

# *At least 18 killed in southern India plane crash*

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Calcuta, August 8 (RHC)-- At least 18 people were killed and 123 others wounded when a passenger jet skidded off the runway after landing in heavy rain in the southern state of Kerala, officials have said.

The Air India Express flight from Dubai was repatriating Indians stranded overseas amid the coronavirus pandemic. The plane was carrying 190 passengers and crew, the Ministry of Civil Aviation said in a statement on Friday. Among them were 10 infant children.

"Unfortunately, 16 people have lost their lives. I offer my condolences to their next of kin and pray for speedy recovery of the injured," Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said in a tweet. Later, it was confirmed that two more people had been killed, for a total of 18.

Abdul Karim, a senior Kerala state police officer, said the dead included one of the pilots of the Air India Express flight. He said at least 15 of the injured were in critical condition, and that rescue operations were over.

The plane's fuselage split into two as it fell into a valley 30 feet below, authorities said. The Ministry of Civil Aviation said there was no fire during landing. TV visuals showed the aircraft's nose smashed into a brick wall, with much of the middle of the plane pulverised.

Local TV news channels showed passengers, some of them lying motionless on stretchers, brought into a hospital surrounded by health workers wearing masks because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that he was "pained by the plane accident."

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