

No respite as monsoon rains pound South Asia

● Total death toll passes 200

● In India, the death toll rose to at least 120

New Delhi, India

Heavy monsoon rains across South Asia claimed more lives yesterday, with the death toll passing 200 as authorities tried to reach stranded villagers cut off by surging floodwaters.

The annual deluge is crucial to replenishing water supplies in the impoverished region, but the rains from June to September often turn deadly.

Across India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, millions of residents have been affected and hundreds of thousands displaced, with homes and boats washed away.

In flood-prone Bangladesh, which is criss-crossed by rivers, around one-third of the country is underwater and people were being killed by lightning strikes, officials said.

In India, the death toll rose to at least 120 and entire communities were cut off by rising floodwaters which damaged or submerged roads.

"It's been 15 days (since) this area has been flooded," a local resident in Assam, where the death toll reached 22, said.

"The damage it has caused is very bad. Cattle have also been affected. Everything has been destroyed."

Video footage shared on social media showed rescuers pulling a rhinoceros calf from swollen



An Indian resident carries gas canisters as he wades through a flooded area following heavy monsoon rains in Muzaffarpur in the Indian state of Bihar

floodwaters at the state's World Heritage-listed Kaziranga National Park, which is home to two-thirds of the world's remaining one-horned rhinos.

In Bihar, which borders Nepal -- and like Assam is one of the worst-affected regions in India -- locals told AFP they were unable to reach food supplies.

Some 33 deaths have been reported and 2.5 million residents affected. Locals were erecting makeshift shelters on elevated land with the meagre belongings they had salvaged from the floodwaters.

In Mumbai, the number of victims from a building collapse following heavy rains rose to 13.

In the worst-affected Bangladesh district of Kurigram, deputy district administrator Hafizur Rahman told AFP a woman and four children died after their small boat sank in floodwaters.

Others were killed by landslides in Cox's Bazar district



Pakistani residents wade along a flooded street after heavy monsoon rains in Lahore

-- home to nearly one million Rohingya Muslim refugees who have fled a military crackdown in Myanmar.

In Nepal, the aid agency Save the Children said severe flooding and landslides had left tens of thousands of people homeless, with many stranded outdoors

or marooned. At least 78 people have died and 16,000 families have been displaced.

"It's absolutely essential that we reach these communities to avoid this turning into a health emergency," Save the Children's Nepal country director Ned Olney said in a statement.



General view of a flooded area following heavy monsoon rains in Muzaffarpur in the Indian state of Bihar



Bangladeshi people look at flood waters in Kurigram district, in the northern part of Bangladesh



Indian residents wade along a flooded street carrying their belongings following heavy monsoon rains at Sitamarhi district in the Indian state of Bihar

Woman rescued as death toll rises in building collapse



Indian National Disaster Response Force and Indian fire brigade personnel search for survivors amid debris after a building collapsed in Mumbai

Mumbai, India

Rescuers pulled a woman from the rubble of a Mumbai building a day after it collapsed but her two young children did not survive, officials said yesterday, as the death toll from the tragedy rose to 13.

Heavy monsoon rains on Tuesday trapped more than 40 people after the building crumbled in southern Mumbai's congested Dongri area, with rescuers and volunteers struggling to conduct their search among the narrow lanes.

"We rescued 28-year-old Alima Indrasi with her two children early on Wednesday morning," India's National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) spokesman Sachidanand Gawde said.

"She has sustained injuries but is undergoing treatment and her children did not survive... (we) are hopeful there may still be some victims who will survive."

He said rescue operations were in the final stages.

Disaster management spokesman Tanaji Kamble added that 13 bodies have been recovered so far.

Spontaneously combusting sushi flakes blamed in mystery blazes

● The two fires in Madison caused at least \$575,000 in damage

Washington, United States

A series of freak fires at sushi restaurants in the United States have been blamed on an unusual culprit: a deep-fried ingredient that, if not handled properly, spontaneously combusts.

Firefighters in the city of Madison, Wisconsin say two fires at local Japanese restaurants earlier this year were caused by chefs deep frying flour to make a tempura-like coating called "crunch," then leaving it to cool.

"Cooking oils, especially soybean oil and canola oil, are known to have a propensity to self-heat under certain circumstances," the Midwestern city's fire department said in a safety bulletin.

"Because the 'crunch' product is heated during the cooking



The charred remains of a sushi kitchen in Madison, Wisconsin.

process, then placed in a bowl or colander to cool and drain, the ability for the heat to dissipate is compromised. These conditions can create an environment for a fire to occur," the bulletin

continued.

The two fires in Madison caused at least \$575,000 in damage, and investigators blame "crunch" for at least five other blazes that they're aware of.

Seeking to forestall future infernos, the fire department recommended spreading the ingredient out on a flat surface like a baking sheet to keep it from catching fire.