

## Gujarat experts to prepare rehabilitation plan for flood-hit Bihar

A team of experts from Gujarat will help the Bihar government prepare a strategy for rehabilitation of flood victims, which will be on the lines of the assistance plan following the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, officials said Monday.

The team of experts from Gujarat would reach here Tuesday.

'The team will spend 10 days in the flood affected areas of five districts to study the ground conditions and plan a strategy for rehabilitation,' an official of the state disaster management department said.

The team will deliver its presentation at a programme of the Bihar Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (BIPARD) here.

According to sources in planning and development department, the visiting team comprises of officials who were involved in rehabilitation work in the wake of the 2001 earthquake.

Disaster Management Minister Nitish Mishra said rehabilitating over three million flood victims was 'a herculean task'.

'The state government plans to adopt the rehabilitation pattern used for victims of the tsunami as well as Gujarat's earthquake,' he said.

Last month, a team of Bihar officials, led by the development commissioner, visited Gujarat to study the model of rehabilitation and reconstruction post-earthquake.

Later, the team also visited tsunami-affected Tamil Nadu for studying the rehabilitation schemes and preparing a plan for the flood victims.

The state government will also be helped by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the flood-affected districts.

'A UNDP team has completed a field survey to assess the damage by the flood and it will submit report to the government soon,' an official said.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has demanded Rs.89.23 billion (\$2 billion) from the central government for the rehabilitation of the flood-hit people in September.

In August, the prime minister had termed the Bihar flood a national calamity and sanctioned Rs.10 billion for relief efforts. He also announced the release of 125,000 tonnes of food grains for flood victims.

More than three million people were rendered homeless and over one million cattle were affected by floods as the Kosi river changed its course following a breach in an embankment upstream in Nepal on Aug 18.

The shifting river engulfed large swathes of Bihar, India's second most populous state.

The floods have claimed over 191 lives, according to official estimates. However, voluntary agencies fear the number could be in thousands once all bodies are recovered.

Officials said 993,992 people have been evacuated to safer places till date. About 370,000 people have taken shelter in over 300 relief camps in flood-affected areas.

The state agriculture department has estimated that standing crops in 175,000 hectares of land have been destroyed in Madhepura, Supaul, Saharsa, Araria and Purnea districts.

Officials engaged in the rescue and relief operations said most flood-affected, homeless people were now living on high-rise places like embankments and highways apart from overcrowded relief camps set up by the government and NGOs.

An official said the state government had prepared a preliminary report on damages caused by the flood.

'But the real assessment of damages and losses will come to light after floodwaters recede fully by the second week of October,' the official said.

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