

Indonesia flood death toll rises to 43 with 15 missing

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The floods in Tanah Datar and another district in West Sumatra killed at least 41 people.

The death toll from flash floods and cold lava flow from a volcano in western Indonesia over the weekend has risen to 43 with 15 more

missing, officials said Monday.

Hours of heavy rain caused large volcanic rocks to roll down one of Indonesia's most active volcanos into two districts on Sumatra island Saturday evening, while flooding inundated roads, homes and mosques.

"The death toll from cold lava flow flooding in West Sumatra province reached 43 people," spokesman of the national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) Abdul Muhari said in a statement on Monday.

Rescuers were still searching for 15 missing people in two districts—Agam and Tanah Datar—that were the worst hit by the floods and home to hundreds of thousands of people.

Residents said they heard rocks thundering down roads outside their homes when the heavy rains struck.

"My house was vibrating," said Budi Rahmat, a 44-year-old farmer in Agam.

"The only thing I could think about was that I had to save my wife and kids."

Abdul Malik, head of the local search and rescue agency in provincial capital Padang, also said the number of people killed had risen to 43 in a separate statement.

West Sumatra's disaster mitigation agency had earlier put the death toll at 41.

Malik said Sunday that the bodies retrieved included two children—a three-year-old and an eight-year-old.



Flash floods and cold lava flow from a volcano hit several districts in western Indonesia.

Ilham Wahab, a West Sumatra disaster mitigation agency official, encouraged "people to evacuate to relatives' places, which are safer" than tent shelters in heavy rains.

"We are focused on first, searching and rescuing the victims, second, protecting the evacuees, protecting the vulnerable people," he said.

Provincial Governor Mahyeldi Ansharullah told reporters on Monday that around 130 people had evacuated to an elementary school in Agam, while more than 2,000 people were evacuated to several places in Tanah

Datar.

Roads in the districts were turned into rivers, with mosques and houses damaged.

Heavy rains inundated neighborhoods with muddy flood waters and swept vehicles into a nearby river, while volcanic ash and large rocks rumbled down Mount Marapi.

Cold lava, also known as lahar, is volcanic material such as ash, sand and pebbles carried down a volcano's slopes by rain.

'Have mercy'

Authorities sent a team of rescuers and rubber boats to look for the missing victims and to transport people to shelters.

The local government set up evacuation centers and emergency posts in several areas of Agam and Tanah Datar.

The BNPB said 84 homes, 16 bridges and two mosques were damaged in Tanah Datar, as were 20 hectares (50 acres) of rice fields.



In the flood-hit district of Tanah Datar, the flooding left roads caked in mud, trucks sticking out of a nearby river and mosques smashed by logs and metal sheets.

Survivors recounted their horror when the flooding and rockfall began.

"I heard the thunder and the sound similar to boiling water. It was the sound of big rocks falling," housewife Rina Devina told AFP, adding that three of her neighbors were killed.

"It was pitch black, so I used my cellphone as a flashlight. The road was muddy, so I chanted 'God, have mercy!' over and over again," she said of her evacuation to a local official's office.

Dwikorita Karnawati, head of Indonesia's meteorology agency, told reporters Monday that West Sumatra was a "unique location" because in parts of the province, rain could fall almost all year round.

"So the potential for floods and landslides are always present," she said.

During the rainy season, generally from October to March, Indonesia is prone to landslides and floods.

In 2022, about 24,000 people were evacuated and two children were killed in floods on Sumatra island, with environmental campaigners blaming deforestation caused by logging for worsening the disaster.

Trees act as natural defenses against floods, slowing the rate at which water runs down hills and into rivers.

Marapi's last major eruption took place in December and spewed an ash tower about 3,000 meters (9,800 feet) into the sky, taller than the volcano itself.

At least 24 climbers, most of them university students, died in the eruption.

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