

Amid intense drought, deadly rains lash Afghanistan

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Pedestrians look for dry ground on a street after heavy rains in Kabul

Torrential rainstorms have lashed drought-stricken Afghanistan in recent days, bringing widespread flooding that has killed at least five people and washed away homes including in the capital Kabul, officials said

Tuesday.

While some welcomed the wet weather after the punishing dry spell of recent years, residents complained about the lack of infrastructure and government assistance to help them clear up from the deluge.

Sixteen of Afghanistan's 34 provinces were hit in the past 24 hours, destroying or damaging hundreds of houses and sweeping away livestock, said Hashmat Bahaduri, a spokesman for Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

Hardest hit was Herat province in western Afghanistan, where at least five people were killed when their houses collapsed, Jilani Farhad, a spokesman for the local governor said.

Officials were also searching for 17 people whose minivan was swept away by flooding in the province's Obey district late Monday, Farhad added.

"There were women and children in the vehicle, we are searching but haven't found any sign of them yet," he said.

Extraordinary scenes played out in the capital, where the usually parched Kabul River swelled suddenly, bursting its banks in places and swamping surrounding streets and neighbourhoods with about one metre (three feet) of water in places.



Afghan girls try to make their way home through flooded streets in the Afghan

capital, Kabul

Drug addicts who normally spend their time in the riverbed or hiding under bridges could be seen openly smoking opium at street level as water swirled around them.

By Tuesday, authorities were warning locals living along the river to be prepared to evacuate their homes as water levels surged.

Bahaduri said 113 houses had already been partially or completely destroyed in Kabul.

In the capital, a university student named Mujtaba bemoaned a lack of drainage canals, but others welcomed the rain.



Drug addicts who usually smoke opium in the shadows on the dry bed of the Kabul river have been forced into the open by the heavy rain



Afghan schoolgirls walk home as heavy rain falls in Kabul

"It is a bliss to have all this water and rain, we are thankful to God to have rain and get rid of the drought problems," Kabul resident Mansoor Majab told AFP.

Years of dry weather, combined with a booming population and wasteful consumption, have drained Kabul's water basin, forcing residents to drill ever-deeper wells.

This winter saw heavy snowfall across parts of Afghanistan, which had led to flash floods in the spring melt.

Over one hundred people had been killed as of March 28 due to flooding in Afghanistan so far this year, according to ANDMA.

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