

Over 5,600 people still missing after Nepal flood, as death toll passes 1,200

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One week has passed since a catastrophic flood struck several communities in northern Nepal and part of Tibet, China. The confirmed death toll has risen to 1,280, while more than 5,600 people remain missing on both sides of the border. According to Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), 1,252 bodies have been recovered. More than 2.5 million people who live downstream have been affected.

The disaster was not simply “natural,” but the product of the capitalist system, which has rendered Nepal's masses defenseless against the consequences of climate change.

Thousands have been rescued, but many still listed as missing are presumed dead, trapped under rubble, swept into rivers, or buried beneath landslides. In the worst-hit parts of Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, and Chitwan, entire families have been erased; in some villages, only a handful of survivors remain.

With decomposition advancing in the humid monsoon heat and the risk of waterborne disease rising, authorities have resorted to mass burials. Some families have also held symbolic funerals for loved ones whose remains may never be found.

Burying her husband, Dolma Newar Tamang said, “We had to do this to set his soul free, so that he is at peace and happy wherever he is,” the *Straits Times* reported on September 2.

Homes, livestock, seed stocks, and tools were washed away in minutes. This material devastation is compounded by psychological trauma.

Thousands of survivors escaped the initial surge by scrambling up the steep valley sides into the surrounding mountains. Helicopter drops of rice, lentils, and tarpaulins have reached some locations, but the scale of need far outstrips what has been delivered.

Medicine, clean water, and blankets are critically short, with night temperatures dropping and monsoon rains continuing; exposure and illness are mounting threats.

At present, rescue operations are focused on the ruins of hydropower projects, where hundreds of workers are trapped. For more than a week, rescue teams have been drilling, cutting, and pumping to reach these spaces, but progress is slow and dangerous, with the risk of secondary collapses and renewed surges. Every hour that passes reduces the chances of finding anyone alive.

The disaster has laid bare the bankruptcy of Nepal's early warning system (EWS). An article published in the *Kathmandu Post* on September 2 said although Nepal invested in sensors and SMS alert infrastructure over the past decade, the system collapsed when it was most needed. Automated gauging stations in upper Bhote Koshi stopped functioning at 8:40 a.m. on August 26, just as the flood crossed the border from Tibet. The first SMS warnings to downstream communities were sent only after the surge was already racing through Rasuwa.

By the time the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology posted a public update that the upstream blockage had not fully drained, five hours had elapsed, and the worst destruction was already done.

A robust, multi-hazard EWS covering glacial lake outbursts, landslide-dammed lakes, and trans-boundary floods is entirely feasible with existing technology. But it requires sustained investment, cross-border data sharing, and a state that prioritizes the lives of workers and peasants over debt servicing and elite enrichment.

The *Post* cited research by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which has identified 21 potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal across the Gandaki, Koshi, and Karnali river basins, and mapped 2,070 glacial lakes in total. As

temperatures rise, both the number and size of glacial lakes are increasing.

Nepal has endured repeated flood disasters. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs' *Nepal Disaster Report 2024*, "A total of 9,886 small and large weather- and climate-related disaster incidents killed 1,173 people and incurred a total economic loss of NPR 6 billion [around \$US40 million] between January 2020 and September 2022." Yet the ruling class in Nepal has treated disaster preparedness with lethargy, not as a life-and-death imperative.

The hypocrisy of the imperialist powers is stark. The United States, Britain, the European Union, and Australia have pledged a combined total of around \$16 million in aid for Nepal—a pittance compared to the billions they expend weekly on wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Washington allocates trillions of dollars annually to its military machine and has spent more than \$100 billion on its war against Iran—nearly 28,000 times the pittance it has pledged for Nepal's flood victims.

The same technological arsenal deployed for destruction—satellite imagery, drone swarms, thermal sensors, AI-driven surveillance systems, and rapid-deployment engineering units—could within hours locate survivors trapped under rubble, map real-time landslide risks, and deliver food and medicine to villages cut off by floods. The US military can mobilize carrier strike groups, F-35 squadrons, and precision-guided missiles for war with Iran within hours. NATO floods Ukraine with artillery shells, reconnaissance drones, and real-time battlefield intelligence daily.

Yet for Nepal, the US has not dispatched a single rescue worker, a single field hospital, or a single heavy-lift helicopter dedicated to evacuation. For imperialism, the lives of Nepali workers and peasants are expendable.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) explained, the flash floods are a direct consequence of global warming, for which the major industrial powers bear primary responsibility. The United States, China, India, Russia and Japan account for nearly 60 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. Nepal contributes less than 0.1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet it stands on the front lines of climate catastrophe.

Nepal's Prime Minister Balen Shah and his right-

wing Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)-led government are already facing criticism over both the failed early warning system and the disorganized and grossly inadequate rescue and relief efforts.

A statement released on Tuesday signed by 35 members of non-government organisations, including Amnesty International and a former Nepali Human Rights commissioner, declared that "the federal government has not been able to demonstrate [a] coordinated and responsible role in the search, rescue and relief distribution." It said the "centralization of the process has meant that collected relief materials have not seen distribution in the initial days when the need was the greatest."

The greatest fear of the ruling elite is that the flooding disaster will lead to a resurgence of mass opposition from below. The RSP rose to power following Nepal's explosive "Gen Z" protests in September 2025. In the past year it has continued to impose the worsening economic crisis on working people, who have fallen deeper into poverty.

The catastrophe in Nepal demonstrates the incapacity of the ruling classes to address even the most basic requirements of the masses. A socialist movement of the working class, in alliance with the peasantry and poor, must be built to break the shackles of imperialism and build a society where technology serves human need rather than profit. Halting the destruction of the environment is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system that is destroying it.



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