

Flooding across Thailand exposes disregard for preparation

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Fifteen years after catastrophic floods in 2011, Bangkok is again confronting widespread inundation, disrupted livelihoods and failures in emergency assistance. The latest disaster has exposed the continuing vulnerability of working-class communities despite repeated government promises to strengthen flood protection.

By October 7, disaster authorities reported 60 deaths across eight provinces, including four districts in Bangkok, from flooding that began nationally on September 16. More than 3.5 million people remained affected. Conditions had improved in much of the capital, but low-lying neighbourhoods remained waterlogged.

Nearly 300 millimetres (11.8 inches) of rain fell over 48 hours in late September, overwhelming canals and drainage systems. Authorities declared all 50 Bangkok districts disaster-affected on September 26, though not every district was submerged. By September 29, almost 7,000 people were staying in more than 230 shelters. Schools closed and transport was severely disrupted.

For workers dependent on daily earnings, the flooding immediately became an income crisis. Rachthanichporn Leeput, a 37-year-old delivery rider, told Reuters that flooding had cut off her earnings. She walked two to three kilometres through water to obtain supplies for resale. “The water rose very fast,” she said. “Many people, many households, couldn’t prepare in time.”

In eastern Bangkok’s Bang Kapi district, vendors stood waist-deep in water trying to sell perishable produce before it spoiled. One trader told CNA: “No authorities ever came to the market. People had to help themselves [and] each other.” Buyers arrived in boats and kayaks, while other residents pushed shopping trolleys through the murky water.

Arita Sanpoka, 33, told Reuters that her home was flooded to waist height, its ground-floor electricity disconnected and its bathroom unusable. Two neighbours in their eighties remained stranded because they could not

get downstairs. “Everything in the house is ruined,” she said.

Auto manufacturer Toyota temporarily halted production at four factories after parts deliveries were disrupted. At Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thai Airways management said flooding prevented more than 200 of roughly 500 general workers from reporting for duty. Only about 20 of the usual 45 loadmasters were available.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, leader of the right-wing Bhumjaithai Party (BJT), defended the government’s response on September 27: “We are doing our duty to the fullest.” At the Ruam Phatthana community, however, residents complained that food distributed the previous day had been insufficient and requested mobile toilets. Anutin ordered a mobile kitchen and personally paid nearby vendors to supply meals—a gesture that underscored, rather than answered, the absence of any systematic provision of disaster relief.

His assurances cannot obscure the longstanding character of the danger, or successive governments’ responsibility for leaving communities exposed to it.

The 2011 floods killed 815 people nationwide and affected 13.6 million. The government and World Bank assessed damage and economic losses at 1.43 trillion baht, or \$US46.5 billion at the time. That river-basin disaster engulfed industrial estates and large areas around Bangkok, one of 65 provinces affected out of a total of 77.

The current floods are of a smaller scale with 27 provinces affected. However, it is significant in what it reveals about the failure to provide adequate protection after a catastrophe that had demonstrated the consequences so starkly.

After 2011, Yingluck Shinawatra’s Pheu Thai government drew up a 350-billion-baht water-management plan, then worth about \$US11 billion including canal dredging and reinforcement, new reservoirs, and floodways.

It was repeatedly delayed encountering opposition over planning and lack of community consultation before the May 2014 coup. The military administration completely derailed the project claiming concerns over poor planning, lack of transparency and loopholes that could lead to corruption.

The water management strategy was revised by the junta to nine major projects, and only two of those, being lower cost measures, were completed. Successive coalition governments including those of Pheu Thai and the BJT similarly failed to complete disaster preparations, leaving projects in development, awaiting funding, or yet to begin construction. This demonstrates that no party had serious intentions of addressing the serious danger of flooding.

After Thailand's disastrous flooding in November 2025, Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt ordered a review covering flood modelling, public alerts, rescue equipment, command structures, and coordination between agencies.

Yet on September 28, Deputy Governor Tavida Kamolvej acknowledged delays in assistance in and around the Khlong Chan flats, a sprawling residential area, where more than 95,000 people had been affected during the first 24 hours of flooding. She attributed delays to rapidly rising water and blocked vehicle access. Plans that cannot deliver food when roads flood are not flood plans at all.

The economic consequences extend beyond damaged property. Kasikorn Research Centre's September 28 estimate put the initial net disruption at 7–17 billion baht, approximately \$US210–510 million, assuming three to seven days of interrupted activity. However, final reconstruction will be a much larger bill.

Households confront these costs while already heavily indebted. Bank of Thailand figures put household debt at approximately 16.43 trillion baht, or 85.2 percent of gross domestic product, in the second quarter of 2026. Lost earnings therefore threaten both immediate necessities and the ability to meet existing repayments.

A September survey by the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce found average debt of about 795,000 baht (\$US23,600) among surveyed households, with monthly repayments approaching 22,000 baht (\$US650). For such families, replacing a flooded motorcycle, refrigerator, or work tools can deepen dependence on borrowing.

A September 29 cabinet meeting of the government approved 4.731 billion baht, approximately \$US140

million, in emergency funding. Basic household assistance offers 5,000 or 9,000 baht (\$US150 or \$US270), depending on eligibility.

Announcing the relief package, Anutin insisted: "It should be sufficient for relief and operations to tackle flooding across the country, not only in Bangkok." Residents' reports of unmet needs for food and sanitation expose the inadequacy of the government's response.

The sums involved reveal the priorities of the state. According to Thai PBS, 31 billion baht (approximately \$US920 million) was allocated for arms procurement in fiscal 2026, more than six times the emergency relief tranche. That annual weapons allocation covered helicopters, submarines, and fighter aircraft, and did not include the military budget as a whole.

Climate change is magnifying the underlying danger. The World Bank warns that more frequent intense rainfall will increase Thailand's exposure to river overflow, urban flash flooding and landslides. These projections make effective warnings, drainage and evacuation systems increasingly urgent.

On October 7, the Thai Meteorological Department issued a fresh warning of heavy to very heavy rainfall across much of the country from October 9 to 13, including Bangkok and surrounding provinces from October 10 to 12. Further flash floods and overflowing waterways threaten communities still recovering from September's inundation. Meanwhile, the Federation of Thai Industries has raised its estimate of industrial flood damage to 6 billion baht (\$US178 million), six times its initial assessment.

Fifteen years after the 2011 catastrophe, working-class communities are again confronting the consequences of inadequate flood protection. The problem is not simply one of engineering or natural forces, but of social priorities. The resources necessary to guarantee safe housing, income protection, and comprehensive flood defences exist, but their allocation remains subordinated to the interests of the capitalist state and private profit. Meeting these needs requires the socialist reorganisation of economic life, under the democratic control of the working class.



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