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# UPDATE 1-Food riots as Indian floods destroy 250,000 homes

Wed Aug 27, 2008 6:27pm IST

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PATNA, India, Aug 27 (Reuters) - Food riots erupted on Wednesday in eastern India, where more than 2 million people have been forced from their homes and about 250,000 houses destroyed in what officials say are the worst floods in 50 years.

One person was killed in Madhepura district when angry villagers fought among themselves over limited supplies of food and medicines at overcrowded relief centres.

The Kosi river in Bihar, one of India's poorest states, smashed through mud embankments and changed course last week, unleashing huge walls of water that inundated hundreds of villages and towns. The floods have since killed nearly 50 people in Bihar.

Stranded villagers waved at passing helicopters and sent text messages to local authorities from rooftops of flooded buildings.

"Time is running out for me and there is no relief in sight and I have not eaten for days," a message from flood victim Sanjeev Kumar read.

Torrential rains have killed more than 1,000 people in South Asia since the monsoon began in June, mainly in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where 725 people have lost their lives. Other deaths were reported from Nepal and Bangladesh.

Some experts blame the floods on heavier monsoon rains caused by global warming, while others say authorities have failed to take preventive measures and improve infrastructure.

Officials said flood victims had looted grain at some places in Bihar. Others ran for miles under helicopters that were dropping food packets. One boy was killed and about 30 people were injured in Supaul district when food packets fell on them.

"We have enough stock of food grains but the problem is that we have limited means of transport to supply them among the villagers," Rajesh Kumar Gupta, a government official in Madhepura, told Reuters by telephone.

Several prisoners took advantage of the floods to escape from a jail in Supaul on Tuesday night, officials said.

"We are having difficulty in getting the exact number of prisoners who fled since communication networks have totally snapped," said Nitish Kumar, Bihar's chief minister.

The U.N. children's fund UNICEF said roads had been damaged and water and electricity supplies disrupted.

## FLOATING ON TREE TRUNKS

Those displaced by the floods are not expected to be able to return home for another two or three months, when the embankment is repaired and the river returns to its normal course.

"We are appealing to villagers to evacuate the areas," Bihar's Kumar said in a radio address on Tuesday. "They must understand that they are right in middle of the river and the monsoon season is still in progress."

Local people call the Kosi the "Sorrow of Bihar" for its regular floods and ability to change course quickly. It originates in Nepal, where it broke a dam last week.

UNICEF said cases of diarrhoea and fever were being reported in makeshift camps.

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Eng 137/3 (17.4 Ovs) | RSA 183/6 (32.1 Ovs)

Batsman	R	B
O Shah	44	40
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England won by 7 wickets

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## REUTERS POLL

Is India capable of handling natural disasters?

- Yes
- No
- Can't say

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"The weather has been extremely hot, aggravating the suffering of the displaced population, particularly for children, pregnant and lactating women and the aged," it said.

Television images showed people using banana tree trunks and cots to stay afloat, some even with their cattle and goats.

Officials said floods had destroyed more than 227,000 homes and damaged about 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) of vegetables, wheat and paddy crops.

Last year, floods in eastern India and Bangladesh killed around 2,000 people. Millions were affected and officials fear climate change will make similar disasters more frequent.

Engineers began repairing the broken dam on the Kosi river in Nepal on Wednesday to prevent it from causing further damage. (Additional reporting by Gopal Sharma in Nepal; Writing by Kritivas Mukherjee; Editing by Bappa Majumdar and Alex Richardson)

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