

Afghan floods kill over 50

AFP, KABUL

Floods in eastern Afghanistan triggered by unseasonal downpours have left around 56 people dead with about 100 plucked to safety overnight with the help of Nato helicopters, officials said yesterday. About 30 people were estimated to have been killed since Wednesday in Panjshir province, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) northeast of Kabul, an official in the Department of Disaster Preparedness told AFP.

Seven more were killed in Kabul province, where several houses were destroyed. Other deaths were recorded in the provinces of Kapisa, Kunar, Paktia and Parwan, Ajmal Karimi said. "These are estimates. Assessment teams have gone to the area to assess the damages," he said.

CORRUPTION PROBE Blair quizzed again

AFP, LONDON

Former British prime minister Tony Blair has been questioned by police a third time over party political corruption allegations, the Press Association news agency said yesterday, quoting unnamed sources.

The "cash for honours" inquiry was launched last year amid claims that political parties had illegally offered seats in the unelected upper House of Lords to financial supporters.

Blair left office on Wednesday and was replaced by former finance minister Gordon Brown, who was unveiling his ministerial team as the information about Blair emerged.

He had previously been interviewed twice as a witness and members of his cabinet have also been quizzed. Blair was the first

sitting prime minister to be questioned as part of a criminal inquiry.

A spokeswoman for London's Metropolitan Police, which is leading the investigation, told AFP that they were "not prepared to discuss" the report. Blair's representatives were not immediately contactable.

Four people have been arrested during the probe, including two of Blair's closest aides, Lord Michael Levy, who was Labour's chief fundraiser and Middle East envoy, and Ruth Turner, a senior Downing Street official under Blair.

Levy and Turner, plus businessman and Labour Party backer Sir Christopher Evans, remain on bail. They deny any wrong-doing and no-one has been charged in the case.

Bad weather halts Pak cyclone aid effort

AFP, QUETTA

Bad weather prevented helicopters yesterday from ferrying aid to hundreds of thousands of flood-stricken people after a cyclone lashed Pakistan's southern coastline, officials said.

Relief officials said around 250,000 people had been left homeless and at least 21 killed by Cyclone Yemyin, which hit the area on Tuesday just days after thunderstorms left around 230 people dead in the southern port city of Karachi.

"The rain is continuing and has badly affected our relief efforts. Planes and helicopters are standing on runways awaiting clear weather," Khuda Bakhsh Baloch, the relief commissioner of badly-hit Baluchistan province, told AFP.

A military statement said 10 army helicopters were on standby to carry out rescue operations as soon as the weather permitted. It was the second successive day that the rain and wind had kept them grounded.

A C-130 Hercules transport aircraft carrying relief goods was also on standby at Chaklala airbase near Islamabad to fly to Baluchistan, again subject to the weather clearing, it added.

Pakistani troops had evacuated some 4,500 people from some of the worst hit areas along the coast, the statement said.

Baloch said that Baluchistan's rail and road links had been damaged by flooding. Gas and electricity supplies to most parts of the province were also cut after a main pipeline and power cables were washed away.

Cyclone Yemyin is the second major storm of the north Indian Ocean cyclone season after Cyclone Gonu hit Oman, Iran and southwestern Pakistan in early June, killing more than 60 people.

The United Nations said on Wednesday that the destruction in Pakistan -- plus floods in neighbouring India and extreme weather across Europe -- showed the world must be better prepared to cope with the impact of climate change.



PHOTO: STAR
Pedestrians run to cross a busy road at Mirpur yesterday, although there is a footbridge nearby. Such practice is commonplace in the city, which sometimes causes accident.

Landmine blasts kill Pak soldier

AFP, QUETTA

A soldier was killed and seven other people wounded in two separate landmine blasts in Pakistan's insurgency-hit Baluchistan province, officials said yesterday.

The trooper and three others were wounded when their vehicle hit a landmine planted by suspected tribal rebels in Dera Bugti district late Wednesday, a paramilitary forces spokesman told AFP.

Four tribesmen were wounded in a separate landmine explosion early Thursday near the same area, he added.

Hundreds of people have been killed since tribesmen demanding more autonomy and a bigger share of gas-rich Baluchistan's resources launched an insurgency in late 2004.

MDGs in the Context of Sustainable Development with Reference to the Disadvantaged Including the Disabled People



PHOTO: STAR

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam speaks at a discussion on 'MDGs in the context of sustainable development with reference to the disadvantaged including the disabled people' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right is Netherlands Charge d'Affaires Fritz Meijndert and on his left are Society for International Development President SM Al Husainy and Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad. (Story on Page 20)

Dhaka canals

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adjoining wetland cannot be saved, the drainage balance [of the city] will be totally destroyed," said architect Iqbal Habib, canal and wetland expert with Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa).

Over the years all the canals across a vast area of the city from the Buriganga Bridge at Postagola to Demra intersection, Sayedabad bus terminal to Kamalapur Buddhist temple, Khilgaon, Rampura, Badda to Gulshan area, Dhanmondi, and Mohammadpur to Tejgaon area have disappeared.

All the rainwater and liquid waste of the central part of the city are drained out through the Begunbari canal that starts from the rear side of the Sonargaon Hotel and flows up to the Rampura bridge, covering an area of more than three kilometres.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Sonargaon Hotel, Hotel Hilton, Biam building, and a few CNG filling stations have either already built or are intending to build structures there. A few of these organisations have built structures without the approval of the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha.

"We have acquired the canal. So, the general people will not be able to occupy the canal," said Wasa Superintendent Engineer Md Zahurul Alam.

A few housing companies have also been filling up land in Hatirjheel area, the only surviving flood retention space for the central part of the city.

The canal has become narrow in the area because of earth filling. The vast wetland where, according to legends, the elephants of Bhawal King used to bathe, has now become an open field.

Environmentalists alleged that a couple of housing companies, a well-known chain store and a private university have been filling up the wetland for years.

The present caretaker government has recently directed to cancel all allocations on the railway land in Hatirjheel and Begunbari areas.

A former communications minister allocated railway land for constructing buildings of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association, International Arbitration Centre, Hotel Hilton, and a few CNG filling stations.

Experts said only an announcement is not enough to protect the valuable wetland. "It needs proper planning and re-excavation of the wetland to save the city from inundation. The government should take immediate steps to stop development activities there," said Bapa

expert Iqbal Habib.

THE ROBBED CANALS

Following the floods in 1988, the government formed a committee to review the inundation problem of Dhaka city. The committee identified three "cluster canals" in Kalyanpur, Segunbagicha and Begunbari, each having four to six branches.

The Segunbagicha and Begunbari cluster canals have almost completely disappeared over the years.

The Segunbagicha cluster canals netted the Old Dhaka and Gulistan area with its branches--Dholai canal, Segunbagicha canal, Arambagh canal, Gopibagh canal, Gendaria canal and Jirani canal.

Among these, Segunbagicha, Arambagh and Gopibagh canals are basically a single canal that flowed through Bijoynagar, Purana Paltan, Fakirerpool, Arambagh, Notre Dame College, Motijheel and Gopibagh towards the Bashabo stadium.

Only around 300 feet of the Segunbagicha canal is now found open near the Gopibagh rail gate. Box culverts have been built over the rest while buildings and shops have been constructed on the two sides of the culverts.

Box culverts have also been made over the Dholai canal, which has played a significant role since the Mughal era. The canal started at Babubazar and flowed through Zindabazar lane, Goalnagar, Nababpur, Narinda, Jaluannagar and Farashganj and then fell in the Buriganga.

At least six canals--Paribagh canal, Dhanmondi canal, Rajarbagh canal, Kathalbagan canal, Bashabo canal and Mohakhali canal--were connected with the Begunbari canal at Panthakunja. However, none of these canals now exist as the authorities have built box culverts over them.

Rainwater and liquid waste from a vast area including Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Tejgaon industrial area, Shahbagh and Ramna are drained out through this box culvert canal network.

The Mohakhali canal, which starts at Nakhla para and is open at some places and covered elsewhere, flows to the zMohakhali bus stand and Niketan in Gulshan. It connects Begunbari canal. The canal is slowly being filled up in Niketan area.