

Deadly flooding spreads to Pakistan's heartland

August 3 2010, By KHALID TANVEER and RIAZ KHAN , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Floodwaters spread into Pakistan's heartland Tuesday, submerging dozens of villages along bloated rivers whose torrents already have killed at least 1,200 people. Fresh rains in the hardest-hit northwest threatened to overwhelm a major dam and unleash a new deluge.

Relief work for some 2 million people has been delayed by swamped roads, washed out bridges and downed communication lines, and survivors have complained about government inaction. Other countries, including the U.S., have pledged assistance to Pakistan, which is already struggling to control a violent Taliban militant movement.

About 3,000 people were marooned in the Kot Addu area of southern Punjab province after the water breached a protection bank, forcing the army to stage an evacuation using boats and helicopters, said Maj. Farooq Feroz, a military spokesman.

The sudden gusher surprised Fateh Mohammad and his family.

"We just ran away with our children, leaving behind everything. All our possessions are drowned in the water. We have nothing," he said while taking refuge on higher ground.

Punjab is Pakistan's most populous province, and home to many of its largest farms. Feroz said many villages in the eastern province's Layyah,

Taunsa Sharif, Rajan Pur, Dera Ghazi Khan and other areas had been inundated by water.

In the northwest, new downpours Tuesday added to the misery of the worst flooding in generations.

Rising water levels at Warsak Dam, the country's third biggest, prompted disaster officials to ask residents in the northern outskirts of Peshawar city to leave their homes.

"If needed, forced evacuation will be started," said Adnan Khan, a spokesman for the Disaster Management Authority of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa province.

The northwest is the epicenter of Pakistan's battle against al-Qaida and the Taliban. Alongside military and police operations, the government - with the support of the West - has tried to improve its services and living standards there to blunt the appeal of militancy.

The Pakistani army, which has the helicopters, boats and infrastructure needed for relief work, is delivering food, medicine and tents, as are government agencies and several different political parties and welfare organizations.

But many flood victims were unhappy with the response. About 300 people blocked a major road in the hard-hit Nowshera district Monday to protest at receiving little or no aid, witnesses said.

At least one extremist group - a welfare organization allegedly linked to the Lashkar-e-Taiba militant network - is also helping survivors. The group, Falah-e-Insaniyat, has previously helped civilians after other disasters.

The United States, keen for an opportunity to win friends in the region, is providing \$10 million dollars in emergency aid. It has also provided rescue boats, water-filtration units, prefabricated steel bridges and thousands of packaged meals.

Other foreign countries, aid groups and the United Nations have promised or are delivering aid.

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Citation: Deadly flooding spreads to Pakistan's heartland (2010, August 3) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-deadly-pakistan-heartland.html>

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