

More rains coming as south India grapples with massive flood

December 3 2015



Rescuers try to evacuate a man stranded in the floods by an over-flowing Adyar River in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. Weeks of torrential rains have forced the Chennai airport in southern India to close and have cut off several roads and highways, leaving tens of thousands of people stranded in their homes, government officials said Wednesday. (AP Photo)

The heaviest rainfall in more than 100 years has devastated swathes of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, forcing thousands to leave their

submerged homes as schools, offices and an airport remained shut for a second day Thursday.

Chennai, the state capital, received more than 330 millimeters (13 inches) of rain over 24 hours, significantly higher than the average for the entire month of December, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said.

"I can't even believe that this much water is possible in Chennai," a woman told NDTV television as she stood in waist-deep water.

"We don't have any food. We don't have any milk," she said, adding that she was searching for a shop selling food, "but I'm scared to walk down this road."

Low-lying neighborhoods and the city's airport were almost completely submerged. The Airport Authority of India said the airport is likely to remain closed until Sunday.

The main train station was so heavily flooded Thursday that it had to halt operations.

Hundreds of army, navy, police and fire department rescuers helped evacuate people trapped in their homes. Twitter and other social media were flooded with calls for help from across the city.

News reports said flood waters released from a lake on the outskirts of Chennai inundated more neighborhoods in the city. The Adyar river, which runs through Chennai before draining into the Bay of Bengal, was flowing above the danger mark.

At least 269 people have been killed in the state since heavy rains began in early November, Singh said, although no deaths have been reported in the latest deluge.



A man runs through a bridge across an over-flowing Adyar River in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015. Weeks of torrential rains have forced the Chennai airport in southern India to close and have cut off several roads and highways, leaving tens of thousands of people stranded in their homes, government officials said Wednesday. (AP Photo)

The downpour eased early Thursday, but the Indian Meteorological Department predicted more heavy rain in several parts of the state through the rest of the week. The rains are caused by a depression in the Bay of Bengal, it said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi surveyed the destruction and flooding from an air force helicopter.

Arun Ebenezer was visiting a friend when heavy rains began to lash the city Tuesday. From his friend's apartment he could see that a bridge on

the Adyar river had broken. Flood waters began to rise and entered his car's engine, stranding him for two days.

On Thursday the water was still too high for him to head home, where his mother was staying alone.

The state government cut power to several parts of Chennai as a safety measure to prevent electrocutions. Most deaths in the last month of rains have been due to drowning, electrocution and wall collapses.

India's main monsoon season runs from June through September, but the period from October to December—also called the retreating monsoon—brings the most rainfall to India's southeastern coastal areas.

The extreme weather in Chennai comes as heads of state are meeting in Paris to discuss a new treaty to limit global warming. Experts say the floods in the city are most directly linked to the El Nino weather pattern, when the waters of the Pacific Ocean get warmer than usual.

"This year saw the strongest El Nino ever recorded," said G.P. Sharma, vice president of meteorology at Skymet, a private weather forecaster. He said that was indicative of an extremely heavy retreating monsoon.

This year, India had a weaker than usual summer monsoon, as it usually does in an El Nino year.

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