

## Bihar asks Nepal to secure Kosi embankments

Fearing a repeat of last year's devastating floods, the Bihar government has requested Nepal to deploy armed security forces on embankments of the Kosi river to ensure that there is no breach, officials here said Friday.

In a letter to the Nepal government, Bihar's department of water resources has highlighted the need for deployment of security forces to ensure the safety of the embankments on the river that is already in spate.

Ajay Nayak, principal secretary of the department, told IANS that he had also requested the Indian ambassador to Nepal and the Bihar government's liaison officer in Kathmandu to take up the matter with the government of Nepal.

Last year, more than three million people were rendered homeless in Bihar when the Kosi river breached its bank upstream in Nepal and changed course Aug 18. Large tracts of land were flooded, forcing people to flee their homes.

The were said to be the worst in Bihar in the last 50 years. People were forced to live along roads under the open sky without food and drinking water or in relief camps set up by the state government.

Thirty-two km of the Kosi embankments fall in Nepali territory.

'The only way to keep the embankments safe and avert any disaster is by constant vigil on the river flow for timely identification of vulnerable points,' Nayak wrote to the Nepal government.

Early this month, heavy water discharge into the Kosi river from Nepal posed a threat to its embankments. In view of the panic among people in Supaul, Madhepura, Purnea, Saharsa and Araria districts, the state government alerted its engineers and asked them to keep a close watch on the embankments.

Bihar Water Resources Development Minister Bijendra Prasad Yadav has repeatedly said that the Kosi embankments are safe and there was no need to panic.

He stressed that the eastern Kosi embankment, which had breached last year, had been strengthened.

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