

Mayhem in Uttarakhand, rain puts Char Dham yatra on hold

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DEHRADUN: A stream of mud and debris hit some cities, a large, two-storey building collapsed into a riverbed and large boulders pummelled roads and settlements, at times narrowly missing commuters while at others burying families inside their homes, as heavy rain wreaked havoc in Uttarakhand overnight, officials said on Monday.

The spell of rain - Rishikesh recorded a staggering 420mm of rain in 24 hours (close to twice the average of what, for instance, Delhi receives through the entire month of August) - brought back painful memories of the 2013 floods that killed thousands of people.

In the last 24 hours, at least 17 people were feared dead or missing in different districts and the government suspended the Char Dham Yatra for two days as highways to Badrinath, Kedarnath and Gangotri shrines were damaged at several places.

Almost all major rivers, including the Alaknanda, Mandakini and Ganga, were flowing above danger levels at Rudraprayag, Srinagar and Devprayag, respectively, according to officials at the disaster control room in state capital Dehradun.

The India Meteorological Department predicted more rainfall in the next 24 hours and issued an orange alert, a severe level warning that signifies rainfall between 115.6 mm and 204.4 mm in a single day.

A cloudburst -- a sharp spell of rain in a short span -- was recorded at Jogiana in Rishikesh, which received 420 mm of rain. "A collapsed building (on the riverfront) housed a coaching centre for defence exams. There were 85 students enrolled... All of them were removed from the building..." said Karan Singh Nagyal, inspector general of police,



A coaching institute constructed on the riverfront in Rishikesh collapsed amid heavy rainfall (left); while several roads were blocked due to landslides and flashfloods across Uttarakhand on Monday.



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Garhwal range.

An inquiry has been ordered on how the building of the Dehradun Defence College came up on riverbank in violation of rules.

On the Neelkanth Marg in Rishikesh, a Haryana family got buried in the debris in the Mohan Chatti area. "We have information about five people - a husband and wife, their two sons and the wife's brother getting buried under the debris," Nagyal said. "There is also information that two people have drowned in Rishikesh. One of them is safe, but a search is on for the other person."

In Rudraprayag, district disaster management officer Nandan Singh Rajwar said a landslide hit a camp at Lincholi near Kedarnath. In Pauri district, a 55-year-old woman was washed away in the Pawar river, while two houses were damaged. Five other people are reported missing after they were carried away in landslides, officials said.

At around 3 am, a portion of the Nightlife Paradise Camp was hit by landslide and four people were trapped under the debris, said DP Kala, district disaster management officer.

11 dead, over 20 trapped as temple collapses in rain-battered Shimla

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SHIMLA: At least 11 people died after a landslide triggered by heavy rains buried devotees in the rubble of Shiva temple in Summer Hill area of Shimla district, officials said.

Shimla superintendent of police Sanjeev Gandhi said, "Eleven bodies were recovered, and several others are feared trapped... rescue operations are underway... it is suspected that the casualties may rise"

According to officials over 20 people are trapped under the debris. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of people trapped under the temple rubble, officials added.

Many residents had reached the temple to offer prayers on the last month of Shravan - a month considered pious in Hindu religion, when the temple collapsed in the landslide, officials said, adding that the inci-



Rescue officials and locals carry out rescue operation after collapse of a temple near Summer Hill in Shimla on Monday.

dent took place around 7.30 am. Teams of National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, police and volunteers launched a massive search and rescue operation to rescue survivors, officials said.

According to Shimla resident Khabar Tokkur, the temple is so had more people than usual as they were preparing for the bhadrada that is organised at the

premises every August 15. Thakur's four nephews are among those trapped under the debris.

Summer Hill councillor Virendra Thakur said, "Rains are hampering rescue operations and efforts are underway to find the survivors."

Chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu visited the site on foot - as roads were blocked due to landslides - to oversee the rescue operation, officials said.

AGENCIES