

Yamuna water level breaches 60-year record; Kejriwal seeks Centre's help

Over 16,500 people evacuated from flood-affected areas as river crosses the 208-m mark; situation will improve in a day, Jal Shakti Minister tells CM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

With the Yamuna water level in the city touching a 60-year high on Wednesday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the Centre to ensure that the level does not rise further. By Wednesday midnight, the river was flowing at 208.13 metres, which is the highest recorded level since 1963.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, the CM urged people living in areas close to the river to evacuate their houses immediately.

Several parts of the city close to the river, such as Monastery Market, Yamuna Bazar, Geeta Ghat and the stretch from Majnu Ka Tilla to Wazirabad, were flooded on Wednesday. Over 16,500 people were evacuated from flood-affected areas till Wednesday night, a Delhi government official said.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the CM requested that "the water from Hathnikund barrage in Haryana [upstream of Delhi] be released [into the Yamuna] at a limited speed", pointing out that the Capital is set to host the G-20 Summit in a few weeks.

The CM said soon after writing to Mr. Shah, Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat contacted him and said there was no facility to stop water at the Hathnikund Barrage. "However, he said that less water is now flowing down from Himachal Pradesh and that the situation will improve in about a day," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The Yamuna's water level has been rising steadily since heavy rain lashed

River records highest-ever water level since 1963

208.13m

July 12 midnight

Year	Water level (in metres)
1963	205.40
1978	207.49
2010	207.11
2013	207.32

Danger Level: 205.33

Warning Level: 204.50

Source: Delhi government

north India on July 8-9. It breached the 'danger mark' of 205.33 metres on Monday evening. By 11 p.m. on Tuesday, it had swollen to 206.83 metres. The Delhi government is in the process of evacuating close to 41,000 people living close to the river.

'Flow to reduce'

The water released from Hathnikund Barrage fell from 3.59 lakh cusecs at 11 a.m. on Tuesday to 1.47 lakh cusecs at 8 p.m. on Wednesday. "The water released from the barrage takes 36-72 hours to reach Delhi. So, even as less water is being released now, it will take some time before the river flow in the Capital is affected,"

PWD Minister Atishi said the embankments along the river are being strengthened to prevent them from giving way to the river, which is in spate.

Lieutenant-Governor V. K. Saxena said various National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams have been deployed in the affected areas and that assistance will be extended to all affected persons.



People in flood-affected Yamuna Bazar in east Delhi shifting to safer areas with their belongings.
SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Raging river brings back memories of 1978 tragedy

Satvika Mahajan
NEW DELHI

As parts of Delhi grapple with flooding and residents of low-lying areas try to keep their heads above water, Sunita Sood, 73, knows how difficult things can get. Ms. Sood has first-hand experience of what it is like to be kept apart from your family and home by flooding.

She was one of the scores of residents who saw it all happen before their eyes when murky, smelly water spilled into homes and roads of Delhi in 1978.

As a turbulent Yamuna menacingly advanced towards the city on Wednesday, the events of the fateful September started playing in Ms. Sood's mind all over again. Back in 1978, she was a young doctor and mother of a one-year-old baby. "I was working with the Holy Family Hospital in Okhla at the time. There was chaos everywhere as patients



An aerial view of a flood-hit Delhi in 1978. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

waded through a sea of problems. So many staffers had to spend their nights in the hospital," she recalls.

To make matters worse, her husband Prabhat Kamal Sood was stuck in Roorkee with neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, too, submerged.

"I was doing a Master's degree as part of a government initiative. I couldn't come and see my family for two months," says Mr. Sood, 75, who was the Deputy Director of Central Water Commission at the time.

The water level of the Yamuna had risen to 207.49 metres that year.

More than four decades

later, many others remember the nights of uncertainty, camped out on their roofs with essential supplies cut off. Urban colonies like Adarsh Nagar, Model Town, Mukherjee Nagar were all under water. Official records state 18 lives were lost and thousands were rendered homeless.

"We were scared for our lives. The government kept the waters from flooding our house was a newly constructed 'bund' [embankment]. We camped on our roof for days until the situation got better," recalls 69-year-old Arjun Jot Malhotra.

Floods push some to the highway, bring irreparable loss to others

Alisha Dutta
NEW DELHI

The rising Yamuna level has displaced nearly 40,000 people in the city, especially in east Delhi.

While many are living at risk having been forced to set up makeshift tents on roads bustling with traffic, others have been provided adequate accommodation by the Delhi government but have suffered irreparable losses. Many more are stuck at homes that are almost submerged.

At Khel Gaon near Akshardham Temple, the temporary homes of almost 60 families were washed away by the incessant rains. Meera Kumari, 30, said many of them have been living on the Delhi-Meerut highway inside temporary tents since Monday.

A few kilometres away at Mayur Vihar Phase I, the government has provided sturdier tents to those displaced from Yamuna Khadar. One of the residents, Hira Lal, a farmer, rued, "I paid ₹30,000 for leasing 100 bighas of land for farming. Now all my crops are gone. The land owners can claim their losses, but how will we?"

At Yamuna Bazar, where a day earlier people were wading through knee-deep water, many homes have been almost submerged. "We cannot walk anymore, so we are forced to take boats to reach the main road," said Sohan Kumar.