

Marooned people drinking floodwater to survive in Bihar

Even as they wait for government aid, the 200 residents of Bangmatiya village in Bihar's flood ravaged Madhepura district are struggling to survive by eating stale rice puff and drinking the dirty water that their houses have been marooned in for the past 10 days.

Sakhua Singh, a landless labourer in his 50s, and his family of six were promised relief by the local administration a week ago but it is yet to reach them.

'There is no way to survive without relief but we are eating baked grains and rice puff. Hopefully, we will get some aid soon,' Sakhua said.

'My wife and son are unwell. We are praying that the waters will recede soon so that we can take them to a doctor,' he added.

Another villager, Gangu Singh, told IANS that children crying for milk were being pacified with roasted rice.

'We are giving our children the polluted floodwater to drink. There is no other option,' he said helplessly.

Bangmatiya, like other villages in Madhepura district, about 225 km from state capital Patna, was swamped by floodwaters after the Kosi river, sometimes known as the sorrow of Bihar, changed its course after almost two centuries and breached an embankment upstream in Nepal.

The village is seven to eight kilometres off the national highway connecting Madhepura to Saharsa. Even the highway has been submerged and the only way to reach the area is by boat.

Disaster Management Minister Nitish Mishra said the marooned people were being evacuated. However, villagers in Madhepura had another tale to tell.

'We have nothing left - there is no food. We don't even have plastic sheets or kerosene,' said Madhav Yadav, a farmer who is among the hundreds forced to live under the open sky on mud embankments.

Satabia Devi, a widow who used to support her three children by working in other's fields, said: 'No relief has reached us. We are surviving on stale rice and flood water.'

Arvind Kumar, the district magistrate of Madhepura, said floodwaters were showing no signs of receding and the administration was trying to evacuate as many marooned people as possible.

'It is not an easy task, given the availability of boats, helicopters and officials engaged in the rescue work,' Kumar said.

About two million people in 14 Bihar districts have been affected by the flood, one of the worst in 50 years. The most seriously hit areas in the state are Madhepura, Supaul, Araria and Purnea.

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