

International

Indians riot for water in drought-hit Gujarat

BOMBAY, Apr 22 : City dwellers in India's drought-hit western state of Gujarat rioted as the municipal water supply slowed to a trickle, officials said today, reports AFP.

Gujarat Chief Minister Kshubhai Patel today appealed for calm after angry residents in the worst affected districts of Jamnagar, Rajkot, Junagadh and Bhavnagar rioted late Friday as they got tap water for just 15-20 minutes a day.

"Gujarat is facing the worst water famine in 100 years," said Patel.

"We cannot provide water the way we did under normal circumstances but we are doing our best. We need calm instead of violence," he said.

State government official Amarendra Nath Rakesh told

AFP by telephone that about 25 million people, out of the state's population of 42 million, were affected by the crisis.

Rakesh said the government was supplying water by tanker trucks every two days to 438 out of the 866 villages which have been officially declared "scarcity affected."

The situation is expected to worsen in summer. We have appealed for central aid so that we can step up relief work," he said.

A resident of Rajkot said private water suppliers were taking advantage of the drought.

"A bucket of water is being sold by private water suppliers for 45 rupees (one US dollar)," said housewife Nidhi Patel.

"Water tankers in our neighbour-

hood have to move around with the help of police protection lest they be looted."

She said people in Rajkot had stoned public property and even damaged state-run buses to protest government apathy.

State irrigation minister Jay Narayan said the drought had destroyed crops in 9,500 villages.

"I have never seen the dams with so little water in the last 10 years," said Narayan.

More than 100 of the 143 dams and reservoirs in Saurashtra, Kutch and north Gujarat are reported to be bone dry and others have water for barely a fortnight. The region only received 45 percent of its average annual rainfall last year.

Delhi grants Rs 2b to Rajasthan, Gujarat

Reuters adds: India's Federal Government said on Friday it would grant nearly two billion rupees (\$45.81 million) in aid to the drought-affected western states of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Over half of Gujarat's villages are battling the worst drought in 100 years and large parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh are facing an acute water shortage.

It is feared the situation could worsen in coming months with temperatures expected to exceed 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

The government said in a statement Gujarat had been granted 874 million rupees and Rajasthan 1.12 billion rupees.

boat loads of Tigers who tried to land on the Jaffna coast.

On Friday, the government appointed a top army general to take combined leadership of the army, navy and airforce as Tamil Tiger guerrillas threatened to overrun a vital army garrison.

A retired army general, Rohan Daluwatte, was put in charge of combat troops of the security forces in the past two days fighting in the Jaffna peninsula, the defence ministry said in a statement.

It said two government soldiers were killed and another 31 wounded in the fierce battles at the southern end of the peninsula.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels.

The defence ministry said the government had deployed MI-24 helicopter gun ships and artillery to pound rebel positions and beat back at least six

rebels.

Defence sources said the military had by Friday evening opened another supply route to the Elephant Pass base located at the entrance to the Jaffna peninsula that the military took from the rebels in December.

However, military officials admitted the Tigers had seized a section of the main A-9 highway that was earlier used by the military to supply Elephant Pass as well as Iyakachchi bases.

On Thursday, the military appointed Major General Janaka Perera to be the main field commander and mount counter attacks against rebel forces.

"Very heavy fighting is continuing and Major General Perera will be overall operations commander in the area," a defence official here said Friday.

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