

Australians safe say tour firms

LONDON, Tuesday (AAP). — All the Australians travelling through India on the way to Katmandu with overland tour operators are believed to be safe.

Late yesterday afternoon London's main overland firms had located their trucks and coaches and none were in any danger.

Operators said that they believed that about 250 Australians were among passengers aboard 10 vehicles either safe in Katmandu, or heading for the town.

Another three Australians are believed to be safe in New Delhi.

They were among 36 people who were travelling with Encounter Overland aboard two ex-military trucks, and at one stage it was feared the Indian Army would commandeer the vehicles for military purposes.

However, a spokesman for the operating company said it had received a telex message from New

Delhi saying the party had arrived safely in the Indian capital.

Other tour operators reported they were all satisfied that their vehicles were in no danger.

The only problem facing them was the close-down of the Katmandu airport.

It is believed that seven coaches are stranded in Katmandu and another two are heading there. By

today there could be at least 450 tourists delayed there until the airport reopened.

One operator said that more than half of these would almost certainly be Australians travelling home for Christmas via the overland route.

Earlier operators had been urgently trying to contact their parties, some of whom had not been heard of for some time.

One operator from Safari to Asia and Africa Ltd. was involved in a journey to the Afghanistan town of Kabaul to try to stop one of his vehicles from crossing the border into West Pakistan.

A spokesman for the operator later reported that he had been successful.

Australian-born Mr Norman Harris, the owner of Swagman Tours, which has two coaches with passengers in Katmandu, said that his third coach had reached Calcutta but had been damaged en route.

Its passengers, including about 14 Australians, were travelling on to Madras and would fly home.