

Tens of millions battle Pakistan floods as death toll rises

August 29 2022, by Ashraf KHAN, with Emma CLARK and Zain Zaman JANJUA in Nowshera



Pakistan is struggling to deal with monsoon flooding that has affected more than 33 million people.

Tens of millions of people across Pakistan were Monday battling the

worst monsoon floods in a decade, with countless homes washed away, vital farmland destroyed and the country's main river threatening to burst its banks.

Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman said a third of the nation was under water, creating a "crisis of unimaginable proportions".

Officials say 1,136 people have died since June, when the seasonal rains began, but the final toll could be higher as hundreds of villages in the mountainous north have been cut off after flood-swollen rivers washed away roads and bridges.

The annual monsoon is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing lakes and dams across the Indian subcontinent, but it can also bring destruction.

This year's flooding has affected more than 33 million people—one in seven Pakistanis—said the National Disaster Management Authority.

"It's all one big ocean, there's no dry land to pump the water out," Rehman told AFP, adding the economic cost will be devastating.

This year's floods are comparable to those of 2010, the worst on record, when more than 2,000 people died.

Flood victims have taken refuge in makeshift camps that have sprung up across the country, where desperation is setting in.

"Living here is miserable. Our self-respect is at stake," said Fazal e Malik, sheltering in the grounds of a school now home to around 2,500 people in the town of Nowshera in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.



Farmers piled their belongings onto a cart and waded through flooded fields to seek dry land in Sindh.

"I stink but there is no place to take a shower. There are no fans."

Near Sukkur, a city in southern Sindh province and home to an ageing colonial-era barrage on the Indus River that is vital to preventing further catastrophe, one farmer lamented the devastation wrought on his rice fields.

Millions of acres of rich farmland have been flooded by weeks of non-stop rain, but now the Indus is threatening to burst its banks as torrents of water course downstream from tributaries in the north.

"Our crop spanned over 5,000 acres on which the best quality rice was sown and is eaten by you and us," Khalil Ahmed, 70, told AFP.

"All that is finished."

Landscape of water

Much of Sindh is now an endless landscape of water, hampering a massive military-led relief operation.

"There are no landing strips or approaches available... our pilots find it difficult to land," one senior officer told AFP.

The army's helicopters were also struggling to pluck people to safety in the north, where soaring mountains and deep valleys make for treacherous flying conditions.



A river in Swat burst its banks and destroyed a bridge and adjoining road.

Many rivers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province—which boasts some of Pakistan's best tourist spots—have overflowed, demolishing scores of buildings including a 150-room hotel that crumbled into a raging torrent.

The government has declared an emergency and appealed for international help, and on Sunday the first aid flights began arriving—from Turkey and the UAE.

The floods could not have come at a worse time for Pakistan, where the economy is in [free fall](#).

In Washington later Monday, the International Monetary Fund [executive board](#) approved the revival of a \$6 billion loan programme essential for the country to service its foreign debt.

"We should now be getting the 7th & 8th tranche of \$1.17 billion," Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said on Twitter.

The United Nations announced that it will launch a formal appeal Tuesday for \$160 million to fund emergency aid for the flood-battered country.

"The situation is expected to worsen with more ongoing rainfall," Stephane Dujarric, the UN Secretary-General spokesman, warned during a press briefing Monday. The UN has already allocated \$10 million in emergency aid.

But it is already clear it will take more to repair and rebuild after this monsoon.

Prices of basic goods—particularly onions, tomatoes and chickpeas—are soaring as vendors bemoan a lack of supplies from the flooded breadbasket provinces of Sindh and Punjab.



People displaced by the flooding queue for food near Ranpur.

The meteorological office said the country as a whole had been deluged with twice the usual monsoon rainfall, but Balochistan and Sindh had seen more than four times the average of the last three decades.

Padidan, a small town in Sindh, was drenched by more than 1.2 metres (47 inches) of rain since June, making it the wettest place in Pakistan.

More arriving daily

Across Sindh, thousands of displaced people are camped alongside elevated highways and railway tracks—often the only dry spots as far as

the eye can see.

More are arriving daily at Sukkur's city ring road, belongings piled on boats and tractor trollies, looking for shelter until the floodwaters recede.

Sukkur Barrage supervisor Aziz Soomro told AFP the main headway of water was expected to arrive around September 5, but he was confident the 90-year-old sluice gates would cope.

The barrage diverts water from the Indus into 10,000 kilometers (6,210 miles) of canals that make up one of the world's biggest irrigation schemes, but the farms it supplies are now mostly under water.

The only bright spark was the latest weather report that said there was little chance of rain for the rest of the week.

© 2022 AFP

Citation: Tens of millions battle Pakistan floods as death toll rises (2022, August 29) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-tens-millions-pakistan-death-toll.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.