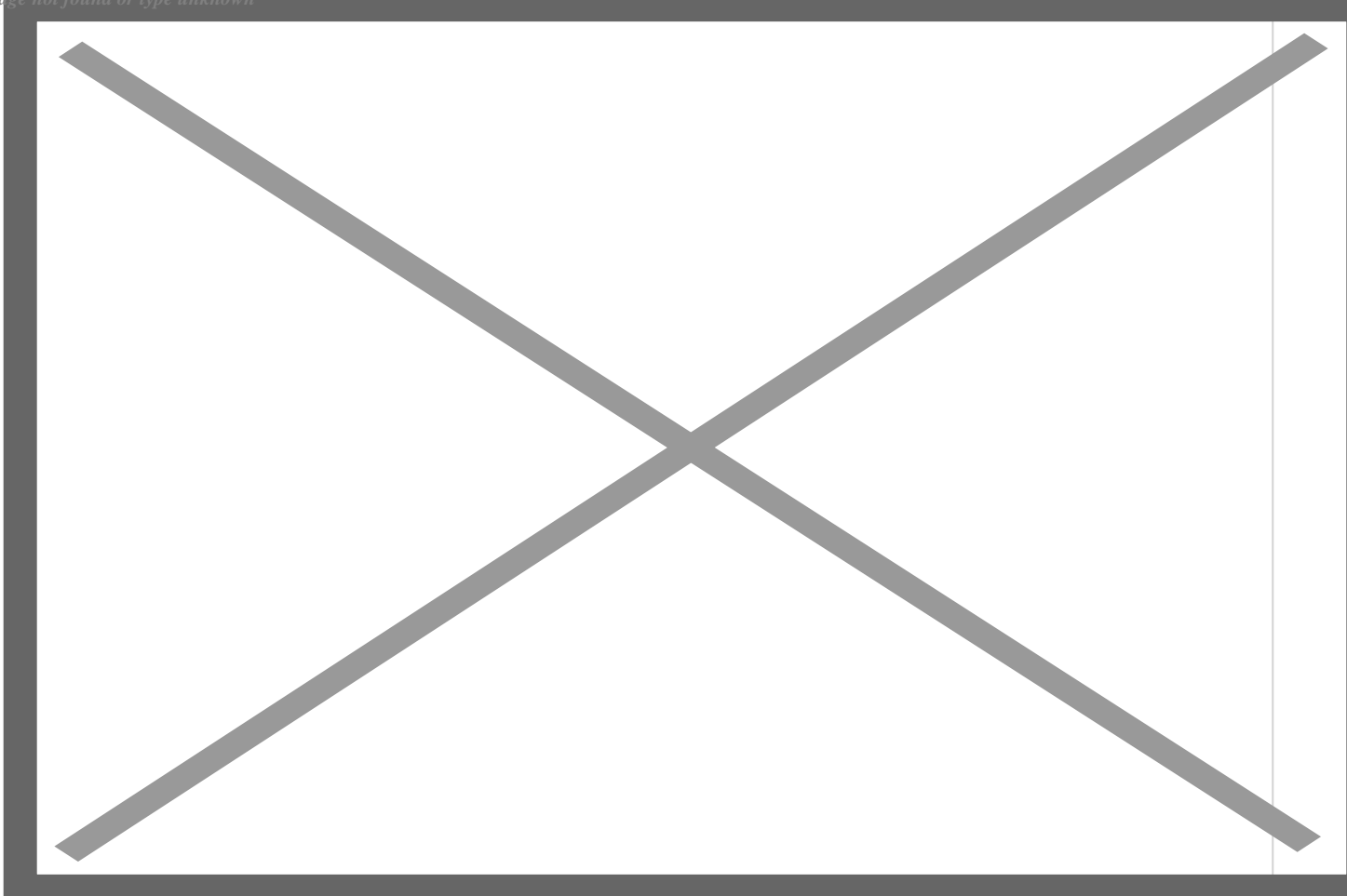


Death toll rises as heavy rains batter northern India

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Personnel from India's National Disaster Response Force carry out a rescue operation during the floods in Udhamsingh Nagar, Uttarakhand [NDRF via EPA]

New Delhi, October 20 (RHC)--At least 41 people have died and more than a dozen were missing after landslides and flash floods triggered by several days of heavy rain hit northern India, officials say.

Officials in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said 35 people were killed in fresh landslides on Tuesday after six died in similar incidents a day earlier.

At least 30 of them were killed in seven separate incidents in the worst-affected Nainital region early Tuesday, after cloudbursts – an ultra-intense deluge of rain – triggered a series of landslides and destroyed several structures. “So far 30 people have been confirmed dead, while many people are still missing,” Nainital senior civil officer Ashok Kumar Joshi told the AFP news agency.

Joshi said several remote areas in the hilly region witnessed widespread damage in the intense rainfall. Five of the dead were from a single family whose house was buried by a massive landslide, another local civil officer Pradeep Jain said.

Prashant Jha, a journalist with the Times of India, said that the army, National Disaster Response Force and state’s disaster response force were all contributing to the current rescue efforts in Uttarakhand. “The villages that have been struck are very far to reach and the roads are cut off,” he said.

Officials said that the rescue efforts will take at least two to three days and dozens are people are still missing,” he added. Another landslide in the northern Almora district killed five people after huge rocks and a wall of mud demolished and engulfed their home.

At least six others were killed on Monday in two remote districts of the state. The Indian Meteorological Department extended and widened its weather alert on Tuesday, predicting “heavy” to “very heavy” rainfall in the region during the next two days.

The weather office said several areas were drenched by more than 400mm (16 inches) of rainfall on Monday, causing landslides and flooding. Authorities ordered the closure of schools and banned all religious and tourist activities in the state.

Television footage and social media videos showed residents wading through knee-deep water near Nainital lake, a tourist hotspot, and the Ganges bursting its banks in Rishikesh. More than 100 tourists were stuck inside a resort in Ramgarh after the overflowing Kosi river deluged several areas.

Landslides are a regular danger in India’s Himalayan north, but experts said they are becoming more common as rains become increasingly erratic and glaciers melt. Experts also blamed construction work on hydroelectric dams and deforestation.

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