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## Little Relief Expected for Flood-Ravaged Brazil

By [ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO](#)

TRIZIDELA DO VALE, [Brazil](#) — Swelled rivers that have flooded homes to their rooftops and forced more than 260,000 people from their homes in northeastern Brazil will probably take a few more weeks to recede, Brazilian authorities said over the weekend.

The intense flooding has paralyzed large swaths of this sweltering tropical region, where schools and government buildings have been closed for weeks and whole towns are almost underwater. While [water levels have receded](#) somewhat in recent days, showers continued through the weekend. That further complicated the timeline for the drenched areas to dry out and for residents to return to their homes.

With only marginal assistance arriving from the federal government, local authorities in some of Brazil's poorest states say they are at the breaking point.

"The water level is not dropping fast enough," said Jânio de Sousa Freitas, the mayor of Trizidela do Vale, one of the worst-hit towns. "We are facing a critical situation. We don't have the resources to cope with the heavy demand for basic goods, from food to medicines to mattresses."

The flooding, which began in April, has been the third-worst in the past 49 years, based on the amount of rainfall in a single month, said Lincoln Muniz Alves, a climatologist in São Paulo for the Center for Weather Forecasting and Climate Studies.

It is the second time in six months that intense flooding has turned into a regional disaster. In November, torrential rains in Santa Catarina, in the south, caused landslides that left 135 people dead and swept more than 78,000 from their homes, affecting some 60 towns.

"What we are observing in the last few years in Brazil is a pattern of droughts and more intense rains," said Carlos Nobre, a climatologist in São Paulo at the National Institute of Space Research.

Colder temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, which climatologists have called the La Niña effect, are colliding with warmer temperatures in the tropical southern Atlantic Ocean, one possible explanation for the extreme weather patterns, he said.

Heavy rains continue to force more people from their homes. Civil-defense authorities said Sunday that the

number of homeless or displaced people in the state of Maranhão had climbed beyond 116,000, with 10 dead and 93 towns in a state of emergency.

On Saturday, the body of a 13-year-old girl was found in the town of Coelho Neto. She had been swept up in the rising waters while headed to school, the civil defense in Maranhão said.

In all, at least 45 deaths have been attributed to the flooding in the north.

Relief efforts continue to be hampered by overflowing rivers that have forced relief workers to deliver goods by small boats or canoes. In Maranhão, donated goods are being centralized in the capital, São Luis, a few hundred miles from the areas most affected by flooding.

Here in Trizidela do Vale, a town of 18,400 in Maranhão, it has been a month since torrential rains forced about 11,000 residents to seek shelter elsewhere. The water is still so high it nearly touches the roofs of many homes.

The floodwaters have dropped by a few inches in the past week, but not enough to give officials hope that the town will dry out before June, Mr. de Sousa Freitas, the mayor, said. Children have not been to class for weeks, with schools and public gymnasiums in both Trizidela and neighboring Pedreiras serving as makeshift shelters.

Mr. de Sousa Freitas said the town had already provided more than 5,000 subsistence meals for the displaced. He criticized the federal government for not doing more, saying it had sent only 1,051 meals to Trizidela.

Mr. de Sousa Freitas has not been alone in alleging that the government of President [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#) has done less for affected areas of the northeast than it did for wealthier Santa Catarina last fall.

Piauí and Maranhão, two of the states most affected by the floods, are also two of the country's three poorest in per-capita income, with most residents earning far less than Brazil's minimum monthly salary of \$225.

"The people in the south treat the northeast as a subrace of Brazilians," said Roberto Quiñero, who owns a small food market in Pedreiras.

Brazilian officials denied any regional favoritism. "The citizens of the northeast will receive the same support that Santa Catarina received," said Franklin Martins, the president's chief spokesman.

Through last week, about \$2.5 million had been donated for relief efforts in the north, compared to some \$16.4 million that was donated to Santa Catarina, according to civil-defense figures, which include private donations.

The United States government, as it did after the floods in Santa Catarina, said last week that it was donating \$50,000 to help buy food and water for the homeless.

*Mery Galanternick contributed reporting from Rio de Janeiro.*

