

Flash flood sweeps away 8 during immersion of Durga idols in Bengal

PTI



Around 50 people stranded on a small silt island in the swollen Mal river and others struggling in the floodwaters were rescued in Jalpaiguri district on Wednesday

Pinak Priya Bhattacharya | TNN

Jalpaiguri: Eight persons were washed away when a flash flood hit a rain-fed river at Malbazar in north Bengal's Jalpaiguri during immersion of Durga idols on Wednesday night. Around 50 people stranded on a small silt island in the middle of the swollen Mal and others struggling in the floodwaters were rescued by the administration. The force of the waters was so strong that it swept away an heavy earth-moving machine and a truck stationed to help puja committees immerse their idols.

PM Narendra Modi expressed grief. He tweeted: "Anguished by the mishap during Durga Puja festivities in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones." He announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh to each of the bereaved families.

CM Mamata Banerjee announced Rs 2 lakh to the bereaved families and Rs 50,000 each to the injured. The CM tweeted: "I pray that their families find strength & solace in these difficult times. 13 people are undergoing treatment at Mal SSH, I pray for their speedy recovery."

"Search and rescue operations by NDRF and SDRF are still underway. Around 70 people were saved by the efforts of the police, Civil Defence Volunteers and local youth," the CM added.

Trinamool ministers Bulu Chik Baraik and Udayan Guha, Siliguri mayor Gautam Deb, and BJP chief whip in the Manoj Tigga visited the area on Thursday. All the deceased were locals. Discontent ran high among residents as they alleged that there were only eight volunteers on the river bank during the immersion and they were ill-equipped.