Humanitarian catastrophe unfolds in Nepal after floods

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As rescue efforts entered their fifth day, the official death toll from last Wednesday's flash floods in Nepal rose to 794, with more than 2,500 people missing. Chinese state media reported 16 deaths and 546 people missing in Tibet. The disaster has deepened an already acute social crisis and exposed the failure of capitalist governments to address climate change.

There is a risk of further flooding: On Sunday, residents in flood-affected districts were urged to remain on high alert after water levels rose in the Bhotekoshi River. According to the Associated Press, Chinese authorities said "a crater located 5.6 kilometers (3.5 miles) upstream, which held an estimated 1.4 million cubic meters (370 million gallons) of water, still posed some risk and required close monitoring."

A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding. Survivors are searching frantically for missing relatives amid shortages of food, clean water, medicine, clothing and shelter. Hospitals and government offices in Kathmandu and Nuwakot are overwhelmed as families check survivor lists; many witnessed relatives swept away by mud and ice flows. Communication blackouts and damaged roads have hampered aid.

Tens of thousands have been displaced and entire villages destroyed, while temporary shelters are overcrowded and unsanitary, raising the risk of disease. The floods struck during the harvest season, wiping out crops and destroying irrigation systems, prompting warnings of a food security crisis as emergency rations struggle to reach affected areas.

At the displacement camp in Kolani, Kopila Pariyar told the *Kathmandu Post* that basic necessities are unobtainable. "There is no drinking water in the camp, and we cannot even buy bottled water," she said. "We have no money, no clothes and there is almost nothing to buy in the Kolani market." Her 43-year-old sister-in-law, Shanti, and her 16-year-old brother, Abinash, have been missing since the flood.

Hospitals near the disaster zone cannot supply essential medicines, especially for chronic illnesses. The floods cut off their main water sources, compromising hygiene and patient care. While the government has ordered free medical treatment for the injured, many remote areas remain inaccessible and medical staff are overwhelmed.

Aid organizations warn that without urgent healthcare, sanitation and hygiene support, the death toll could rise further from preventable causes. Pariyar told the *Kathmandu Post*, "My mother has asthma and needs two or three medicines, but we have not been able to get all of them." Another displaced resident, Raghubir, said, "My mother has to take her medicine regularly, but the hospital does not have them. It has been three days since she was able to take them."

Atenolol and losartan, two medications frequently prescribed for hypertension, were not accessible, according to hospital pharmacist Maheshwar Yadav. He also said, "Our hospital insurance programme is also not operating because there is no internet, and we are running out of medicine."

Sanitary facilities and clean water are lacking, and inadequate toilet drainage is making matters worse. Physicians fear a second catastrophe: disease epidemics in the overcrowded camps. Rajendra Lama, medical superintendent of Trishuli Hospital, said, "With so many people living together in one place, there is a risk of disease spreading," adding that "the lack of safe drinking water and proper toilets raises the possibility of an epidemic."

The poor quality and inadequate food in the camps is a particular danger for pregnant women, new mothers and the sick. There are major shortages of medication, cooking gas, and diesel for ambulances.

In the Chitwan district, authorities have begun the ground burial of 229 unidentified bodies after decomposition made storage untenable.

Satellite imagery analysis by *India Today* found that out of 192 structures along the Syabrubesi riverside alone, 114 were damaged or swept away entirely. More than 60 homes in Trishuli Bazaar were destroyed.

The United Nations estimates that some 10,000 households require immediate assistance, indicating widespread loss of

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housing.

At least 18 schools have been completely destroyed and another 20 damaged, affecting an estimated 10,000 to 17,000 school-age children. Dozens more schools on riverbanks remain at high risk.

Health facilities were also badly hit: Three clinics were destroyed, one hospital was partially damaged and access to two others was cut off.

Infrastructure was likewise devastated. The Department of Roads reported that 35 motorable bridges and 45 suspension bridges were damaged or swept away, according to Rediff News. The entire 42-kilometer stretch of road between Betrawati and Rasuwagadhi was damaged at multiple points, cutting off numerous communities.

Eleven hydropower units and one solar facility ceased operating, taking 431.1 MW—about 10 percent of Nepal's installed capacity—off the national grid. A further 15 power plants under construction, with a combined projected capacity of 470 MW, were also damaged.

Nepal may require $4 billion to $5 billion to rebuild, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle told Reuters on Saturday, a sum equivalent to roughly a tenth of the economy. This will sharply worsen the country's economic crisis.

Nepal has publicly appealed for international financial and technical assistance, after initially refusing foreign search-and-rescue teams. The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) government's belated acceptance of foreign help exposes its gross underestimation of the disaster and its contempt for the masses. Years of austerity, privatization and corruption have gutted the state's capacity to respond. The RSP fears mass discontent and is making gestures such as donating ministers' monthly salaries.

The imperialist powers, for their part, have pledged a pittance. The United States is offering just $3.6 million and the deployment of one disaster-response advisor. Britain's response is only marginally better: emergency responders and $6.79 million in aid. The European Union has set aside $2.32 million in humanitarian aid. Australia is giving just $3.58 million. Set against the scale of the devastation, these sums are derisory, and it remains to be seen how much will actually reach Nepal.

The record of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, which killed nearly 9,000 people and caused an estimated $7 billion to $10 billion in damage, is instructive. The US pledged a total of more than $61 million. Britain pledged £33 million (about $51 million) in humanitarian aid and eventually committed to a five-year £83 million reconstruction program. The European Commission provided €16.4 million in immediate humanitarian funding, later raising its total to €22.6 million.

Delivery, however, fell far short of the pledges. At the June 2015 donor conference, international donors promised about $4 billion for reconstruction, but two years later Nepal had received only $2.73 billion. Much of the pledged aid was delayed, redirected or never disbursed, leaving a vast gap between what was announced and what arrived.

The floods devastating Nepal are the direct product of a climate crisis for which the major industrial powers are directly responsible, yet their response is a study in criminal indifference. A few million dollars are pledged for a catastrophe demanding billions. The poorest people, who bear no responsibility for global warming, pay the greatest price, including their lives and livelihoods.

By contrast, the imperialist countries are spending trillions on the military. US national defense outlays for FY2026 are estimated at around $1.04 trillion. According to some estimates, Washington has spent more than $100 billion on the war against Iran, nearly 28,000 times the amount pledged for Nepal.

British defense spending reached approximately $89 billion in 2025 and is projected at about $92 billion in 2026, roughly 2.4 to 2.5 percent of GDP. Across the 27-member European Union, combined defense expenditure stands at some $450 billion in 2025 and is projected to rise in 2026, part of a headlong rearmament drive.

The catastrophe in Nepal is a stark demonstration of the incapacity of the ruling classes—in Nepal and throughout the world—to address even the most basic requirements of the masses. The way forward lies in the international unification of the working class in a socialist struggle to reorganize society on the basis of human need and scientific planning. The fight to stop the destruction of the environment is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system that is destroying it.

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