

# India landslide toll hits 270 as rain hampers rescue work

AFP | Wayanad, India

Relentless downpours and howling winds hampered yesterday's search for survivors of landslides that struck Indian tea plantations and killed at least 270 people, most believed to be labourers and their families.

Days of torrential monsoon rains have battered the southern coastal state of Kerala, with blocked roads into the Wayanad district disaster area complicating relief efforts.

The only bridge connecting the worst-hit villages of Chooralmala and Mundakkai was washed away, forcing rescue teams to carry bodies on stretchers out of the disaster zone using a makeshift zipline erected over raging flood waters.

Several people who managed to flee the initial impact of the landslides found themselves caught in a nearby river that had burst its banks, volunteer rescuer Arun Dev told AFP at a hospital treating survivors.

"Those who escaped were swept away along with houses, temples and schools," he said.

Senior police officer M.R. Ajith Kumar told AFP that around 500 people had been rescued since successive landslides struck before dawn on Tuesday.

"Still large areas are to be explored and searched to find out whether live people are there or not," he said.

Wayanad is famed for the tea estates that crisscross its hilly



Relief personnel conduct a search and rescue operation after landslides in Wayanad



A damaged vehicle lies amid mud after landslides in Wayanad



A man stands near a damaged house

countryside and which rely on a large pool of labourers for planting and harvest.

A number of brick-walled row homes built to accommodate seasonal workers were inundat-

ed by a powerful wall of brown sludge as labourers and their families slept.

Other buildings were caked with mud as the force of the landslide scattered cars, cor-

rugated iron and other debris around the disaster site.

"Catastrophic debris flows are extremely violent, so survival is very difficult," Hull University earth scientist Dave Petley told

AFP. "This will have been exacerbated by the timing -- in the early hours when people were asleep -- and by flimsy structures that offered little protection." A total of 238 bodies had been recovered so far, the office of state revenue minister K. Rajan told reporters.

More than 3,000 people were sheltering in emergency relief camps around Wayanad district, the state government said.

At least 572 millimetres (22.5 inches) of rain fell in the two days leading up to the landslides, according to state chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Kerala's disaster agency said more rain and strong winds were forecast for the week with the likelihood of "damage to unsafe structures" elsewhere in the state.

## 'Incessant rains'

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, who until recently represented Wayanad in parliament, said he had been unable to go through with a planned visit to the disaster.

"Due to incessant rains and adverse weather conditions we have been informed by authorities that we will not be able to land," he said in a post on social media platform X. "Our thoughts are with the people of Wayanad at this difficult time," he said. Monsoon rains across the region from June to September offer respite from the summer heat and are crucial to replenishing water supplies.

## Ex-BBC presenter Edwards pleads guilty to indecent child images charges



Former BBC news anchor Huw Edwards

London, United Kingdom

Former BBC news anchor Huw Edwards, one of the most recognisable faces on UK television, pleaded guilty Wednesday to three counts of making indecent images of children.

The 62-year-old -- who resigned from the BBC in April on "medical advice", six months after he was arrested -- faces a maximum prison sentence of 10 years and a minimum of 12 months.

Wearing a dark suit and blue tie, Edwards sat impassively during the 25-minute court hearing as he admitted receiving 41 indecent images of children on WhatsApp, including seven of the most serious type.

Under English law, electronic communications involving indecent imagery of children -- including receiving and downloading pictures and videos -- can constitute the offence of making indecent images of children.

## UNESCO welcomes UK's Stonehenge tunnel cancellation

AFP | Paris, France

The United Nations' cultural organisation on Wednesday welcomed Britain's decision to cancel a controversial tunnel project near Stonehenge, a world heritage site.

The UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves on Monday announced a number of "difficult" budget decisions, telling parliament that a few "unfunded" projects launched by the previous government would not go ahead under the Labour administration of Prime Minister Keir Starmer, including plans for a road tunnel close to Stonehenge, a renowned prehistoric site in England.

"UNESCO welcomes the Starmer government's decision to cancel the construction of a road tunnel under the Stonehenge World Heritage Site," the organisation's Director-General Audrey Azoulay said in a social media post.

UNESCO last month warned that Stonehenge could be added to its world heritage in danger list because of the tunnel project.

# Palestinians detained by Israel subjected to 'torture': UN report

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Palestinians detained by Israel during the Gaza war have largely been held in secret and in some cases subjected to treatment that may amount to torture, the United Nations said yesterday.

Since the October 7 Hamas attacks, thousands of Palestinians -- including medics, patients, residents and captured fighters -- have been taken from Gaza to Israel, "usually shackled and blindfolded", the OHCHR UN human rights office said in a report.

Thousands more have been detained in the West Bank and



Displaced Palestinians return to Bani Suhayla and neighbouring towns east of Khan Yunis following reports of Israeli forces withdrawing from the area in the southern Gaza Strip

Israel, it added.

"They have generally been held in secret, without being given a reason for their detention, access to a lawyer or effective judicial review," OHCHR said.

Israel did not immediately comment but has rejected previous critical reports saying its prisons are run according to international law. The report was released the day after Israel's

military police questioned soldiers arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing a Palestinian detainee.

At least 53 detainees from Gaza and the West Bank have died in Israeli detention since the Gaza war began on October 7, the report found.

Testimonies for the report suggested that Israel had subjected prisoners to "a range of

appalling acts, such as waterboarding and the release of dogs on detainees", UN rights chief Volker Turk said.

The report covers October 7 to June 30. It relies primarily on information gathered through interviews with released Palestinian detainees and other victims and witnesses of violations, OHCHR said.

The report said there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that since October 7, Israel and Palestinian armed groups had "committed gross violations and abuses... of the rights to life, liberty and freedom from torture and other ill-treatment."

These included the use of "rape and other forms of sexual violence," warning the abuses may amount to war crimes.

Besides calling for the abuses to cease, the OHCHR urged all parties to "immediately end all forms of arbitrary detention, including the holding of hostages".

## 'Burnt with cigarettes'

The report said most Palestinians held since October 7 have been detained "without charges or trial".

Many released Palestinians reported treatment "including

severe beatings, electrocution, being forced to remain in stress positions for prolonged periods, or waterboarding".

The report said detainees had been subjected to blackmail, "being burnt with cigarettes, and given hallucinogenic pills".

The report also said the Palestinian Authority "continued to carry out arbitrary detention and torture or other ill treatment in the West Bank, reportedly principally to suppress criticism and political opposition".

A host of studies by rights groups and UN agencies have condemned conditions in Israeli prisons as well as Hamas's treatment of detainees.

Amnesty International said this month it had documented 27 cases of Palestinians, including five women and a 14-year-old boy, who were detained by Israel "for up to four and a half months" without being able to contact their families.

According to the Prisoners Club, a Palestinian rights watchdog, about 9,600 Palestinians are currently in Israeli jails, including hundreds under administrative detention where they can be held for long periods without charge.



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