

South Asian floods kill hundreds and displace millions

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24 July 2020

Floods and landslides triggered by heavy monsoonal rains since June have killed over 700 people across South Asia, including in Nepal, Bangladesh and India. With many people still missing and downpours continuing, the death toll is expected to further increase. Around 10 million people have already been displaced.

In India, more than 6.8 million people have been hit by severe flooding, mainly in the northern states of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. In Assam, the most heavily affected state, 87 people have been killed and 2.5 million displaced according to the latest figures, with Goalpara, Barpeta and Morigaon the worst hit districts.

In Bangladesh, more than 2.8 million people have been impacted, including over one million who remain isolated and surrounded by flood waters, according to the country's disaster management and relief agency.

On Monday, Bangladesh's director-general of health services said 79 people have been killed in "flood-related problems" and more than 4,500 were infected with various waterborne diseases in 18 flood-hit districts.

The *Kathmandu Post* reported this week that the death toll in Nepal had risen to 114. More than one million people had been displaced and several districts cut off after floods washed away bridges and landslides blocked highways. On Monday, the flooded Bagmati River, which passes through the Kathmandu Valley, inundated residential districts.

Experts cited by the newspaper said the severity of recent flood disasters was caused by "haphazard urbanisation and reckless land use." The political responsibility for this lies with the decision of successive national and local Nepalese governments.

The monsoonal flooding comes as Indian and

Bangladeshi residents were attempting to recover from Cyclone Amphan, which hit the region in May, destroying or damaging 260,000 houses, along with basic infrastructure and crops. At least 91 people were killed in India and Bangladesh in that cyclone.

The latest disaster coincides with the ravaging of South Asia by COVID-19. Yesterday, Indian health authorities reported 1.24 million infections and 29,861 deaths, while in Bangladesh the figures climbed to over 216,000 infections and 2,801 fatalities. Nepal recorded more than 18,241 cases and 43 deaths.

A report this week by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies correctly noted that the destruction of homes, small businesses, farmlands and crops in recent weeks will push millions more people into poverty. The callous government responses parallel the official indifference to those infected with COVID-19.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week spoke about the flood situation with Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and reportedly expressed his "solidarity" with the people. Modi is shedding meaningless crocodile tears for public consumption, as with his response to every disaster.

According to the Assam-based *pratidin* website, the state has not received any assistance from the Indian government's National Disaster Response Fund since 2014, despite having suffered substantial human and material losses in floods that year and every year since.

In a video conference on Tuesday, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina claimed her ministers and officials had made arrangements to alleviate the hardships of all those affected by the floods. This is empty posturing, with no concrete details, and will doubtless do little to assist the hundreds of thousands

struggling to avoid starvation.

The *Daily Star* reported on Wednesday that in Kurigram district more than 300,000 people had been displaced by floods and were facing severe hardship without drinking water, food and shelter. Flood survivor, Saleha Begum, 48, told the *Star* that residents “have been living a subhuman life for the past eight days.” and that “no one came forward to help.”

Flood devastation and the associated deaths, destruction and poverty are an annual occurrence in South Asia. According to a recent UN report, at least 600 people were killed and more than 25 million were impacted by monsoonal flooding in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Nepal last year. And in 2017, over 1,000 people died in floods across the region.

Researchers have also warned that within a few decades, Bangladesh, with a population of over 160 million people, could lose more than 10 percent of its land to rising sea-levels caused by global warming. This would result in the displacement of as many as 18 million people.

In May last year, the *South China Morning Post* warned: “Rising temperatures have caused Himalayan glaciers to melt, increasing the risk of floods and landslides during monsoon season. Long-term, permanent disappearance of the glaciers could affect the flow of major Asian rivers, including the Yangtze, the Mekong and the Brahmaputra.”

Six rivers—the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutluj and Beas—flow from India into Pakistan. Three of these pass through Jammu and Kashmir. Meanwhile, water from the Indus is shared by India and Pakistan. The Ganges is shared by India and Bangladesh, former East Pakistan. The largest of these rivers, the Brahmaputra, originates from Chinese-controlled Tibet and flows through India and Bangladesh.

The arbitrary, undemocratic and reactionary character of the 1947 communal partition imposed in South Asia by British imperialism and the regional capitalist elites prevents the development of a coordinated strategy to overcome these disasters. The capitalist class and its political servants are incapable of developing a progressive, internationally-coordinated solution to natural disasters and associated social, economic and health crises facing working people in this vast area.

The only force able to create the conditions for this to occur is the working class, united and mobilised behind

a revolutionary socialist perspective to put an end to capitalism and establish a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia.



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