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New Delhi, February 8 (RHC)-- Indian rescuers are searching for more than 200 people missing in the Himalayas, including some trapped in a tunnel, after part of a glacier broke away, sending a torrent of water, rock and dust down a mountain valley.

Sunday's violent surge below Nanda Devi, India's second-highest peak, swept away the small Rishiganga hydroelectric project and damaged a bigger one further down the Dhauliganga river being built by state firm NTPC.

Eighteen bodies have been recovered from the mountainsides, officials said. Most of the missing were people working on the two projects, part of many the government has been building deep in the mountains of Uttarakhand state as part of a development push.

"As of now, around 203 people are missing," state chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said, and the number was changing as more information about people caught up the deluge emerged from the remote area. Videos on social media showed water surging through a small dam site, washing away construction equipment and bringing down small bridges.

"Everything was swept away, people, cattle and trees," Sangram Singh Rawat, a former village council member of Raini, the site closest to the Rishiganga project, told local media.

Rescue squads were focused on drilling their way through a 2.5km (1.5 miles) tunnel at the Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower project site that NTPC was building 5km (3 miles) downstream and where about 30 workers were believed trapped.

"We are trying to break open the tunnel, it's a long one, about 2.5km," said Ashok Kumar, the state police chief. He said rescuers had gone 150 metres (490 yards) into the tunnel but debris and slush were slowing progress.

There had been no voice contact yet with anyone in the tunnel, another official said. Heavy equipment has been employed and a canine squad flown to the site to locate survivors. On Sunday, 12 people were rescued from another, much smaller, tunnel.

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