

Rescue ops start in Nepal to bring back Indian pilgrims

By **Geeta Mohan**
in New Delhi

FLIGHT operations have started between Nepalganj and Simikot to bring back the stranded Indian pilgrims who had taken the Nepal route for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra.

Government sources say all efforts are being made to get everyone back. It will be a gradual process and much depends on the weather conditions.

As per the headcount by the Mission representative, there are 629 people stranded in Simikot and 451 people stranded in Hilsa. The Mission has evacuated 158 people from Simikot to Nepalganj and more than 250 (headcount awaited) from Hilsa to Simikot.

Rescue process will depend on weather conditions

Luckily, there has been a lower inflow into Hilsa due to the Mission's request to tour operators to hold people on the Tibet side where better civic amenities are available. Only 51 entered Hilsa.

Our representative is taking rounds to find any medical complication and no major medical complications reported.

When asked about the pilgrims in Tibet, a source said that "the ones in the Tibet will also be brought back to the Nepal side and we will clear them as well."

While the Indian Embassy is "monitoring" the situation along Nepalganj-Simikot-Hilsa route of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra (through Nepal), the weather situation remains inclement and only with a little improvement in the weather evacuation flights have started.

The Indian mission, meanwhile, has placed its representatives in Nepalganj and Simikot, who are personally in touch with each and every stranded pilgrim. The representatives are ensuring that



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MEANWHILE, IN TAMIL NADU

■ The state government on Tuesday said it has set up a control room in New Delhi to provide logistic support for pilgrims of Kailash Mansarovar yatra from the state stranded in Nepal.

■ The control room, manned by five officials, will be functioning in the Tamil Nadu House and can be reached at 011-21610285

and 011-21610286, an official release said.

■ Once pilgrims belonging to Tamil Nadu are brought to India, the Tamil Nadu House will provide facilitation and logistic support for pilgrims to reach their destination in the state.

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proper food and lodging facilities are available to all the pilgrims.

Medical practitioners have also been deployed in Simikot for regular health check-ups of the pilgrims since there could be complications for the elderly given the altitude. They are also being administered preventive medication and medical coun-

selling about dos and don'ts.

Indian officials are also in touch with local authorities and tour operators. The operators have been asked to hold the pilgrims on the Tibet side there itself since the medical and civic facilities on Nepal side are inadequate. They have further been told to accord first priority in

clearing up the situation in Hilsa which is the most infrastructure lean place in the area.

The pilgrims come from various states in south India and that's the reason why hotline services have been initiated for pilgrims and their family members in various regional languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam.

While flights have started

Govt also looking at alternative routes

between Nepalganj and Simikot, the Indian mission is also looking at various alternative routes (Simikot-Surkhet/Simikot-Jumla/Simikot-Mugu).

Union external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has also requested the Nepalese Army to press their helicopter services into action which have superior abilities of operation in difficult terrain.

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