

Focus turns to relief work in rain-hit South T.N.; over 3,500 persons relocated

Ten persons have died in rain-battered districts; in Thoothukudi, water remains stagnant rendering the port city inaccessible; over 500 passengers rescued from a stranded train

The Hindu Bureau

TIRUNELVELI

After heavy rain lashed the southern districts of Tamil Nadu leading to floods, 10 people have died in the battered Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli districts, even as the focus of the administration remains on relief and rescue operations.

Over 3,500 people from the worst-hit 36 villages and two town panchayats in Tirunelveli district were relocated to 75 relief camps from their marooned homes in low-lying areas, especially along the watercourse of Tamirabharani river.

Along with National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the Fire and Rescue Services, police and the trained disaster management volunteers were involved in rescuing the families stranded in the flooded houses. Around 35 boats have been pressed into service to rescue the people.

A sizeable number of irrigation channels in the affected areas helped to drain the flood water into fields and back into the Tamirabharani river. Hence, stagnant flood water in more than 50% of the inundated places including Tirunelveli Junction Bus Stand has been drained.



Road to safety: Residents moving to safety on a earth mover in Thoothukudi on Tuesday as flood waters show no signs of receding. N. RAJESH

As four more bodies were recovered on Tuesday, the toll in Tirunelveli district has risen to seven. Even though 10,000 litres of additional milk was brought in to Tirunelveli to meet the increased demand, long queues could be seen in front of the dairy shops. Power supply has been restored to more than 85% of the flood-hit areas, a TANGEDCO official said.

In Thoothukudi, flood water remains stagnant since it cannot be drained into the Puckle Channel meant to carry sewage and rainwater into the sea.

Over 500 passengers from a stranded train at Srivaikuntam railway station were rescued by RPF

and NDRF teams after 36 hours of wait on Tuesday.

The Indian Army personnel of 23 Maratha Light Infantry and Madras Regimental Centre joined the rescue operation in Srivaikuntam, Vasavappapuram, Naanalkaadu and Anthoniyarpuram, where they rescued over 1,000 people and safely moved them to the nearest relief centres.

The Indian Air Force (IAF), on its part, has stationed two Dornier aircraft at Madurai Airport to transport relief materials to Thoothukudi Airport even as the IAF's helicopters winched up stranded people, including a pregnant woman and an 18-month-old baby, and dropped

food packets.

After sending 410 kg relief materials in the first batch on Tuesday, the second batch of 3.50 tonnes will be taken to Thoothukudi from Madurai on Wednesday, a defence statement said.

While buses from Tirunelveli to all nearby places resumed operations, the rainwater stagnating or flowing along the arterial roads connecting Thoothukudi has left the city inaccessible. Consequently, power supply to more than 90% of the places are yet to be restored, the TANGEDCO official said. Most of the mobile phone signal transmission towers are virtually "dead".