

WORLD

'385 lives lost'

Panicked pleas for help as Kerala flood toll triples to 324

More than 321 centimetres (126 inches) of rain has fallen in Idukki, a hilly district in central Kerala

● More than 100 bodies found in a day

● Thousands still trapped

● Fresh alert issued for torrential rain

● 6,000 are still waiting to be saved.

● Almost 200,000 people made homeless across the state

● 10,000 kilometres (6,000 miles) of roads have been destroyed

AFP | Kochi, India

Troop reinforcements stepped up desperate rescue attempts in India's flood-stricken Kerala state yesterday after more than 100 bodies were found in a day and a half, taking the crisis death toll to 385.

The state has been battered by record monsoon rainfall in recent days and is "facing the worst flood in 100 years", chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said.

In a Twitter statement released by his office, he said there had been "324 lives lost", a tripling of the death toll in the last 24 hours.

Vijayan added that 223,139 people have been moved to more than 1,500 relief camps.

With thousands still trapped, power and communication lines down and fresh alerts of further torrential rain, authorities warned of even more trouble ahead.

More than 30 military helicopters and 320 boats are attempting rescues across Kerala, which is suffering its worst floods in nearly a century, officials said.

Extra troops have been sent in and local fishermen have also joined the operation with their boats.

Thousands of people have been rescued so far, according to authorities, but they believe more than 6,000 are still waiting to be saved.

More than 321 centimetres (126 inches) of rain has fallen in Idukki, a hilly district in central Kerala -- which since June 1 has been one of many areas now virtually cut off, according to the India Meteorological Department.

The floods have risen in the past 10 days. And with no end in sight to the deluge, people all over the state of 33 million peo-



Indian passengers travel in a truck to a safer place as flood waters ravaged the National Highway 47 in Ernakulam district of Kochi



Indian army personnel evacuate local residents in a residential area at Aluva in Ernakulam district



Indian volunteers and rescue personnel evacuate local residents in a residential area at Aluva in Ernakulam district, in the Indian state of Kerala



Residents wade through flood waters to their marooned houses on the outskirts of Kozhikode district



Volunteering members of the Kerala Adventure Sports Club carry flood relief material in a vehicle in marooned villages on the outskirts of Kozhikode district

ple have made panic-stricken appeals on social media for help, saying they cannot get through to rescue services.

"My family and neighbouring families are in trouble with flood in Pandanad nakkada area in Alappuzha," Ajo Varghese said in a Facebook post that quickly

spread.

Neck deep in water

"No water and food. Not able to communicate from afternoon. Mobile phones are not reachable and switch off. Please help... No rescue is available," he added. A video of a man neck-deep

385

is the latest official toll which is expected to climb as Kerala faces the worst flood in 100 years

in water in his house in Chennannur, another badly affected district, has also gone viral. Other messages have been sent from people trapped in temples and hospitals as well as in their homes.

"The chief minister has confirmed 164 deaths (since August 9). Around 100 people died in the last 36 hours alone," a Kerala government spokesman told AFP.

Local media reports predicted the toll would quickly mount amid unconfirmed reports of more deaths in landslides and people found drowned.

The Kerala government has said it faces an "extremely grave" crisis and state chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan warned of a new wave of rainfall hitting the battered region.

The gates of dozens of dams and reservoirs across the state have been opened as water levels reach danger levels. That has added to the submerging of many villages.

North and central Kerala has been worst-hit by the floods with the international airport in the main city of Kochi shut until at least August 26.

Almost 200,000 people made homeless across the state have moved into hundreds of relief camps but many of those are now threatened by the floods.

On top of tourist cancellations, Kerala's valuable rubber industry has been badly hit by the floods.

The government says 10,000 kilometres (6,000 miles) of Kerala roads have been destroyed or damaged along with thousands of homes.

News reports said electricity supplies to more than half the state have been cut. The state power company said that only one million people were affected, however.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was due to arrive Friday in Kerala, which is renowned for its palm-lined beaches and tea plantations.

The home ministry announced meanwhile that 868 people have been reported dead in seven Indian states including Kerala since the start of the monsoon in June.