu have again revealed criminal negligence on the part of all sections of political establishment towards the lives of working people. The death toll in the state since early November has risen to 347. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced and more than 50,000 are still living in temporary camps.

There have been protests across the state by flood victims over the lack of assistance from authorities. In a number of places, people vented their frustration and anger by blocking roads, including in Sathyavani Muthu Nagar, Manali, Nehru Nagar, Valasaravakkam and Virukambakkam.

The state capital Chennai was effectively cut off for days in early December with all highways closed, its international airport shut and mobile networks not operating. Although heavy rains stopped Wednesday, hundreds of thousands of people in the worst-hit areas lack essentials like water, electricity, milk and other food items.

Three days after the rain stopped, officials in the state capital Chennai had still not acted to drain the flood water from several parts of city. Tens of thousands of people in the capital and across the state are yet to be rescued and properly assisted. According to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, flooding has affected more than 20,000 hectares of paddy fields in Cuddalore and other districts.

Facing mounting public anger over the inaction of authorities, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa Jayaram, who heads the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Khazhakam (AIADMK), told the media: "Losses are unavoidable when there's very heavy rain." While the torrential rain was the heaviest in more than a century, the death and destruction has mainly been caused by the failure of successive governments at

the central, state and city levels to take preventative measures, including the building and maintenance of a proper flood control drainage system.

Several experts have pointed out that unplanned urbanisation in Chennai to facilitate investment has constricted existing flood plains and drainage systems contributing to the current devastation. Nityanand Jayaraman, a Chennai-based environmental activist, said that one major IT park, which is currently inundated, had been built on a drainage area. A new runway at Chennai airport, which was opened last year, was built on a flood plain of the Adyar River. "The Chennai floods are a sign of things to come," he warned.

The *Times of India* reported: "There has been an outpouring of anger on social media against 'AIADMK goons' insisting that 'Amma' (Jayalalithaa) stickers be placed on relief materials coming into the city. NGOs are being bullied into slapping the stickers with pictures of chief minister and AIADMK chief J. Jayalalithaa with a benign smile on her face, on bags of food and other relief materials. Goons claiming to be AIADMK cadres have also resorted to extortion."

This crude attempt by the AIADMK to cover up the government's failure exposes their utter contempt for the working people who are the victims of the floods.

The WSWS reporters visited a badly affected area of Chennai, Sidco Nagar near Villivakkam, and spoke to flood victims.

Elumalai, 31, a three-wheeler taxi driver, said: "The government has not taken any precautionary measures and did not clear the canals. The main reason for flooding in Sidco Nagar is the disappearance of Wheels India lake. Men from all political parties occupied this area, filled in the lake with sand meant for Metro rail work, leveled the ground and sold the land. As a result

after the heavy rain, the water couldn't drain away and flooded all the houses in the area. Around 300 huts occupied by poor people have been submerged."

Jayanti, 35, explained: "My husband is a vegetable seller on the streets. Due to continuous rain for a month it was not possible to maintain our sales. We are struggling for food and drinking water. We don't have money to buy vegetables to sell. The compensation package announced by the government is totally inadequate. We don't even know when that meagre amount will be given to us. The situation of many poor people in these areas remains the same."

Jeyalaksmi, 21, said: "We sold our jewelry and leased a house. In the first week of the rain, the electricity supply was cut off and in the second week, following more flooding, the shops were closed in the area. We could not buy milk for our child. Only now have we been given milk, food and drinking water by volunteer organisations. All our home appliances were damaged by the flood."

Kasturi, 53, said: "I am living in a small rented house. As a widow I only get 1,000 rupees [\$US29] pension [each month]. It is completely inadequate for my family. None of the governments have provided me with any other benefits. Now we are thrown into the streets following the heavy rain and floods. As well as not helping the victims, the men from the ruling party are trying to stop aid meant for us. People in this area took the initiative to drain the clogged water. This situation will be repeated in the next monsoon season. Write on your website about the difficulties we are facing."

A Chennai Corporation transport worker told the WSWS: "We have been staying on the roof of our flats for several days without electricity and water. Our ground floors have been completely flooded. We have been receiving help—food parcels and drinking water—from volunteer and Muslim organisations more than from the government agencies. The entire Sidco Nagar area has been submerged. Around 30,000 families are suffering the impact. All our belongings have been damaged."

He was critical of successive governments and the trade unions: "Both [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi's government and the previous Manmohan Singh government follow the same policy. Ordinary people and the middle class bear the brunt of the Modi

government's anti-working class policies.

"Thousands of workers lost their jobs following the closure of the Nokia factory in Sriperumbadur. The central and state governments didn't care about the wellbeing of workers. The demands of workers over wages and other benefits were not heeded by management. But the trade unions, including CITU and AITUC [affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India (CPI) respectively] were rewarded with kickbacks and acted against workers."



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