

# FLOODS IN MUMBAI

## and Maharashtra – 2005



1000 dead; 20 million affected and still counting...  
How long will this nightmare last?

**A Humanitarian needs assessment Report**

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**ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world  
– a world without poverty.**

**In emergencies we work for the security and protection of  
the human rights of poor and marginalised people.**

This report is based on the discussions with the flood-affected people in Mumbai, community based organisations, people-based movements, Non Governmental Organisations, International Non Governmental Organisations, academic institutions, UN agencies, Government and media. The team also referred other sources like Government of India website, UN's Reliefweb, etc.

The team expresses their gratitude to the numerous individuals and organisations they interacted with, especially the people of Shivashakthi Nagar and and Bhimwadi, South Mumbai.

This humanitarian needs assessment report is compiled by an ActionAid International team consisting of Dr Kamini Kapadia and Dr Unnikrishnan P V.

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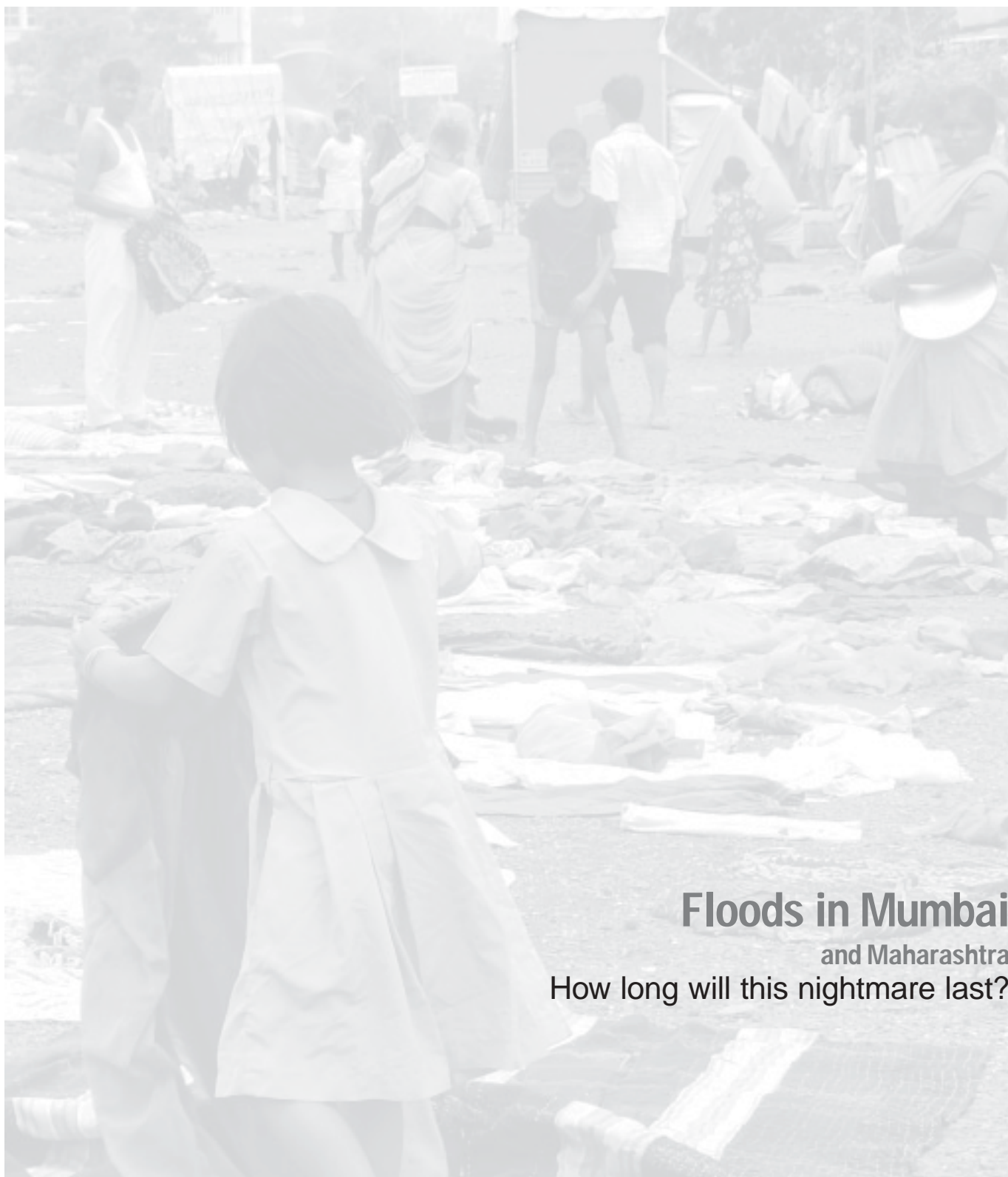
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**Floods in Mumbai**  
and Maharashtra  
How long will this nightmare last?



# Floods in Mumbai and Maharashtra

July 2005

A report by ActionAid International

## Mumbai floods- a deluging crisis

Torrential rains, flooding and the *Offshore Vortex* (an unusual meteorological phenomenon) have left over 1000 dead in the western Indian coast. 100 people are still missing.

Reports quoting government officials say that the floods, considered to be the worst in 100 years, have disrupted lives of about 20 million people. High tides in this sea-facing city have further compounded the human suffering.

Initial estimates put financial losses at over 150,000 million rupees (US\$1 = INR43).

## Introduction

Today, a week after the disaster pulled India's financial capital to a grinding halt, the crisis is far from ebbing. An ominous lack of adequate relief response and the unending suffering of the affected calls for an immediate reality check. It is time to step up the response.

Survivors of Mumbai complain that relief hardly reaches them. It is a rapidly deteriorating picture still, with fresh bouts of waterborne diseases and gastroenteritis stalking the slums and the make-shift relief camps. The psychosocial impact of this disaster is already taking a heavy toll.

Initial reports had sought to glamourise the resilience of the people of Mumbai, who have braved past disasters

**Deaths:** 1000  
**Affected:** 20 Million  
**Missing:** 100  
**Evacuated:** 52,000 (in Maharashtra)  
**Financial Loss:** US\$ 1 Billion

like sectarian violence, bomb blasts and the like. But a week later, reality is sinking in slowly. As the blame now gets dissipated on unkind nature, greedy builders, insensitive administration or global warming, the affected people's patience is being stretched taut, their basic dignity challenged.



*People have been in knee deep flood waters for several days. Water borne diseases are rampant. Doctors have warned to take precautions for leptospirosis.*

Far from the media glare, people living in the flood ravaged rural fringes of this western Indian state are indeed going through trying times. Their panic is now palpable as news reports indicate imminent release of water from the city's overflowing reservoirs.

Thousands of people living close by to reservoirs in Maharashtra and the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka have been evacuated. In Maharashtra alone, the evacuees number over 52,000 as this report goes to press.

The initial reports indicating Mumbai is coping well had resulted in a limited response from international agencies, which would otherwise have been active in disaster situations. "This is an unprecedented situation. The impact is unparalleled" said Prof. Babu Mathew, Director of ActionAid International-India (AAI).

Working through local organisations, AAI-India is responding in a limited way to address the immediate humanitarian needs like provisions of food grain, medical aid and shelter. Initiatives by the Mahila Mandal Federations (women's groups) are helping to reach out to the most affected parts. However, while this report is on its way to the press (on 3 August 2005), AAI is stepping up its response.

This report is the outcome of rapid humanitarian needs assessment carried out by ActionAid International- India (AAI-India).

## Floods – the saga of sufferings thus far

The deluge came unannounced. There were warnings of a higher rainfall, but when it hit, the rain wrecked havoc. On 26 July, Mumbai received a record-breaking rain of 94 cm.

Thousands of Mumbaikars were stranded. Streets turned rivers and transport networks ground to a complete halt. Mumbai's suburban rail system transports over eight million commuters a day, with 3500 buses chipping in to the effort. But both lurched to a dead stop and people could not hope to leave their places of work. Air services were also affected.

Massive water logging and congestion paralysed telephone lines and cell phone systems. Electricity was shut off in many places for several days, prompting the Government to order electricity supply companies to resume operations forthwith.

The Bombay Stock Exchange suspended trading.

The armed forces were called in for rescue and food distribution work. Government authorities urged people to remain indoors.

According to India's Union Home Minister, Mr Shivaraj Patil, 942 people were killed by drowning, landslides or by electrocution in Maharashtra; 429 of them in Mumbai itself, by the second of August.

300 cases of cholera, gastroenteritis and dysentery have been reported in the state. 1200 buffaloes and 15,000 goats and sheep died in the floods in Mumbai.

The United Nations report (OCHA situation report No. 3 dated 2 August 2005) said that 10,000 houses have collapsed and 225,000 ha of crops have been damaged.

The psychosocial dimensions of this disaster are manifold. "Children scream during sleep and we feel helpless" said Rajubhai Sampat Sawant, a resident of Shivashakthi Nagar of South Mumbai, to the AAI team. The children were stranded for several hours in the deluge. "We saw



*Children are having a trying time.  
They have lost some clothes and the rest is soaked in water.*

bodies floating around. We are scared," said Kavita (11). A caring administration and appropriate relief can go a long way in ensuring a sense of security. However, this is far from reality. For example, residents of Shivshakthi Nagar complained that they are being cut off from relief channels. "We got nothing during the past 4 days as we are not on the main road side," said Rajan Ubalaya Yogi, a youth leader of this Bhimwadi slum in South Mumbai.

During an inter-agency meeting that was held at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), the Director of the institute, Prof. Parasuraman, informed that the Government has taken an unprecedented step to authorise the institute and other academic institutions and citizen's bodies to procure ration and relief materials from the government to ensure its equitable and speedy distribution.

"Distribution of aid is a daunting task. We are chipping in to ensure synergy and we hope this will help to kick start the community kitchens" said Prof. Prarasuraman. The cost of transportation and logistics for the ration grain that the government has just promised, is to be met by individual agencies. This alone will cost several million rupees.

News reports quoting senior government official pegged the financial losses at around one billion dollars. *The Economist* (issue dated August 4th, 2005) reported financial losses to the tune of US\$110 million in Maharashtra.

Today (3 August 2005), the national dailies, quoting government sources said that the initial losses are to the tune of Rs15,000 crores (US\$1 = INR43). It will take a long time to get a realistic picture.

It is painful, especially for the millions of poor people like the unorganised workers whose survival depends on daily wages. The plight of disadvantaged groups like the ragpickers and millions of homeless people are critical.

The union home minister informed the parliament that half of Maharashtra's 35 districts and more than 300 villages have been affected. More than 52,000 people, majority living near the reservoirs, have been evacuated.

The flood is sending its ripples outside Maharashtra too.

## Background

Mumbai, a city with more than 14 million people, has seen unplanned construction of its physical infrastructure in recent years. An editorial in a national newspaper blamed the greed of builders and their nexus to politicians for what the editor called as the 'rape of the city'.

Certain estimates show that over 70% of the people of this city live in slums. Latur (300km away from Mumbai) was devastated by an earthquake in 1993. The disaster triggered series of actions, including public interest litigations that pointed out the level of unpreparedness in the province, especially Mumbai. Many promises were made by subsequent governments that disaster management policies and programmes would be put in place.

Twenty four hours before the rains hit Mumbai on 26 July, the weather forecasts warned of heavy rains to the tune of 15 to 16cm. However, their warning was nowhere near how the rains turned out to be when the city received 94cm in one single day – a record in 100 years. Later, the weatherman blamed **Offshore Vortex**, a rare climatic phenomenon, for their inaccurate weather prediction.

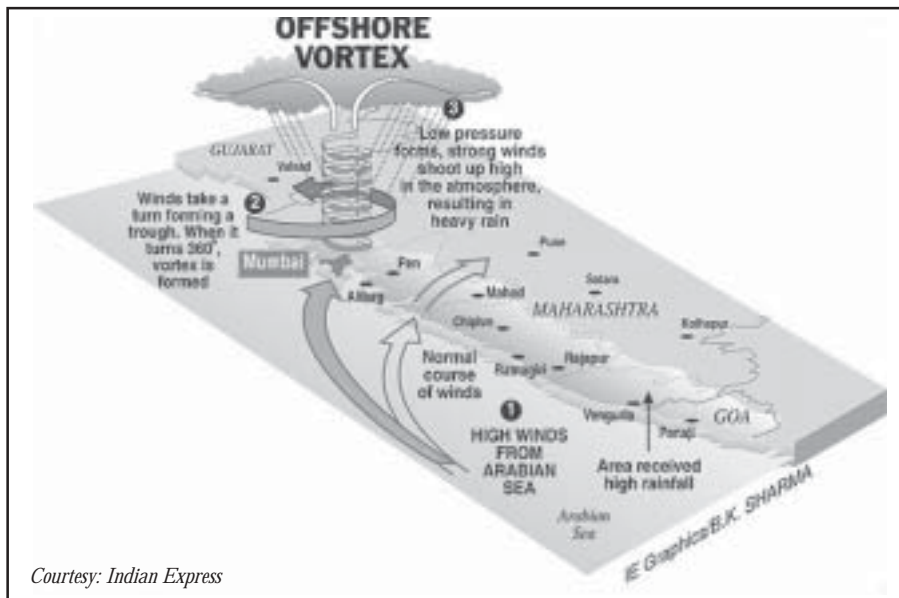
This flood, unfortunately, has once again brought out the level of unpreparedness within the official machinery. A news report on the floods in the Inter Press Service, a developmental news agency said, "...failed Disaster Management Plan has revealed the vulnerabilities of this city..."



*Waiting for cooking fuel. A bottle of kerosene, usually available in ration shops for 10 rupees, is available in the 'black market' for 30 rupees now.*



*Flood displaced thousands. Psychosocial impacts of this disaster are many fold.*



Courtesy: Indian Express

*Offshore Vortex* is a rare meteorological phenomenon that is characterised by a heavy downpour, but extremely localized, spread as little as 30 sq kms.

Scientists say that in Mumbai, firstly there were high winds in the Arabian sea. The winds then took a turn to form a trough. When it took 360 degrees,

a vortex was formed. Then there was formation of low pressure, strong winds shot up high in the atmosphere resulting in heavy rain.

## **IMMEDIATE NEEDS and recommendations:**

This report, based on the needs expressed by the survivors and the constituencies involved in flood response, makes the following recommendations. All the needs are to be met with utmost urgency, starting from **NOW**.

### **THE FOLLOWING IMMEDIATE NEEDS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR THE NEXT 30 DAYS:**

1. Food materials – dry ration like rice, wheat, oil, sugar and other essential items
2. Starting of community kitchens
3. Cooking fuel (kerosene and LPG gas) and utensils
4. Streamlining food distribution mechanism like activation of ration shops, relief centres and community kitchens
5. Special care for women, children, unorganised workers and homeless people.
6. Potable water and water purification materials like halogen tablets and chlorine
7. Immediate disposal of carcasses
8. Shelter – temporary and permanent
9. Support to kick start schools – provision of text and notebooks and resources to procure them again.
10. Restoration of livelihoods
11. Mechanism to track the missing
12. Dignified and speedy compensation for lost lives and property loss
13. Streamlining the relief distribution through better co-operation and co-ordination amongst various players like the government; academic institutions, citizens groups, community based organisations, NGOs and INGOs
14. Mechanism to give ration cards, passports and other identity cards to ensure speedy compensation mechanism
15. Clothes, especially for women and children
16. Beddings and sheets
17. Medical assistance and hygiene promotion measures
18. Public health and psychosocial support
19. Efforts are needed to reach out to the people who are away from road sides and outside Mumbai. Media can play a crucial role in this
20. Additional material and financial resources and experienced hands are needed
21. Constant monitoring and vigilance,

### **Medium and longer term needs:**

1. Develop a people-centred disaster response mechanism and policy
2. Develop an early warning and early response mechanism
3. Include disaster response in the curricula, starting from schools onwards
4. Constitute community-based disaster response teams
5. Use mass media for public education and disaster preparedness work.

### **Recommendations for AAI-India:**

1. Step up humanitarian assistance
2. Facilitate co-ordination amongst INGOs, especially those who are members of DEC
3. Mobilise more resources and deploy additional experienced people
4. Sensitise international donors about the unattended needs
5. Work with local groups to take up advocacy issues to address compensation, rights and dignity of the survivors
6. Put focused efforts to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable like women, children, unorganised workers and homeless people.

## In the aftermath of the floods in Mumbai *Rajubhai Sampat Sawant recalls...*

**Bhimwadi, south Mumbai August 1st week.** Fear is visible in her eyes and it is palpable in her voice when she recalls the flood fury. The day (26 July) flood waters reconfigured her lives, Rajubhai Sampat Sawant was in her slum shack house with her grandchildren.

She recalls while in her makeshift home in Bhimwadi, a slum in south Mumbai...

"It started by 3:30 pm. By 11 pm, water was at chest level. I ran with the rest of the family to my daughter's house that is close by, but on an elevated plain." "We lost everything."

"The floods reconfigured the landscape and livelihoods of my neighbours and others in this slum."

The first site that hits your eye when you enter the slum is the clothes spread all over the open area. People are drying the clothes that they have been to save from the floods. It is spread all over.

Jabhai Judhawade has been waiting patiently for the past several days. "I hope the rain god is kind enough to stop the rains so that I can dry and prepare something out of this for my grandchildren." When I look at this grandmother, I see a ray of hope despite clouds still darkening sun's rays.

The government claims that relief efforts have been improving. Rains have been subsiding. However, slum residents echo a different tale. "Relief is going where it is convenient for the authorities to deliver than where it is most needed" said Dr Kamini Kapadia of ActionAid International. The poor are left out from the relief safety net.

The situation in the makeshift camps is deteriorating. The floods claimed over 1000 lives and disrupted the lives of 20 million people. However, little support has come for the residents of Shivshakthi Nagar, home for Rajubhai and other 550 families.

"It is 8 days now since the floods began and we have no work to make a living," says Rajan Ubalaya Yogi, a youth leader in this slum. The plight of people like Yogi who survive on daily wages is difficult. Ragpickers and other unorganised sectors are feeling the real pinch - no work, no pay.

Slum people now hit worse by the floods say that a shortage of fuel is amplifying health problems. A bottle of kerosene, usually available in ration shops for Rs10, is available in the 'black market' for Rs30 now. Still there are long queues for the same. A bunch of *Methi*

(popular green leafy vegetable) is sold for Rs15, almost three times the usual rate.

The devastating floods and unrelenting rain also triggered mass displacement, though poor people remain wary of moving away, fearful that their land will be taken. "We lost our identity cards, ration cards and other documents," said a local youth.

Water-borne diseases are rampant and some doctors have warned people to take precautions against the bacterial disease leptospirosis. Some of the people have been in knee-deep flood waters for several days.

Children are the worst hit. Some clothes lost while the rest soaked in water. Floods and unrelenting rain are testing their resilience. Fever, diarrhoea and chest infections are rampant.

Road-side charity work is a hallmark of assistance in many a places. Too much media coverage on the resilience and bravery of *Mumbaikers* (as residents of Mumbai are popularly known) has misled international aid agencies and hampered relief efforts on the ground. It is time for a reality check.

The poorest - the slum dwellers, the daily wage earners, ragpickers - suffer the most, and their recovery is going to be a long nightmare.

The psychosocial dimensions of this disaster are manifold. "Children scream during sleep and we feel helpless," said Rajubhai. The children were stranded for several hours in the deluge. "We saw bodies floating around. We are scared," said Kavita (11).

Rajubhai and the rest of the residents of this slum will never forget the dreadful day. She like the millions in Mumbai hopes that it never happens again

**Unnikrishnan P V**



*Jabhai Judhawade in a south Mumbai slum*

# Humanitarian Principles in Action



**1** The Humanitarian imperative comes first

**2** Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone

**3** Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.

**4** We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy



**5** We shall respect culture and custom



**6** We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities

**7** Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid

**8** Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerability to disaster as well as meet basic needs

**9** We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources

**10** In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects



Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief



**India: Maharashtra and Goa - Floods**  
 Based on OCHA Situation Report No. 1 (27 July 2005)  
 Updated on 28 July 2005 from media sources  
 GLIDE: FL-2005-000104-IND

"More than 500 people have been killed by floods and landslides in western India and thousands remained stuck on Thursday in the nation's financial capital, Bombay, following the worst ever monsoon rains in the region." (Reuters - 28 July 2005)



**SITUATION**  
 Heavy rains have caused severe flooding in Maharashtra and Goa states. 42 total deaths have been reported. Road networks, air links, communications, and power supply have been disrupted in locations throughout the affected area.

**ACTION**  
 Army, Navy and Air Forces called in by Government to carry out search and rescue operations. Air force helicopters to airdrop food packages. Approximately 10,000 people evacuated to safer locations. Detailed damage assessment survey to be undertaken in affected districts once floodwaters recede. State Relief and Rehabilitation Department releasing funds to districts for relief expenditure.

Note: Information received from the United Nations Resident Coordinator's office in Delhi. Updated map figures from Reuters, BBC, and OCHA

Map projection: Gnomonic  
 Map data source: Census of India ESAI, UN Geographical Section  
 Note: Spelling is based on Census of India.  
 Code: OCHA/IND - 2005/021

Produced by the ReliefWeb Map Centre  
 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
 United Nations - 28 July 2005

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