

# Alert

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## India

# Earthquake in India

Geneva, 20 September 2011

### 1. Brief description of the emergency

The death toll in the 6.8 earthquake that convulsed the state of Sikkim in India on Sunday evening (18<sup>th</sup> September) crossed 80 as army columns and paramilitary personnel battled torrential rain, mist and landslides that cut off affected areas and stalled relief and rescue work. North and East Sikkim are the worst affected, where major stretches remain disconnected from the state capital Gangtok. Even where diggers and heavy earth movers barreled their way through, rescue teams had a trying time reaching out to those trapped in the rubble. Until late last night, medical teams were trying to reach Mangan, the spot closest to the epicenter of the quake. This despite the fact that the road to Mangan was cleared by late yesterday afternoon. Elsewhere, boulders and debris mark what were once roads.

Sikkim alone accounted for 50 deaths followed by 12 deaths in Bengal, six in Bihar and at least 20 in Nepal and Tibet. Officials said that when the quake struck on Sunday evening, there were several vehicles on the Gangtok-Mangan route and many of these could have been "tossed off the road" or crushed under moving mountains of debris. "We have reports of several people missing but can only act on these once the road is restored," said an official. As many as 22 people travelling in a bus are reported missing since the occurrence of the quake in north Sikkim. As dusk descended over the hills yesterday, panic returned to haunt residents. There are fears among the people that the quake may return at any time and this has made them to come out in open not taking any chances.

As many as 105 army columns, with an estimated 5000 personnel, have moved into the affected areas. Their primary objective is to restore road, telecom and power links. According to an army spokesman as many as 20 blockades had been cleared on the national highway to Gangtok, but airdropping operations had to be abandoned because of bad weather. On the city outskirts, many families have pitched tents in open spaces where they spent a second night yesterday.

### 2. Impact

103 severely injured people have so far been admitted in the hospital and are receiving treatments and the death toll and number of injured people may rise as the rescue operation starts in full swing today. Preliminary assessment suggests the total collapse of 1000 houses and buildings and partial damage to over 100,000 houses and buildings. Besides this, all the major roads such as the national highway, state highway, district highways and

rural roads have been damaged extensively. Along with the roads concrete bridges, rural bridges have also been damaged.

The secretariat building, government press building, police headquarter, hospital buildings, school buildings and government buildings in four affected districts have also been extensively damaged. Power transmission lines and electric poles have been uprooted severely effecting power supply. Water supply of Gangtok has been reported to be damaged and rural water supply in various districts has been affected.

### **3. National and international response**

Armed forces, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel have been pressed into search and rescue operations. Though over 6,000 personnel have been mobilized, their deployment remained slow due to lack of road connectivity to Gangtok. Most of them were later airlifted to different parts of Sikkim in batches. The ITBP has pressed 712 personnel for the rescue operations. Two medical teams with doctors and paramedics have reached the worst-hit Mangan in North Sikkim. The army has already opened relief camps for 2,000 people and ITBP for 400 others.

In Delhi, the prime minister of India has announced INR 200,000 (USD 4,100 approx.) as ex-gratia to next of kin of those killed in the earthquake and INR 100,000 each for those seriously injured. The chief minister of Sikkim state has announced ex gratia of INR 500,000 per person for the kith and kin of the deceased, INR 50,000 for grievous injuries and INR 25,000 for minor injuries. The government of West Bengal has announced an ex-gratia of INR 200,000 to the next of kin of the dead.

### **4. ACT Alliance response**

ACT Alliance India members especially LWSIT and CASA are closely monitoring the situation. It appears that both national and state governments are highly pro-active to the situation and making all efforts to rescue the victims of the earthquake and providing necessary support in terms of food and medical aid to the people in the region. In West Bengal the damages are less and the state government itself can deal with the situation. However, given the extensive destruction to lives and property in Sikkim, the government response may not be adequate and timely in all affected areas.

CASA has already deployed its assessment team to the affected areas and planning to initiate immediate relief assistance through an ACT appeal. The team will provide first hand information regarding sectoral needs and also explore the possibilities of partnership with local NGO's, churches and other civil society actors to carry out a relief and recovery programme. A preliminary appeal is forthcoming.

LWSIT is currently assessing the situation and its response capacity and likely to join the appeal through early recovery and rehabilitation activities.

**Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jean-Daniel Birmele, ACT Chief Finance Officer ([Jean\\_Daniel.Birmele@actalliance.org](mailto:Jean_Daniel.Birmele@actalliance.org)).**

Thank you for your attention.

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