

PAKISTAN FLOODS

Survivors face growing health problems

CNN ONLINE, Shahdadkot

The misery of Pakistan's flooding, which has already displaced millions, is showing up in the form of communicable illnesses, the United Nations said yesterday. Up to 1.5 million flood victims in Pakistan were being treated for a variety of ailments and conditions, including acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea and skin infections, according to Maurizio Giuliano with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani has called a Tuesday meeting of senior Pakistani health officials, local officials, UN agencies and other international group to look into the emerging health crisis, state-run TV reported.

The World Health Organization announced Sunday that cases of acute diarrhoea have topped 204,000. The number of skin diseases -- such as scabies -- has topped 263,300.

More than 204,600 Pakistanis have reported acute respiratory infections as filthy waters surround homeless flood victims, WHO said.

Thousands have cases of suspected malaria.

"Strong water and sanitation interventions, such as providing clean drinking water supply and addressing environmental hazards, are urgently needed to prevent outbreaks of waterborne diseases in"



A baby sleeps at a camp for flood victims in Pakistan's Muzaffargarh district of Punjab province yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Charsadda, Nowshera and Peshawar, WHO said.

Meanwhile, the half-million residents of Shahdadkot frantically tried to flee their homes over the weekend as a wall of water threatened to burst mud berms and drown

the entire city in Pakistan's Sindh province.

Three weeks into the worst natural disaster in Pakistan's history, people were still desperate to escape as a second wave of monsoon floodwaters surged southward. More than

1,500 people have died and 20 million lives have been disrupted.

But the suffering is sure to continue. Health officials fear that the human toll will get a lot worse as people are forced to wade through unsanitary water while clean drink-

ing water is scarce.

More than 200 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, according to the World Health Organization, greatly reducing the available health care for millions of survivors in filthy conditions. At least 4 million people are homeless.

"The depth of suffering is incalculable as risks escalate of diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection, malaria and other communicable diseases," said Dr. Guido Sabatinelli of the World Health Organization. "It is crucial that all humanitarian health providers, local and national, coordinate their relief efforts closely to save lives, reduce suffering and deliver the most effective response."

WHO said waterborne, airborne and vector-borne diseases, including acute watery diarrhoea, measles, malaria and acute respiratory infections, are threats due to overcrowding, lack of hygiene and breakage in waterlines.

The focus is now turning to heading off more disease, particularly among young children, WHO said.

More than 100,000 children have been given polio shots in Charsadda and Peshawar regions in the first three days of a new vaccination program.

United Nations officials have appealed for \$460 million over the next three months to help the roughly 20 million people in need of shelter, food and emergency care.

Nepal again fails to elect new PM

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's parliament failed for the fifth time to elect a new prime minister yesterday, leading the president to warn citizens could lose faith in democracy after a three-month leadership vacuum.

Nepal has been without a government since June, when former prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal stood down under pressure from the opposition Maoist party to pave the way for a new power-sharing government.

Since then, political leaders have been unable to agree on the shape of the new administration, and four earlier votes to try to select a new prime minister also failed to produce a clear winner.

A spokesman for Nepal's President Ram Baran Yadav said he was "deeply troubled" by the crisis in the impoverished Himalayan country and had urged leaders to reach a consensus.

"The president is deeply troubled... he fears the public will begin to lose faith in democratic institutions and the democratic process," Rajendra Dahal told AFP.

"He has expressed his concerns to everyone including the party leaders and prime minister," he added, referring to Nepal, who has stayed on in caretaker role during the deadlock.

The Maoists, who fought a decade-long civil war against the state before transforming themselves into a political party ahead of 2008 elections, hold the largest number of seats in parliament, but not enough to govern alone.

Party leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal is standing against Ram Chandra Poudel, chairman of the second-largest party in parliament, the centrist Nepali Congress, to be the next prime minister.

But neither candidate has been able to secure the backing of rival parties that they would need to form a new coalition government.

The resulting stalemate has hampered progress in the long-running peace process that began when the war ended in 2006 and prevented the passage of the annual budget, delaying much-needed government spending.

"If the budget cannot be passed soon we will face a lot of problems. Investors will lose confidence and we will have difficulty implementing development projects," finance ministry spokesman Lokdarshan Regmi told AFP.

US looks to Iraq strategy for Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

With the withdrawal of the final American combat brigade from Iraq, US commanders in Afghanistan are hoping to emulate a strategy used there as they step up the war against insurgents.

The number of US and Nato soldiers in Afghanistan is set to peak at 150,000 in coming weeks following orders from US President Barack Obama for an extra 30,000 troops, a "surge" aimed at speeding the end of the war.

Critics say his goal to start drawing down the US presence from mid-2011 is unrealistic, as Afghanistan's security forces are not up to the task of taking charge of the war-torn country.

The 2007 US troop surge in Iraq built on moves the year before to co-opt Sunni tribal militias and turn them against their former al-Qaeda allies.

Violence peaked, but the United States was soon able to capitalise on the two-pronged approach and turn around the

war, which had raged increasingly out of control since the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Now Washington is hoping the war in Afghanistan -- deadlier than ever and already two years older than the Iraq conflict -- can benefit from a similar strategy.

The commander of international forces, US General David Petraeus, who took up his post on July 4, was quick to press for what are now called Local Police Forces -- armed men paid by the government to defend their villages.

The programme is already under way in central Wardak and southern Uruzgan provinces, with plans to extend it to the toughest bastions of insurgency in the south, southwest and east, deputy interior minister Mohammad Munir Mangal has said.

Unlike the Iraqi militias, which were drawn largely along tribal lines, Afghanistan's are localised at village level, officials said.

"It will be up to 10,000 people, in perhaps something like 30 districts all over the country. They will have uniforms, small arms only, radios, but they cannot arrest," said the spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) General Josef Blotz.

"It's like a local neighbourhood watch for defence purposes only. They won't be used as fighting units."

"We need temporary solutions. After two to three years, they can be dissolved or integrated into the police."

Stephen Biddle, an expert on defence policy at Washington think-tank the Council on Foreign Relations, said the village forces plan for Afghanistan had less potential than the Iraqi militias, which were made up of former insurgents.

"In Iraq, the SOI (Sons of Iraq) were mostly insurgents. When these insurgents became SOI, it dramatically reduced the threats," said Biddle, who advised Petraeus in Iraq.

Turkey to remove Iran from enemies watch list

AFP, Ankara

Turkey is to remove Iran from a watch list of nations it considers a specific threat to its national security, a news report said yesterday, amid Western concerns of rapprochement between the two countries.

The updated list is contained in Turkey's security review produced by the country's National Security Council, which will be adopted in October and will no longer refer to Iran as a "specific threat", the Milliyet newspaper said.

The review replaces a previous edition published five years ago, the newspaper added.

Members of the council, made up of government and military leaders, were not immediately available for comment on the report on Iran, which Western nations accuse of seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Ahmadinejad offers friendship to the US

AP, Cairo

Iran's president offered friendship to the United States but also taunted Washington by saying he does not fear an attack by the US because it could not even defeat a small army in Iraq, according to a television interview with the leader aired Sunday.

President Barack Obama has repeatedly offered to start a dialogue with Iran, but his administration says Iran chose international isolation instead. The two countries are at odds over Iran's nuclear program, which the US fears is aimed at producing weapons though Tehran denies it.

US military chief Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said earlier this month that the US military has a plan to attack Iran, although he thinks a military strike is probably a bad idea. Still, he said the risk of Iran developing a nuclear weapon is unacceptable and he reiterated that "the military option" remains on the table.

"There are no logical reasons for the United States to carry out such an act," President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told the Arabic satellite television channel Al Jazeera, according to an Arabic translation of the interview in Farsi.

"Do you believe an army that has been defeated by a small army in Iraq can enter into a war with a large and well trained army like the Iranian army?" he asked, referring to the insurgents in Iraq.

He said Washington lacks real motives for attacking Iran and will not benefit from hostility.

"The friendship of Iran is much better than its hostility," he said.

Uttara road

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rickshaw three days ago after it collapsed after falling over a pothole," grumbled Azizul, at the bitterness of his experience.

The university authorities have finally given in to the pleas of its students and have decided to shift to sector- 5, said Mamun, an employee of the university.

Mansur Ahmed, executive engineer of Dhaka City Corporation of zone-10 said they have already informed the Nagar Bhaban about the dilapidated condition of the road, but are yet to receive any directions from them.

The cost of repair has also risen to Tk. 4.35 crore from Tk. one crore a year earlier, he said.

"We plan to construct a road 100 ft wide interconnecting with the other sectors through a bridge," he said.

Next week they will begin setting up a surface drain around two feet wide and three to five feet deep, at a cost of Tk 86 lakh.

The chairman of Rajuk also issued a letter to DCC months ago regarding the issue, he added.

Mayor of DCC Sadeque Hossain Khoka told The Daily Star they have already taken initiatives to repair the road.

To make the lives of the residents of that area even more miserable, a portion of that road is always piled high with rubbish, exposing them to innumerable health hazards not to mention the unbearable stench.

The DCC has been using a part of Sonargaon-Janapath Road as a secondary garbage collection point, for the last four years.

"We have been using it as we have no other alternative," said Chan Mia, a worker at the dumpster.

He said the accumulated garbage of sectors 1, 5, 12, 11, 13, 10, 7, 9 and 14 are brought to that point from where they take it to Amin Bazar.

"We have no other choice but to tolerate the foul odour of the garbage," said Probash, who runs a pharmacy near the dumpster.

The authorities concerned should take immediate measure to relocate the site to spare the locals of diseases, said Abdur Rahim Khan, a resident of that area.

Captain Bipan Kumar Saha, chief waste management officer of DCC said they will issue a letter to Rajuk shortly regarding the relocation of the site.

The waste management of Uttara is done by private organisations, which do not have any proper disposal containers but simply dump the garbage on the road, he said.

"We are taking initiatives to make them more capable in managing waste," he said.

Rival protests held at NY Ground Zero mosque site

BBC ONLINE

Hundreds of people took part in rival protests over plans for a mosque near the site of the 9/11 terror attacks.

Police kept the banner-waving groups apart, although there were no reports of violence between supporters and opponents of the scheme in New York.

Opponents chanted "No mosque, no way" as supporters responded with "Say no to racist fear".

Developers plan to convert an old building into a 13-storey Islamic community centre and mosque.

Feelings ran high during Sunday's protests in Manhattan, close to Ground Zero.

There were face-to-face confrontations as demonstrators shouted at each other across the barricades, the Associated Press reported.

Opponents want the mosque to be moved further from the site where more than 2,700 people were killed in the September 11 terror attacks.

Steve Ayling, a 40-year-old plumber from Brooklyn, told AP: "They should put it in the Middle East." The people behind the mosque project were "the same people who took down the twin towers", he said.

But Dr Ali Akram, a 39-year-old doctor also from Brooklyn, said that scores of Muslims died in the twin towers. Opponents of the mosque were "un-American," he said.

Trapped 33 Chilean miners still alive after 17 days

BBC ONLINE

It will take at least four months to rescue 33 miners trapped underground in Chile, the head of the rescue operation said yesterday.

Rescuers made contact with the miners by lowering a probe into the mine, 17 days after the men became trapped.

The miners, stuck in a mine shaft shelter some 700m (2,300ft) down, sent up a note saying they were all alive.

Rescuers are now preparing to drill a wider hole through which they can bring the miners to the surface.

The chief engineer in charge of the rescue operation, Andres Sougarret, said a larger and more powerful drill would be needed to dig the hole at the San Jose gold and copper mine near the city of Copiapo.

"A shaft 66cm (26 inches) in diameter will take at least 120 days," he said.

Rescuers plan to send narrow plastic tubes down the narrow borehole already drilled with food, hydration gels and equipment that will allow them to communicate with relatives - including cameras and microphones.

The men have been trapped since 5 August when the main access tunnel collapsed. They are said to be trapped 4.5 miles (7 km) inside the mine, in a space the size of a small flat.

Expressway route finalised

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adding that this would drastically reduce traffic jam in the city.

Within this week, the Bridge Division of the communications ministry will ask four pre-qualified companies to submit their proposals. These companies are: Italian-Thai Development Public Company (Thailand), Sikder Real Estate-KCC JV (Bangladesh-Korea), Gammon Infrastructure Projects Ltd-Bouygues Travaux Publics SA Consortium (India-France) and China Railway International (China).

At yesterday's meeting, it was disclosed that Japan would provide \$1.7 billion for constructing the first part of the proposed metro railway in Dhaka. This would be finalised early next year during a visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan, a cabinet member told The Daily Star.

The prime minister rejected a World Bank suggestion to raise the toll fee of Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge. The bank said otherwise, it would not provide support for the upcoming Padma Bridge.

Hasina told the meeting that Bangladesh paid the bank

interest for taking loans. Why should the country listen to such odd suggestions when the people are already paying high toll considering Bangladesh's perspective, she said. If such suggestions are implemented, it will increase prices of commodities, she said.

THE EXPRESSWAY ROUTE
This option chosen for the expressway will follow the rail alignment with piers offset from the railway. This is subject to negotiations between Bangladesh Railway, Bangladesh Bridge Authority and the bidders, depending on the engineering solutions proposed by each bidder. Should land not be available adjacent to the railway alignment, then the route would follow the central reservation of roads.

At Mohakhali Flyover, the expressway would run along the central reservation of Shaheed Tajuddin Road through Tejaogon industrial area. The expressway would rejoin the rail corridor through Moghbazar to then join up with Syedabad Road.

Along Syedabad Road, the expressway would be located between the road and the rail corridor, reducing the interaction with the Khilgaon flyover.

The expressway could then continue along the rail corri-

dor to the Kamalapur Railway Station and container terminal. South of Kamalapur Station, the expressway curves to the east passing south of Kamalapur Stadium. The route then passes through the water catchments and Syedabad Water Treatment Plant, turns south and connects with Dhaka-Chittagong Highway.

While this expressway route would not link places like Dhanmondi or Mohammadpur, it proposes two additional extensions. The first one is a 1.8km long extension through Tejaogon industrial area to Farmgate. The second one is 3.4km long expansion starting near Panthapath and traversing the water catchments south of Hotel Sonargaon, then following the Sonargaon Road from New Eskaton Road to Buet.

The study identified potential interchanges in the following locations:

1. Kuril Flyover at the intersection of Airport Road to provide access to Airport Road southbound.

2. Cantonment overpass over Airport Road near railway crossing.

3. Banani, south of Kamal Ataturk Avenue and

north of Mohakhali Flyover to give access to and from Gulshan and Mohakhali.

4. Panthapath to provide access to and from Ramna, Tejaogon and Shaheed Tajuddin Road.

5. Kamalapur Railway Station south of the Khilgaon Flyover to provide access to and from Paltan and Motijheel.

A major advantage of this route would be minimal disruption to traffic during the construction period as it mainly uses the rail alignment.

But there will be significant disruption to traffic during the construction period along Shaheed Tajuddin Road and possibly Airport Road. The southern end of the Expressway from Kamalapur to Dhaka-Chittagong Highway will require significant land acquisition.

The project would, however, impact link projects like Zia Colony to Mirpur Road, Bijoy Sarani-Shaheed Tajuddin Road, Mirpur-14 to New Airport Road, Jatrabari Bridge-Polder Road, Jatrabari-Demra Ghat, Jatrabari Crossing to Hatirjheel, and Malibagh Level Crossing.

Due to contractual inflexibility of the public-private

Even bribe cannot ensure just amount of rice

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corruption has tightened its grip even on rickshaw-pullers in remote villages. On the other hand, people in authority make quick bucks abusing their power and misappropriating government goods.

Though corruption has become a common phenomenon and an open secret, it can hardly be proved in court where the poor finally do not dare speaking against local chairmen. Even if they do so, their statements contradict each other under pressure by the musclemen.

"They never received as less as 25 kg of rice or wheat. There might be one or two kg less due to loss in the process of loading or unloading the food," said

Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of Rampur UP.

He straightaway refused the allegations of bribery.

"Sometimes more people than the registered ones arrive at distribution place. We have to give the additional people some food which causes less in weight," he claimed.

The VGD and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) registration and distribution are ruled by manifold corruption across the country. Wazed Ali, Aizghana UP chairman in Mirzapur in Tangail, can be a glaring example as he has recently been suspended for issuing a VGF card against a dead person.

"It is happening everywhere in the country and

allegations are rife that people get four to five kg less food. We are so corrupt that we can't spare a single kg of rice from misappropriation," said Hitesh Chandra Pulok, vice-chairman of Mirzapur upazila.

Under the VGF programme, each cardholder is supposed to get at least 10 kg rice or wheat at least twice a year. However, people of the visited areas never received rice more than nine kg at a time.

It cannot be estimated how much of the 2.17 lakh tonnes of rice or wheat given among 6.21 lakh people in between July 2009 and June 2010 across the country under VGD programme was misappropriated as there is no survey done

in this regard.

The Anti-Corruption Commission during the immediate past caretaker government filed numerous cases against Union Parishad chairmen across the country on charges of manipulation and misappropriation of VGD and VGF cards.

"The charges eventually could not be proved in court in most cases as the poor victims do not dare to give deposition against the chairmen," said ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman.

Sources in the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation say at least 17 to 18 investigations were initiated during the caretaker rule following newspaper reports over corruption

in the sector, but none could be proved.

During the caretaker rule the joint forces even caught a number of UP chairmen red-handed for giving less food but those too managed a safe return.

The chairmen and local leaders say they give less in weight to meet up the carrying expenditures required for taking VGD or VGF incentives from upazila godown to the areas of distribution.

The upazila relief officers say corruption cannot be checked unless rice or wheat is sent in packets of 30 kg or 10 kg intact and the government strengthens its monitoring.