

Nepal flash floods leave 93,000 affected as Red Cross warns of rising death toll

NEW DELHI, AUG 28: The scale of trauma caused by the devastating flash floods that struck Nepal on August 26 is “enormous,” the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said on August 28, as the humanitarian toll of the disaster continued to mount.

Early assessments indicate that at least 93,000 people have been affected and are in urgent need of assistance, according to the IFRC, the world’s largest humanitarian network. The organisation warned that the death toll, which has already surpassed 500, is expected to rise further as emergency teams gain access to areas cut off by the disaster.

David Fisher, the IFRC’s head of delegation for Nepal, said rescuers and humanitarian workers had yet to reach some of the worst-hit communities because critical infrastructure had been destroyed or severely damaged.

“Due to roads and bridges having been washed out and both cell coverage and electricity cuts, we have not yet been able to access some of the hardest-hit areas,” Fisher said at a press conference in Geneva, speaking from Kathmandu.

“The trauma of this event is enormous,” he added, underscoring the scale of the humanitarian crisis facing affected communities.



Nepal flood death toll rises to 547; 1545 people rescued floods LIVE | Death toll rises to 547, Red Cross estimates 93,000 affected; fresh deluge threat looms

Thousands of homes have either been destroyed or sustained significant damage in the floods, leaving large numbers of people without adequate shelter and basic necessities. The IFRC said its initial estimate of 93,000 affected people could increase as more information becomes available and teams are able to reach isolated areas. “The death toll is very high and unfortunately likely to continue to rise,” Fisher said.

The Nepal Red Cross has begun distributing emergency assistance to people who have lost their homes. Relief efforts include the provision of essential food and drinking water, as well as hygiene kits, mattresses and blankets. However, access remains one of the key challenges confronting responders. Washed-out roads and bridges, along with disruptions to mobile phone networks and electricity supplies, have hampered communication and prevented aid workers from reaching some of the communities most severely affected. The Red Cross said it is continuing to assess needs

and expand emergency relief operations as access improves. With the full extent of the destruction still emerging, humanitarian agencies are preparing for the possibility of further casualties and increased demand for shelter, food, water and other essential supplies. The disaster has left communities across affected areas grappling not only with loss of life and property but also with the psychological impact of the floods. The IFRC’s warning about the “enormous” trauma reflects the broader humanitarian consequences of a disaster whose full impact is yet to be assessed.



An aerial view of the houses partially submerged in mud-laden flash flood following an outburst in the Bhotekoshi River, in Rasuwa.

‘Murder of freedom of expression’: Congress leaders question Penguin India over Sonia Gandhi memoir

NEW DELHI, AUG 28: Several Congress leaders on Friday accused Penguin Random House India (PRHI) of compromising freedom of expression over the publication of Sonia Gandhi’s memoir ‘Belonging: A Journey of Love’ in India, with some questioning whether the publishing house was under government pressure.

Their reactions came after Penguin India said it is not the Indian publisher of Gandhi’s memoir and denied reports that it decided against publishing the book because the Congress leader declined proposed editorial changes.

Senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot questioned what was preventing the publishing house from releasing in India the same book being published internationally.

“What is this reason or pressure that prevents them from printing in India what is being printed worldwide?” Gehlot said in a post on X.

He alleged that pressure had been put on Penguin India to remove sections relating to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and China’s alleged occupation of Indian territory during the Modi government.

“Pressuring and stopping the book of such a personality-rich, senior politician of the country and former Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, is akin to murdering the freedom of expression,” Gehlot said.

“This is the murder of democracy. Why is this truth being hidden from the people of India? Will the Modi government also force publishers to alter facts under pressure?” he asked.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath



also described the reported refusal to publish the memoir as a matter of “grave concern”.

“Will the publisher decide what a senior figure like Mrs Gandhi will write and what she will not? The question also arises whether the publisher is saying this on its own or if there is pressure from someone on it?” Nath said in a post on X.

He said the trend of books being stopped from publication under “suspicious circumstances” posed a serious threat to freedom of expression and called for Gandhi’s memoir to be published soon.

Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi described Penguin India’s statement as “weak”.

“Penguin India is more than happy to publish ‘Exam Warriors’ and several books on RSS. No doubt there are those in the BJP government who have now become afraid of a book being read by the people of India,” Gogoi said on X.

Congress Seva Dal chief Srinivas BV also criticised the publishing house, saying its statement on “editorial independence” was unconvincing. The Seva Dal’s official X account separately described Penguin India as “Paltu Penguin”.

The Indian Youth Congress questioned the publishing house over the editorial changes it had sought, saying, “Nobody asked

whether you were ‘keen’. Tell us what changes you wanted, and why. The rest is corporate grammar.”

The organisation also posted “Introducing Penguin Janta Party” and “Penguin hai ya pinjare ka parinda” on X.

Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba accused Penguin and PRHI of resorting to “blackmailing tactics” and praised Gandhi for refusing to “bow down”.

Congress’s Kerala unit also took a swipe at the government, posting, “Peacock blocking penguin is just an old man’s fantasy. Nothing can stop ‘Belonging’ from reaching you.”

Penguin Random House India had earlier published a statement, clarifying it is not the publisher of Belonging in India and disputed the reported reason for its decision.

“Penguin Random House India is not the publisher of Belonging in India. Any suggestion that Penguin Random House India decided not to publish Belonging because the author declined editorial changes does not accurately reflect the circumstances,” it said in an official statement.

The publishing house said fact-checking and providing editorial recommendations were part of the normal publishing process.

“As a publisher, it is both our prerogative and our responsibility to fact check and

provide authors with recommendations that are in the best interests of their books. This is a normal part of the publishing process,” it said.

Penguin India added that it had remained “willing and keen to publish the book” throughout the relevant discussions and said it would not comment further on “confidential discussions with the author”.

Reports had suggested that the publisher pulled the plug on the book’s distribution over “an inaccurate map” and that “no changes are forthcoming” from the originating publisher.

The publisher also made headlines in February for saying that it had “not printed” former Army Chief General M M Naravane’s memoir “Four Stars of Destiny”. This was days after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi flashed a hard copy of the book in Parliament.

Meanwhile, the status of the book’s Indian publisher remains unclear. However, an e-book edition of Belonging was listed for pre-order on Amazon at Rs 2,615.

According to the Amazon listing, the e-book is published by William Collins, an imprint of HarperCollins UK.

The book is scheduled for international release on November 10 through Alfred A Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House. Knopf had announced an initial print run of one lakh copies.

According to Knopf, the 79-year-old Congress leader’s memoir will recount her journey from marrying into one of India’s most prominent political families to the death of her husband Rajiv Gandhi, which pushed her into the “public world of politics”. It will also reportedly cover her decision to turn down the prime minister’s post in 2004.

Russian drones batter Ukraine's Kyiv region, hitting apartments and warehouses for a second day

KYIV, AUG 28: Russian forces on Friday resumed their drone barrage of Ukraine’s Kyiv region, hitting more than a dozen apartment buildings and storage depots in a second straight day of aerial attacks, officials said.

Prolonged air raids in Kyiv on Thursday essentially locked down the Ukrainian capital for 15 hours, the Foreign Ministry said, choking the economy and severely disrupting civilian life more than 4½ years after Russia’s full-scale invasion of its neighbor. Even longer alerts are a daily reality in regions closer to the front line, the ministry said.

Russian drone and missile attacks are also taking aim at the power grid in what Ukrainian officials say is an annual campaign to “weaponize winter.” In Ukraine’s southern Kherson region on the Black Sea, where glide bombs a day earlier forced a combined heat and power plant to shut down, officials predicted a winter of extended outages and told people to move elsewhere if they could.

Russian strikes in the Kyiv region damaged 14 warehouses, 16 private houses, three apartment buildings and 16 vehicles, Tymur Tkachenko, head of the Kyiv regional military administration, said Friday.

A second drone hit one location after emergency crews were deployed, the State Emergency Service said, in what is termed by the military as a “double tap” that targets first responders. The attacks killed one person and wounded two others, according to officials.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that its forces overnight struck a warehouse in the Kyiv region that stores Ukraine’s Flamingo cruise missiles and fuel for rocket boosters.

Ukrainian officials didn’t immediately confirm the Russian claim, and The Associated Press couldn’t verify it. Recent strikes have dam-



aged numerous warehouses across Kyiv and the wider region, including facilities storing books, food and other consumer goods.

The attacks stretched into daylight hours, and Tkachenko urged residents to stay in safe locations and heed air raid alerts.

Russia is launching small numbers of fast-moving jet-powered drones in waves in an attempt to paralyze the capital, according to Andrii Kovalenko, head of Ukraine’s Center for Countering Disinformation at the National Security and Defense Council. “The goal is to exhaust air defenses and the population,” he said on social media on Friday.

Kyiv region authorities said that air quality worsened because of the attacks and warned people in some areas to keep their windows closed and limit their time outdoors. Four Russian glide bombs destroyed a sorting center belonging to the postal service Nova Poshta in the northern Sumy region, and a drone smashed one of its depots in the Kyiv region, the company said. In the southern Kherson region, which is about 70% under Russian control, officials urged tens of thousands of residents to move to safer regions because of the possibility of prolonged power and heating outages this winter.

“Kherson may be without electricity and heat not for hours or days, but for a long time. And we need to pre-

pare for this now,” said Oleksandr Prokudin, head of the Kherson regional military administration, in a social media post late Thursday. Russia has intensified attacks on critical infrastructure in the region, with 170 glide bombs dropped on the Kherson region since July 1 — more than in the first six months of the year, Prokudin said.

Russia has also launched more than 1,700 attack drones over the past two months, increasingly using jet-powered Shahed and Gerbera drones against critical infrastructure, he said, and attacks by smaller drones rose to 6,500 in the past week alone.

Authorities will offer help with evacuation, transportation, resettlement and social support for those who decide to leave, he said.

Russia fired 164 drones at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine’s air force said. It didn’t mention missiles, which usually are part of Russia’s aerial attacks.

A 61-year-old man was killed and seven other people were wounded Friday in a Russian glide bomb attack on the northern Sumy region, said Oleh Hryhorov, head of the Sumy regional military administration.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that its air defenses overnight shot down 512 Ukrainian drones over 18 Russian regions, as well as over the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula and the waters of the Black Sea.

Ukrainian forces struck the Slavneft-YANOS refinery in Russia’s Yaroslavl region overnight, causing a fire, Ukraine’s General Staff said, as Ukraine continued its campaign against the Russian oil sector.

A fire broke out at the site, which is around 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the border with Ukraine, the General Staff said. The plant produces gasoline, diesel and aviation fuel, fuel oil, lubricants and other petroleum products, it added.

A Ukrainian drone attack on Friday morning in the Yaroslavl region killed one person and wounded 27 other people, Gov. Mikhail Yevrayev said. Ten of those were wounded when drone debris fell on a bus, he said.

He said that unspecified “industrial infrastructure,” residential areas and unidentified retail facilities were hit.

In the Moscow region that surrounds but doesn’t include the Russian capital, a drone hit a supermarket, damaging it and shattering windows in a nearby outpatient clinic, Gov. Andrei Vorobyov said on Telegram.

In the port city of Sevastopol in Crimea, a five-story residential building suffered significant damage from a drone, according to the Russian-installed governor of Sevastopol Mikhail Razvozhaev. Four people were wounded, he said. He posted images of a charred building with windows and balconies knocked out.

BJP chief discusses with his new team party's roadmap for upcoming assembly polls

NEW DELHI, AUG 28: BJP president Nitin Nabin on Thursday held a meeting with newly appointed national general secretaries of the party and discussed the roadmap for the upcoming assembly elections in various states, including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

The meeting, which lasted for more than three hours at the BJP headquarters here, was attended by all newly appointed national general secretaries including former Union minister Smriti Irani, and Rajya Sabha MPs Vinod Tawde and Satish Poonia.

BJP national general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santhosh was also present at the meeting.

“Chaired the first organisational meeting with the newly appointed National General Secretaries at the BJP headquarters today,” Nabin said in a post on X after the meeting.

“Held detailed discussions on organisational preparations and the roadmap for the upcoming Assembly elections in various states,” the BJP chief added.



The assembly polls are due in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat in 2027. The BJP is in power in five of these poll-bound states, except Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. While the Aam Aadmi Party currently rules Punjab, the Congress is in power in Himachal Pradesh.

Later, in a post on X, Irani said, “The first meeting of the newly appointed national general secretaries was held under the chairmanship of the national president, Nitin Nabin, at the BJP headquarters.”

“A meaningful discussion took place on numerous important matters related to the party and organization, as well as on the upcoming elections in various states, and deliberations were held on the outline of the ‘Seva Sankalp Abhiyan’,” she said.

The BJP is set to launch a month-long ‘Seva Sankalp Abhiyan’ across the country from September 17 to mark the completion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 25 years in public life as the head of a government and his contributions.

The decision was taken at the party’s meeting on August 22. The meeting was also attended by the presidents and organising general secretaries of the BJP’s state units, besides other senior leaders of the party.

During the nationwide campaign, the BJP will reach out to every section of society, including youth, women and farmers through various programmes.

Under the campaign, BJP workers will reach out to 14 lakh Anganwadi workers across the country to honour