

Flood alerts issued in Kashmir as rivers cross danger mark

March 30 2015, by Meraj-Uddin



Kashmiri villagers and officials search for bodies of victims following landslides due to heavy rainfall in the village of Laden some 45 Kilometers (28 miles) west of Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Monday, March 30, 2015. Hundreds of Kashmiris in both India and Pakistan moved to higher ground Monday as rain-swollen rivers swamped parts of the disputed Himalayan region placed under an emergency flood alert just six months after some 600 people died in flooding that left the region in shambles. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)

Hundreds of Kashmiris in both India and Pakistan moved to higher

ground Monday as rain-swollen rivers swamped parts of the disputed Himalayan region placed under an emergency flood alert just six months after some 600 people died in flooding that left the region in shambles.

Officials ordered residents along the banks of the Jhelum River to move to relief camps as the water crossed the danger threshold in Srinagar, the main city in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

More than a dozen people were trapped inside two houses that partially sank into the ground after a landslide hit Laden village in Budgam district, police said. Rescuers pulled out the bodies of four men from the huge piles of mud that buried the houses, said Manoj Pandit, a police spokesman. Rescue workers were searching for at least 10 others who were in the buildings when they were hit by the landslide, he said.

The flooding after three days of heavy rain renewed fears among the tens of thousands who have struggled to rebuild after flooding in September destroyed thousands of homes and infrastructure worth \$17 billion. For days in September, many residents were left stranded on rooftops or the upper floors of buildings as bloated livestock carcasses floated by. For weeks, heaps of garbage piled up in the waterlogged city.

"My house has been submerged," Srinagar resident Zareena Bano said. "Last year, too, it was submerged, and today again. I feel helpless."

After many faulted the government last year for failing to anticipate such flooding, and for taking too long to respond, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday dispatched a special team to assess the threat and to get relief efforts moving.



Kashmiri men assist a woman and a child to evacuate from a flooded area in Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Monday, March 30, 2015. Authorities in Kashmir issued alerts Monday and asked people to move to higher ground after heavy rain flooded several parts of the Himalayan region. (AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan)

The government of the Indian-controlled portion of the region had issued a flood warning Sunday night as river levels approached the danger mark. On Monday, a junior minister assured that the central government was working with the region to offer whatever help it could.

"We understand the kind of panic among people, because they have faced such difficulties in September as well. So, we are all prepared," said Kiren Rijiju from the Home Ministry in New Delhi.

As water swirled through the streets, Srinagar's main SKIMS Medical College Hospital began shifting patients to clinics and hospitals in safer

areas.

"Last year, this hospital was the first to get submerged when floods hit Kashmir. We don't want to take any risk this time," deputy police commissioner Farooq Lone.

People living in low-lying areas or near the river itself were urged to move, said Javid Jaffar, the top engineer of Kashmir's flood control department.



Kashmiri men evacuate a sheep from a flood affected area in Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Monday, March 30, 2015. Hundreds of Kashmiris in both India and Pakistan moved to higher ground Monday as rain-swollen rivers swamped parts of the disputed Himalayan region placed under an emergency

flood alert just six months after some 600 people died in flooding that left the region in shambles. (AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan)

Landslides closed key highways, including the one linking Srinagar with Jammu district.

On the Pakistani side of the border, which was hit worse by last year's flooding, authorities also warned residents to move away from the swelling Neelum River.



An unidentified woman comforts a relative, center, of landslide victims in the village of Laden some 45 Kilometers (28 miles) west of Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Monday, March 30, 2015. Hundreds of Kashmiris in both India and Pakistan moved to higher ground Monday as rain-swollen rivers swamped parts of the disputed Himalayan region placed under an emergency flood alert just six months after some 600 people died in flooding that left the

region in shambles. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)

"The rain caused landslides on Sunday. In some of the areas, roads were partially damaged because of it, but the situation is normal now," said Akram Suhail from the Disaster Management Authority in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

No casualties were immediately reported, Suhail said.



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An unidentified woman, left, comforts a relative of landslide victims in the village of Laden some 45 Kilometers (28 miles) west of Srinagar, Indian-controlled Kashmir, Monday, March 30, 2015. Hundreds of Kashmiris in both India and Pakistan moved to higher ground Monday as rain-swollen rivers swamped parts of the disputed Himalayan region placed under an emergency flood alert just six months after some 600 people died in flooding that left the region in shambles. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)

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Citation: Flood alerts issued in Kashmir as rivers cross danger mark (2015, March 30) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-issued-kashmir-rivers-danger.html>

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