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Commuters and long-distance travellers were left stranded and ended up spending the night at stations.

Mumbai airport was also home to many stranded passengers on Tuesday night, with many arrivals preferring to wait inside as the traffic jam outside prevented their families from picking them up. According to Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL) authorities, around 15,000 passengers arriving at Santacruz domestic airport's the Terminal 1 chose to stay put till Wednesday morning. These passengers also refused to avail of free shuttle rides to important stations like Dadar and Andheri, as trains were offline.

With the waiting area full, passengers instead chose to rest on the inoperational conveyor belts. "Airport staff were deployed on the highway to ensure passing vehicles could be used to car-pool for passengers' benefit," an MIAL spokesperson said. The airport operator also offered discounts ranging from 30% to 50% on food and beverages inside the terminal.

Airport officials said inclement weather during the last 24 hours, including the suspension of arrivals and departures between 4.15 p.m. and 5 p.m. at the airport, impacted flight schedules, resulting in flights from Mumbai being delayed by up to 30 to 40 minutes.

Kurla resident Jitendra Gupta said his neighbour landed from Ahmedabad last evening, but was stuck inside the airport till 5 a.m. as traffic was a mess outside. "Thousands either sat on the floor or slept on the conveyor belt. A few hundred extra chairs were provided by the authorities," he said.

Mr. Gupta said normally, wheelchairs would be available within half-an-hour. "Yesterday, the airport was not prepared for the situation where each wheelchair was occupied by one occupant for many hours. Thus, there was a huge shortage of wheelchairs and some passengers who needed it had to struggle. This also led to arguments with airport staff."



Endless night: Stranded passengers rest on conveyor belts at the domestic airport on Tuesday night

In an update, Jet Airways said, "The situation at Mumbai airport is under control and weather conditions have improved. As per transport department 50% of the drivers have reported for duty. Cockpit crew are coming by company transport, while some are coming in on their own. Flights are being released as per crew reporting due to which flights are getting delayed, with a maximum delay up to two hours." Unlike Tuesday, which saw 10 flight cancellations and seven diversions, zero diversions were reported out of Mumbai on Wednesday. Jet Airways cancelled 19 flights.

The neighbouring Juhu Aerodrome, India's first airport, resumed operations after being closed for nearly 24 hours. "Flying operations began after 2 p.m. when water on the runway was pumped out. Waterlogging in several parts of the aerodrome remains to be cleared," Capt. Uday Geli, who operates the aerodrome, said.

Preparing for Wednesday

At least five people were reported killed in different rain-related incidents in the city, while two deaths each were reported from Palghar and Ghansoli. "The victims were brought in with various rain related accidents like drowning, fall etc," Dr. Avinash Supe, director of major civic hospitals said.

BMC commissioner Ajay Mehta refused to accept that the civic body had failed to ensure the drains were not clogged. "The weather condition was extreme. The city witnessed excessive waterlogging. However, the civic machinery was in place and worked properly. Mumbai received 320 mm rainfall on Tuesday. At 23 places, over 200 mm rainfall was received," Mr. Mehta said.

The BMC pressed over 30,000 employees into service to handle the situation. “They removed excessive water (from roads and rail tracks) and provided shelters to the stranded people who could not travel home,” the civic chief said. A total of 229 pumps were used to flush out water, while 425 people stranded on 12 trains were rescued by the fire brigade from four locations in the city. The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) operated 3,146 buses and ferried 30 lakh passengers during the downpour.

The Traffic Police began preparing on Tuesday night to prepare the city for Wednesday. Officers said private crane operators were contacted overnight and asked to be ready to tow stranded vehicles. “We waived towing charges for people who abandoned vehicles and returned on Wednesday to reclaim them. Cranes were kept on standby and roads were cleared in the first half today,” JCP (Traffic) Amitesh Kumar said. He added vehicles were mostly abandoned in Kalanagar, Kherwadi and Vakola on the Western Express Highway and between Dadar and Hindmata on Babasaheb Ambedkar Road.

The Traffic Police also coordinated with the BMC and arranged for trucks to move fallen trees off the streets. A total of 210 trees were reported to have fallen across the city due to the heavy rains.

Officials said with Eid-ul-Zuha approaching on September 2, a lot of vehicles came into the city carrying goats to the Deonar abattoir, for which the Eastern Express Highway was cleared on a priority basis.

Mr. Mehta said, “Assistant Commissioners of respective wards provided 69 night shelters in the vicinity of railway stations where around 5,000 people spent the night.” The city police, NDRF, IMD, HAM Radio and Navy extended their help while the Coast Guard, Army and Air Force were kept on standby, he added, and appealed to citizens to seek medical assistance if they experienced symptoms like fever or vomiting.

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