

INDIA: Rain fury leaves Chennai marooned; Army, navy rescue stranded people

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Chennai: Chennai and several coastal areas of the state were today marooned in flood waters following incessant heavy rains that pounded the city and the neighbouring districts cutting the state capital from rail and road links even as the airport was shutdown for the day.

Though the heavy rains that lashed the city and the suburbs and neighbouring districts of Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur and Cuddalore for more than a day yesterday have shown a let up since this morning, a continuous drizzle under overcast skies spelled further trouble for citizens. Â

Teams of army, navy, coast guard and NDRF have been deployed in the worst-affected areas of Tambaram, the southern gateway to the city, Mudichur and Oorapakkam.Â Police and Fire service personnel were also involved in rescue operations. The Coast Guard has deployed its boats in some areas in the city that has witnessed unprecedented rains in a short period of time in recent memory. Â

DG MeT Department Laxman Singh Rathore said, “Extremely heavy rainfall has been occurring for sometime and today Tamil Nadu has witnessed 35 cm of rainfall that has created havoc.Â Its intensity, however, will decrease in the next 48 hours and further by 72 hours but it is likely to continue for five-seven days,” he said.

Teams have also been pressed into service in Jafarkhanpet, Saidapet and Kotturpuram on the banks of Adyar and Vadapalani and Valasaravakkam and several areas in the western parts of the city which have been flooded with waters entering residential homes.

The southern suburbs of Chennai including Velachery, Madipakkam and neighbouring areas which had suffered heavily in the earlier spells of rain in November were again hit badly by the downpour that has again flooded homes. Â

The Grand Southern Trunk road connecting Chennai with Madurai and beyond, the old Mahabalipuram road and the East Coastal road through which Chennai can be accessed have been cut off with waters washing away the roads in several places including Guduvancheri.

While travellers from southern districts have been stranded midway, a number of passengers were also left helpless in

Chennai Central and Egmore stations. Suburban railway services in Chennai have also been suspended because of flooding of tracks.

The flooding of the city and the suburbs has been caused essentially by the surplusing of waters from the reservoirs like Chembarambakkam, Poondi and Puzhal into Adyar and Cooum that criss-cross the city flooding several areas along the banks and displacing people from homes.

An unprecedented 30,000 cusecs of water has been released from the Chembarambakkam lake as the reservoir has been getting heavy supplies from the rain in catchment areas. Electricity has been cut off in most parts of the city as a precautionary measure while people went without essential supplies like milk and water.

Air Force helicopters were seen distributing food packets in some of the worst-hit areas.

The Southern Railways cancelled 16 trains and diverted 12 others both on the Chennai Central and Egmore sections following breaching of tracks in several areas. The airport, whose runway, tarmac and apron areas have been flooded with rainwater, has been shut down till 6 AM tomorrow.

Operations were suspended at the airport last night itself. Flights to Chennai have been diverted to Bangalore and Hyderabad.

In view of the water logging, Chennai Airport authorities have shut operations till 6 AM tomorrow. All airlines have cancelled their operations from Chennai airport where stranded passengers have been having a horrid time. The Airports Authority of India has issued a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) to all air operators in this regard, an AAI spokesperson said in New Delhi.

The spokesperson said Chennai airport authorities had initially shut operations till this morning but due to incessant rains it has now decided to extend it till 6 AM tomorrow.

Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) is a notice containing information concerning the establishment, condition, or change in any facility, service or procedure, among others, in airspace management.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh said in Delhi that in view of the situation, the Centre has deployed Army, Navy and NDRF teams in sufficient numbers.

“The Prime Minister has issued a memorandum and we have deployed our Central team there to assess the situation and make a report so that every possible help can also reach there,” Singh said.

Two columns of army’s Garrison Infantry Battalion have been pressed into service in Tambaram and Oorapakkam after the Tamil Nadu government sought military assistance. The Navy has also been deployed to assist in the operations.

“More army personnel are coming to Chennai from Bengaluru,” a Defence Public Relations official said. Navy personnel have been deployed in Sadiapet area of Chennai to rescue people marooned in low-lying areas.

The NDRF is airlifting another 15 teams to the rain-battered state. While 10 teams are being airlifted from Bhubaneswar to Tirupati, another five teams are being lifted from Delhi, NDRF DG O P Singh said. Each team comprises 40 personnel.

The teams are also carrying 20 inflatable boats along with them for the rescue operations.

NDRF DIG and commanding officer have been stationed in Chennai to take stock of the operations, he said.Â Singh said that he is also in constant touch with the Relief Commissioner of Tamil Nadu.

Talking about Navy's operations, Rear Admiral Alok Bhatnagar said Navy has deployed a team comprising two boats, two helicopters and a remotely piloted aircraft for relief and rescue operations.

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar said more forces will be deployed to tackle the situation.

However, "we are facing difficulty in bringing them (forces) there as the airport is also not operating," he said.

- PTI