

## UN to launch Pakistan flood appeal

BBC ONLINE

The UN is to launch an appeal to help Pakistan tackle the country's worst flooding in 80 years.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued an urgent plea for donors to "generously support Pakistan at this difficult time".

A UN official said the disaster had now affected nearly 14 million people - eclipsing the scale of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

At least 1,600 people are known to have died so far in Pakistan.

"We will soon issue an appeal for several hundred million dollars to respond to immediate needs," Ban told a news conference.

UN officials and the Pakistani government have appealed for more international help as the monsoon rains show little sign of abating.

The flood waters which devastated the north-west of the country have moved south to the agricultural heartland of Punjab and on to Sindh.

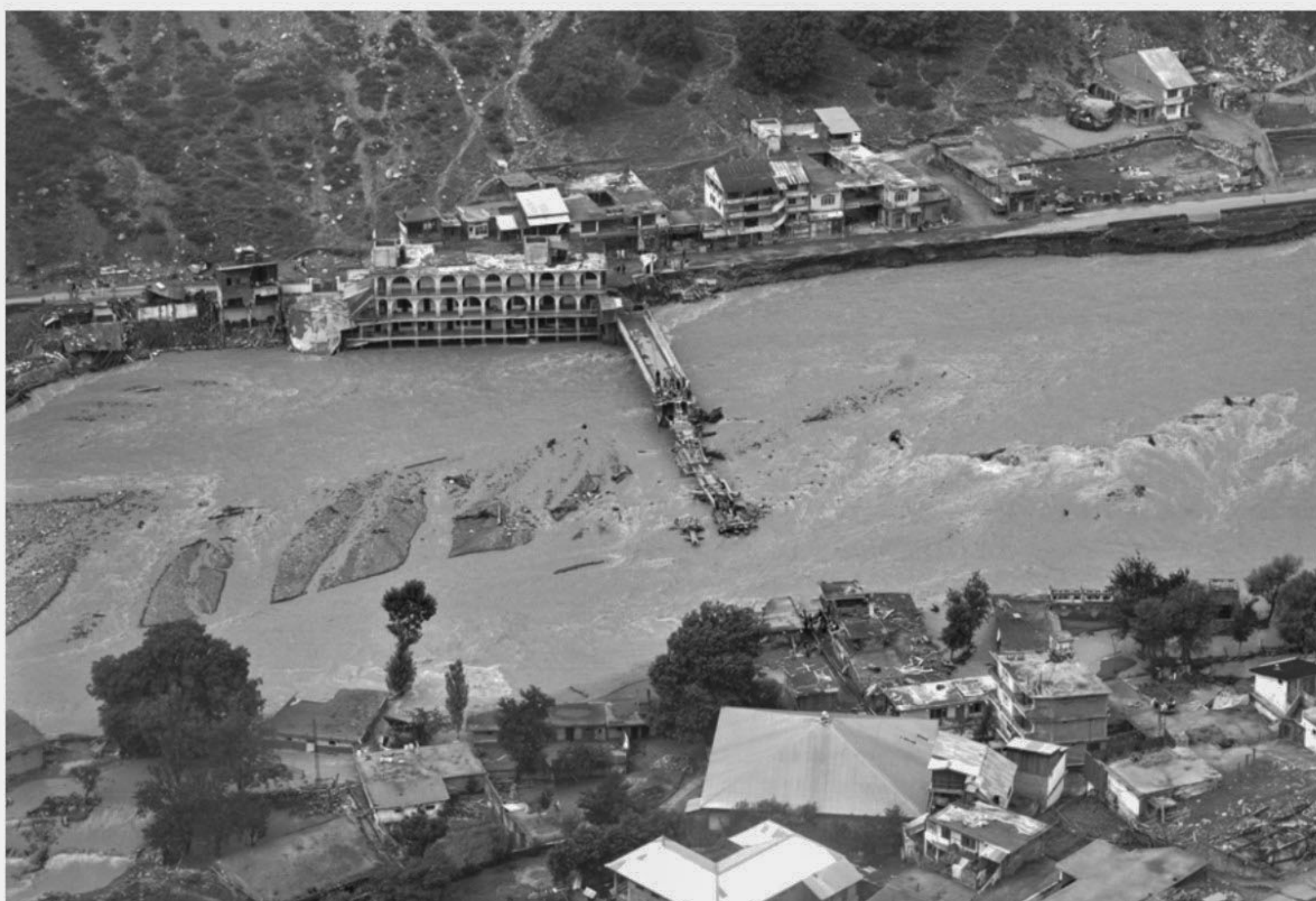
The torrents are battering the key Sukkur Barrage, threatening to further inundate large areas of Sindh.

Upper Sindh is already under water, and two million people have fled the province as the Indus river threatens to burst its banks.

Maurizio Giuliano, a spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told the BBC that the disaster was affecting 13.9 million people across Pakistan - "more than the world's three disasters combined".

More than three million people were affected by the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, another five million by the 2004 tsunami and three million by the Haiti earthquake in January.

The UN estimates that 1,600 people have died in Pakistan's floods and the Pakistani government has confirmed 1,243 deaths. About 220,000 were killed in the December 2004 tsunami in Asia.



In this aerial photograph, a bridge swept away by floodwaters is seen in Swat Valley yesterday. The United States has sent four Chinooks and two Blackhawks to Pakistan, which fly with a representative of the Pakistani military on board. Around 13.8 million people have been affected by massive floods in Pakistan, making the scale of the disaster worse than the devastating 2004 tsunami, a UN official said.

## 6m Pakistan flood victims need aid to survive: UN

AFP, Geneva

The UN said yesterday that aid for Pakistan's flood victims would focus on the survival needs of six million people, as it prepared to ramp up the relief effort with an international appeal for funds.

"We are focusing for now on six million people who are in need of direct humanitarian assistance, meaning that they need it to survive," said Elisabeth Byrs, a spokeswoman for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Byrs said the figure of 14 million affected was a broader measure given by Pakistani authorities that included the direct and indirect impact of the country's worst flooding for 80 years, extending from the homeless to longer term damage such as crop losses or loss of earnings.

UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes will launch the international appeal for funds in New York on Wednesday, along with Pakistani officials, Byrs said.

She told AFP that the number of victims targeted by the appeal had yet to be finalised.

But it is likely to be among one of the biggest relief efforts in the UN's history in terms of the number of people in need.

## Afghan civilian casualties up 31pc: UN

AFP, Kabul

The number of civilian casualties in the Afghan war rose by a third in the first six months of 2010, with insurgents killing seven times more civilians than Nato-led troops, a UN report said yesterday.

Particularly alarming was a 55 percent increase in assassinations of civilians at the hands of insurgents, warned the world body in its six-month update.

"We are worried. We are very concerned about the future because the human cost of this conflict is unfortunately being paid too heavily by the civilian Afghans," UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura told a news conference in Kabul.

"Afghan children and women are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict. They are being killed and injured in their homes and communities in greater numbers than ever before," De Mistura said.

Insurgents, who caused around half of civilian deaths in the same period last year, were now responsible for 76 percent of the 1,271 deaths and 1,997 people wounded, the report said.

"We have seen that 76 percent of the casualties are attributed and claimed by the anti government elements," he said.

The report attributed the rising numbers to more frequent and sophisticated homemade bomb attacks and a 95 percent increase in the number of civilians assassinated by insurgents, which "included public executions of children."

Casualties attributed to Afghan government and US-led Nato forces fell 30 percent during the same period, driven by a 64 percent decline in deaths and injuries caused by air strikes, it said.

The comparative decrease in such casualties at the hands of foreign troops signalled at least some success for the US-led counter-insurgency strategy to safeguard civilians in a bid to turn the population against the Taliban.

Following the report the top US general in Afghanistan, David Petraeus, reaffirmed Nato's commitment to protecting and serving the Afghan people.

"We must continue our emphasis on reducing the loss of innocent civilian life to an absolute minimum," he was quoted as saying in a statement.

The United States and Nato allies have boosted the overall number of foreign troops in Afghanistan to nearly 150,000 as part of a last-ditch attempt to reverse the Taliban momentum and speed an end to the nine-year conflict.

But the heartland of the Taliban insurgency has been in the south, where UN statistics showed that civilian casualties grew the most despite the expanding Western military deployment.

More than half of assassinations and executions occurred in the southern region, where more than 100 Afghan civilians were killed in such incidents.

De Mistura said that the number of targeted assassinations by militants had nearly doubled from the first half of 2009, including the killing of three candidates in parliamentary elections scheduled to be held on September 18.

### AFGHAN CAUSALITIES: 2010

No of civilian killed increased by	31%
Last six months casualties	1,250 killed
Children killed	176
389 kids injured	55% up from same period last year
Civilians executed by insurgents	95%



Media rights activists hold up posters bearing the image of missing Sri Lankan cartoonist Prageeth Eknaligoda during a protest rally in Colombo yesterday. Eknaligoda, who also wrote for the LankaNews.com website, disappeared two days before the January 26th presidential polls. His whereabouts are not known and family and friends have blamed the government for his disappearance.

PHOTO: AFP

## BJP attacks Mamata for Lalghar rally

Maoist rebels back Indian minister's effort

PTI, BBC ONLINE, New Delhi

BJP yesterday found unlikely allies in the Left parties as it attacked Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee's alleged support to the Maoists and her questioning of the encounter in which Naxal spokesman Azad was killed. As soon as the House assembled for the day, BJP Deputy Leader Gopinath Munde got up and sought permission from Speaker Meira Kumar to raise the issue of Banerjee questioning the encounter.

Kumar asked Munde to raise the matter during Zero Hour but the BJP leader insisted on speaking immediately. Even as the Speaker called for the Question Hour, Munde began speaking on the issue.

At this point Trinamool Congress members started protesting prompting the Left members to rise in their seats and back the BJP in attacking Banerjee. Trinamool member Sudip Bandopadhyay was seen gesturing in the House suggesting that the BJP has made common cause with arch ideological rivals - the Left parties.

"They do not want Question Hour to run," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said, pointing towards the Opposition benches as BJP and Trinamool members continued to raise slogans against each other. Congress members were on their feet demanding smooth functioning of the Question Hour.

As the Speaker continued with the Question Hour, the BJP members took their seats according to the Chair's request to raise the matter during Zero Hour. Yesterday, at a rally in the Maoist stronghold Lalghar in West Bengal, Banerjee condemned "the manner" in which Maoist spokesperson Cherukuri Rajkumar, alias Azad, was "murdered" in Andhra Pradesh last month.

'AGAINST TERROR' At Monday's rally in Lalghar, Ms Banerji called for negotiations between the Maoists and the government.

"I am against all kinds of terror. Terror should stop in Lalghar and all areas around it and the counter-insurgency operations in the area should be stopped," she told flag-waving supporters.

Security forces and police have been conducting a huge counter-insurgency campaign against the rebels in the area.

A BBC correspondent in Lalghar, Amitabh Bhattasali, says more than 10,000 rebel supporters converged in the area to back the rally.

Earlier, the police had said they would arrest any Maoist leader who attended.

But there have been no arrests, our correspondent says.

A senior Maoist leader had urged local people to attend the event in Lalghar and thousands showed up.

## Mumbai collision shuts India's busiest cargo port

AFP, Mumbai

One of India's busiest ports is likely to remain closed for three days after a collision between two cargo vessels on the approach to the harbour, an industry official said yesterday.

Hundreds of containers from one of the stricken ships have spilled into the sea, with diesel oil and fuel spreading towards the shore.

The official, who asked not to be identified, told AFP that Mumbai's Jawaharal Nehru Port (JNP) was expected to be shut until the clean-up operation in the shipping lane was completed.

The nearby Mumbai Port, which also handles cargo, was also shut after the collision between two Panamanian-registered container ships on Saturday morning.

A shipping trade body warned that the closures could affect business for weeks to come.

"The short-term impact is that at the moment we have two ports constituting 40 percent of India's maritime trade closed," the vice-president of the Western India Shippers' Association, R Venkatesh, told AFP.

## WikiLeaks urged to remove Afghan names

AFP, Kabul

Human rights groups are urging WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to remove the names of Afghans helping US forces from thousands of leaked military documents, fearing they could be the target for reprisals.

"In our letter, we asked him to take out some of the names and to be more careful in the future," Nader Nadery, president of the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission, told AFP in Kabul.

AHRC joined four other rights groups in issuing the appeal to Assange after WikiLeaks published in late July 70,000 leaked classified documents on the near nine-year US-led war in Afghanistan.

The files contained a string of damaging claims, including allegations that Pakistani spies met directly with the Taliban and that deaths of innocent civilians at the hands of international forces were covered up.

They also included the names of some Afghan informants, prompting claims that the leaks have endangered lives.

"We fear the names could create new targets. These persons, whose names and locations, provinces, are mentioned, could be targets for the Taliban," Nadery said.

"We have noticed a sharp rise of assassinations by the Taliban against tribal leaders, religious leaders (in recent months)," he added. The Wall Street Journal said the letter to Assange was issued by AHRC, Amnesty International, Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict, Open Society Institute and Commission and International Crisis Group.

"We have seen the negative, sometimes deadly ramifications for those Afghans identified as working for or sympathising with inter-

national forces," it quoted the letter as saying.

The message said the groups "strongly urge your volunteers and staff to analyse all documents to ensure that those containing identifying information are taken down or redacted."

Assange questioned what the groups were themselves doing to examine the classified documents, and whether they would be willing to help with the redaction process, the Journal said.

### KARZAI TO DISSOLVE ALL SECURITY COMPANIES

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is to dissolve all international and domestic private security companies operating in the country, his spokesman said yesterday.

"Dissolving the private security companies is a serious programme that the government of Afghanistan will execute," Waheed Omer told reporters, adding that "very soon the president of Afghanistan will set a deadline."

Omer said Karzai had spoken to his Western backers as well as leaders of the US and Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) who contract the companies to safeguard many aspects of their work, including supply convoys.

"Over the past few days the president held discussions with officials from our allied countries, with Nato and Isaf leaders and all those involved," said Omer.

He said private security companies employ 30-40,000 armed personnel throughout Afghanistan.

Karzai has accused the companies of operating in parallel to Afghan security forces, and of diverting critical resources needed to train army and police.

"If the dissolution is not carried out under a precise programme there will definitely be consequences."

## Sri Lanka's war probe panel to start work

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka announced the government-appointed panel looking into the island's civil war that ended last year would hold its first public hearings today.

The eight-member panel will hear testimony for five days in the capital Colombo and two days in Vavuniya, near the former war zone, an official statement said Tuesday.

The probe is expected to focus on why a 2002 truce between the government and separatist Tamil Tiger rebels collapsed and led to more fighting.

The president's office said in a statement that the panel was also tasked with recommending measures to ensure that Sri Lanka did not return to conflict.

Sri Lanka has rejected a separate United Nations probe into alleged rights abuses during the final stages of the war.

The UN has previously reported that at least 7,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed in the last four months of fighting before government troops finally defeated the Tigers in May.

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