

# SIKKIM FLASH FLOOD: SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN FULL SWING, OPERATIONAL SITUATION STABLE ALONG THE LAC

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

A Glacial Lake Outburst in South Lhonak Lake in North Sikkim on the night of 03-04 Oct caused a devastating flood in the North Eastern State of Sikkim. The level of water in the Teesta River increased by about 50-60 feet in height which caused calamitous floods downstream. Large scale damage to infrastructure, property and loss of human lives have been reported. As per the State Govt estimate, a total of 142 persons are missing, out of which 26 bodies have been recovered so far. The exact assessment of the damage is yet to be corroborated due to the inclement weather and incessant rains.

Indian Army deployed in the area has also been affected with some of its camps along the Teesta River bank being damaged/ washed away. A vehicle parking area at Burdang near Singtam was affected by the flash flood and 23 soldiers and 39 vehicles that were taking a temporary overnight transit halt have been submerged in silt or swept away.

At the site of the incident, silt and mud measuring up to 30-40 feet high has been deposited and most of the vehicles are buried underneath. A massive Search and Rescue operation was immediately launched by the Indian Army, BRO along with NDRF, State Disaster Relief Teams, Para Military Forces, Police, Civil Administration and local populace of Sikkim & North Bengal.

On 4th Oct evening, one soldier was rescued by villagers from an area 18 km downstream of Burdang and the individual is now stable and under medical care. Approximately 26 bodies in total have been recovered so far from various areas along the river in North Bengal and four bodies have been handed over by Bangladesh Border Forces. Out of the 26 recovered bodies, eight have been positively identified as that of Indian Army soldiers. The last rites of Naik Bimal Oraon hailing from Alipurduar were conducted on 6th Oct 23 with full military honours. The mortal remains of four soldiers are being taken to their native places on 7th Oct by service and civil aircrafts for conduct of last rites in presence of the family members.

Post Mortem of two mortal remains is in progress. Meanwhile, the search operation for the remaining 14 soldiers continues.

Dozers and plant equipment have been digging up the site of incident at Burdang. Since 06 Oct 23, Radars (Leo Life Detector Radar, REECO Radar) and Army Dogs have also been employed. So far, 15 vehicles out of the total 39 missing have been recovered. Some ammunition, explosives and stores of the Indian Army from various camps swept away have been reported from various places along the downstream river banks. Indian Army has issued advisories through civil administration and deployed look out teams along with State Police to warn the locals for reporting sighting of such items. Ammunition experts have been deployed to destroy the explosives recovered in a controlled manner.

National Highway 10 (NH 10), the lifeline of Sikkim, has been rendered unusable due to damages to the road surface and many bridges across the Teesta River. The opening/widening of road stretch Rangpo - Singtam is under progress.

Alternate routes to Gangtok are available via East Sikkim and routes to West & South Sikkim

are also available. However, in North Sikkim, roads beyond Mangan are currently cut off. Lt Gen RP Kalita, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command along with Lt Gen VPS Kaushik, GOC Trishakti Corps undertook an aerial survey on 6 Oct 23 to assess the extent of damage and plan for the relief effort. The Director General BRO along with Indian Army Engineers, NHIDCL and State Government officials are assessing the damage and carrying out survey for restoring the road connectivity. Meanwhile, efforts are on, to connect Chungthang with a foot bridge. Helicopters of Indian Army and Indian Air Force are undertaking emergency supply and evacuation sorties. However, the inclement weather and incessant rains have hindered the aerial operations.

Approximately 1500 tourists are assessed to be stranded in the areas of Lachung and Lachen valleys in North Sikkim. Indian Army along with the local administration has been extending assistance to the stranded tourists and locals by providing food, medical aid and telephone connectivity through satellite terminals.

Teams have collected data of all the tourists staying in various hotels and some of them have been accommodated in Army camps. Special helplines has been set up at Indian Army's Trishakti Corps HQ and family members back home of all the stranded tourists have been informed about their wellbeing.

While the hinterland of Sikkim has been affected, the operational situation along the Line of Actual Control in Sikkim continues to be stable. The formations responsible for the Border Management Posture are maintaining high state of readiness and are optimally stocked as per the sustainable operational logistics plan. Indian Army along with all agencies and Civil Administration continue their relentless Search & Rescue operations, while at the same time focusing on resuscitation of communication and other infrastructure in a well-coordinated manner.





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