



## Highest-ever monsoon rains flood Mumbai

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The strongest rain ever recorded in India shut down the financial hub of Mumbai, snapped communication lines, closed airports and forced thousands of people to sleep in their offices or walk home during the night, officials said today.

Police officials said landslides had killed at least 59 people and buried 130 in India's western Maharashtra state following flash floods caused by the monsoon rains.

"The death toll from landslides across western Maharashtra is 59 ... but the number could rise as at least another 130 have been trapped," said an official in the chief minister's office.

He said the information came from an official communique.

The government declared a public holiday in Mumbai as people waded waist-deep in the streets of India's financial capital, where weather officials said a record 66.6 centimetres of rain fell in the last 24 hours.

"We have declared a public holiday and ask people to stay indoors," Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh said, adding that schools in Mumbai and neighbouring Thane district had also been asked to close for two days.

Troops were deployed after the sudden rains - measuring up to 94.4 centimetres in one day in some areas of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra state - stranded tens of thousands of people.

"Most places in India don't receive this kind of rainfall in a year. This is the highest ever recorded in India's history. We have to compare it with world records to find out if this was the highest in the world," R V Sharma, director of the meteorological department, told The Associated Press.

The state-run All India Radio reported about 150,000 people were stranded in railway stations across Mumbai, India's main financial centre.

Early today, Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh, the state's top elected official, called the army, navy and home guards to help with the relief effort.

"Inflatable rafts will be used to reach stranded people. Please try to stay where you are and don't leave your homes," he said.

Tens of thousands of people were stranded for hours on roads in Mumbai, and its airport - one of the busiest in the country - was shut yesterday evening. All incoming flights were diverted to New Delhi and other airports.

India's previous heaviest rainfall, recorded at Cherrapunji in the northeastern Meghalaya state, one of the rainiest places on Earth, was 83.82 centimetres on July 12, 1910, Sharma said.

Rail, road and air traffic to and from Mumbai was suspended for a second day as the weather bureau forecast very heavy rains in the city for the next 24 hours and warned fishermen not to set out to sea.

"Waterlogging has completely disrupted life in Mumbai as the rains have coincided with high sea tides," a weather bureau official said.

"Police rescue teams have still to reach affected villages as they're inaccessible due to the heavy floods," senior inspector Sunil Dareghan said.

Trading was halted on Mumbai's bond, commodity and currency markets. The stock market remained open but trade was thin.

**AP/AFP**

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