

Flooding in Thailand is continuing while survivors struggle to get aid

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Large parts of Thailand including the capital Bangkok have been hit with heavy flooding, which has left at least 83 people dead as of Monday. Extensive flooding began in mid-September and peaked in late September/early October but is continuing in a significant number of areas.

The flooding has been caused by a combination of high tides, heavy rains and swollen rivers. The *Nation* reported on Wednesday that three areas hit by high tides with flooding in parts of Bang Saen, Mae Klong and Samut Prakan.

At the same time, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) has warned of possible further flooding due to elevated tidal levels for Bangkok and seven of the country's central provinces from October 27 to November 5. Low-lying riverside areas and communities outside permanent flood barriers are particularly vulnerable.

The latest DDPM report issued on Tuesday stated that nearly one million people—978,112 people from 327,004 households—are still impacted by flooding across 20 provinces and Bangkok, even though water levels are falling. Flooding has hit 60 districts, 387 subdistricts and 2,738 villages in the country's provinces, as well as two districts in eastern Bangkok.

Weeks after flooding that devastated neighbourhoods across Bangkok, workers and small shopkeepers confront financial crises as a result of the cumbersome and inadequate government compensation system. Residents have had to queue overnight for assistance, while families whose possessions and business equipment were destroyed face the prospect of having to start borrowing again. Their difficulties make a mockery of government claims that relief is proceeding efficiently.

The Thai cabinet approved another 10.51 billion baht

(\$US313 million) for flood assistance in October, intended to cover about 1.48 million households nationally, alongside loan repayment suspensions and subsidised loans. However, the announcement gave no indication of how quickly assistance would be provided to households, let alone whether it would cover damage and losses.

Media reports earlier this month indicated that people had difficulty even putting in applications for assistance. Thai PBS reported on one day that more than 100 residents were waiting at a compensation service point in Bang Khen district, the first arriving at 4:30 a.m. The previous day, Ploypannee Khamda, a housekeeper from Don Mueang, was given queue number 395 and told to return at 3 p.m., requiring her to seek leave from work for both morning and afternoon.

The same report cited the case of Jetsadang Khamkhuean, who arrived at the district office at 7 a.m. despite being only three days away from giving birth. Her online application through the government's Tang Rat app had been refused on the basis of missing documents although she was not clear which documents.

Bangkok authorities reported approximately 1.06 million applications, of which 408,427 had been approved as of October 20 or under two-fifths. Governor Chadchart Sittipunt denied the process was slow, pointing to the volume of applications and predicting the remainder could be processed within one or two weeks.

Approvals, moreover, must be distinguished from money actually deposited in residents' accounts. By October 17, authorities reported 5.225 billion baht had been distributed to 683,286 households nationwide, but the figure does not establish whether particular

communities and individuals have received adequate assistance.

Accounts from the flood-hit communities are revealing. Reporting from the Rom Klao housing estate, Thai news outlet “The Reporters” interviewed a 60-year-old electrical-appliance repairer known as Uncle Oi, who estimated his losses at nearly 100,000 baht. “The 9,000-baht compensation isn’t enough. Even 10,000 baht wouldn’t be enough... there’s nothing left except our lives.”

Koi, a 48-year-old cooked-food vendor, described water rising to waist height and destroying her equipment. She saved her gas stove, but estimated reopening would require around 30,000 baht.

As well as the flat-rate payment, Bangkok has a separate damage-assessment process, including home-repair assistance of up to 88,600 baht. However, the latest figures reveal a substantial backlog. As of October 21, Bangkok had received 72,848 applications with officials still organising the inspections needed to assess damage and approve payments. A further 37,737 applications had been lodged for livelihood equipment and business capital, providing a maximum of 13,500 baht per household.

The precarious position of poorer households was expressed by Suda Phadungwathana, an elderly resident interviewed by the *Nation*. She and her husband had borrowed 4,000–5,000 baht to establish a small shop three months earlier. Flooding destroyed their goods. “People do not have the same amount of money. I cannot earn even 4,000–5,000 baht in a whole month,” she said.

Another trader, 55-year-old Waewdao, had operated a traditional coffee shop for a decade. Floodwaters destroyed her stocks of coffee, tea and milk, and damaged her home and motorcycle. She estimated losses to her shop at around 10,000 baht, but had not applied for compensation because her business was unregistered and she did not know how to navigate the application process.

In the absence of a properly funded, coordinated public response, residents have been left to improvise. Neighbours in Rom Klao had to repeatedly pool money to purchase necessities when assistance failed to reach their part of the community. Others relied on volunteer assistance. More than 100 Thai and foreign volunteers mobilised through the Bangkok Community Help

Foundation to deliver food and water to flood-stricken residents.

Alongside grants, state financial institutions are offering repayment holidays, loan extensions and new credit. Government Savings Bank is providing emergency loans of up to 50,000 baht which carry no interest for the first three months. However, such measures already occur under conditions where household debt levels in Thailand amount to 85.2 percent of GDP—one of the highest levels in Asia.

Like capitalist governments internationally, the Thai government of Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul is above all concerned with boosting the profits of the major corporations and the wealthy as well as expanding the military, not with protecting the livelihoods and well-being of ordinary working people.

Just one of the Royal Thai Navy’s projects—the building of a new warship announced in September at the cost of 16.73 billion baht—overshadows the latest 10.51 billion-baht flood relief allocation. At the same time, the government has been accelerating approvals for major corporate investments and offering eligible companies up to three additional years of income-tax exemptions.

While adequate flood relief for all those affected is absolutely necessary, so too is much needed flood protection measures to prevent damage being done in the first place. Thailand has always been prone to flooding and violent storms that are only on the rise as a result of worsening climate change. Yet the fact that existing defences are overwhelmed and many communities have no protection, demonstrates the failure of successive governments to take the necessary steps.



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