

158 still trapped in India landslide as death toll hits 31

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USPA News - Rescue workers raced Thursday to find more survivors in western India where at least 158 people remain missing and feared trapped under debris after a landslide wiped out an entire village, officials said as newly recovered bodies raised the death toll to 31. Heavy rains triggered a landslide in the village of Malin, near the city of Pune in the western state of Maharashtra, on early Wednesday morning. The state government is currently taking up rescue and relief efforts, but incessant rains have repeatedly hampered rescue operations.

The natural disaster happened in the morning while villagers were asleep, wiping out most of the 67 houses in the village. It has left whole families missing, meaning there is no one to practice their burial rituals. In other cases, relatives are unable to go ahead with these practices as the heavy rains are ongoing. "It's a big challenge before me now. I have lost 11 members of my family, including my parents, wife, brothers and uncles," villager Namdeo Jandhare said, as quoted by the Hindustan Times. "I survived because I had gone to Pune. Now, I don't even know how I will conduct the last rites." The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was sifting through the flattened surface on Thursday, digging out more bodies that have been trapped underneath the debris of the landslide. The NDRF commandant stated that, with every passing hour, the likelihood of survival for those trapped is decreasing. "We are trying our best but with the time passing off, there are hardly any chances of anyone still alive under the debris," NDRF commandant Alok Avasthy told the Hindustan Times. Continuous heavy rains have made it increasingly difficult to remove the 15 feet (4.5 meters) of mud that engulfs the houses. Once mud is removed by rescue workers, more mud flows to take its place, making the rescue effort almost impossible. Further landslides are also a possibility due to the extreme weather. NDRF has said that it has deployed 378 trained personnel in the affected area, but its dog squad has been unable to search for people underneath the debris because of the incessant rains and personnel are restrained by further landslides, according to local media reports. Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be extending a compensation of Rs 200,000 Indian Rupee (\$3,300) to relatives of each person who has been killed in the disaster. The ministry said the death toll stood at 31 on Thursday afternoon, with 158 people still missing. Eight people were safely rescued in the immediate aftermath of the landslide. Indian President Shri Pranab Mukherjee, speaking on Wednesday, extended his condolences to those who have lost loved ones in the deadly landslide. "Please convey my heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased. I wish speedy recovery to the injured persons," he said.

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