

63 killed in 24hrs of heavy rain in Pakistan
Nearly 300 injured; emergency declared in parts of Punjab

REUTERS, Lahore

Heavy monsoon rains across Pakistan's Punjab province killed at least 63 people and injured nearly 300 in the past 24 hours, provincial officials said yesterday, bringing the nationwide death toll from the rains to at least 159 since late June.

It was one of the deadliest days of this year's rainy season so far. Section 144 was imposed across Punjab along with a state of emergency in several districts.

The downpours caused flooding and building collapses, with most of the deaths caused by the roofs of weaker homes failing. Lahore, the eastern provincial capital, reported 15 deaths, Faisalabad nine, and the farming towns of Okara, Sahiwal and Pakpattan several more.

Since late June, the monsoon rains have killed 103 people and injured 393 in Punjab alone, according to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA). More than 120 homes were damaged and six livestock killed.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) gave the toll of at least 159 deaths nationwide since June 25 and said more than 1,000 homes had been damaged.

A high flood alert was issued for the River Jhelum at the northern town of Manga, where water inflows were expected to surge to high levels, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department. Authorities warned that adjoining streams could also overflow in the next 24 hours, putting nearby communities at risk.

Monsoon rains are a routine part of South Asia's climate and are essential for crop irrigation and replenishing water supplies. However, their adverse impact has worsened in recent years due to rapid urban expansion, poor drainage systems, and more frequent extreme weather events linked to climate change.

Drone hits oil field in Iraq's Kurdistan for second day

AFP, Arbil

A drone loaded with explosives struck an oil field in Iraq's northern Kurdistan region yesterday, Kurdish forces said -- the second attack in two days on the Norwegian-operated site.

"At 10:55 am (0755 GMT) a new attack by an explosives-laden drone hit" the DNO-operated Tawke field in Zakho district, Kurdistan's counterterrorism services said.

No casualties or damage were reported.

Similar attacks on Wednesday forced the Norwegian firm to suspend operations at the Tawke and Peshkabir oil fields.

Another two attacks targeted an oil field operated by the US firm Hunt Oil in Duhok province.

In the past few weeks, Kurdistan has seen a spate of unclaimed drone attacks, which have come as the regional government and the federal authorities in Baghdad wrangle over control of export revenues from the Kurdistan fields.

Several oil fields in the region have been hit in the space of a week.

The Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan (APIKUR) -- which represents international oil firms in the region, including DNO, and Hunt -- condemned the attacks Wednesday.

It added that the majority of its members have suspended production "totalling over 200,000 barrels per day".

Long plagued by conflict, Iraq frequently experiences such attacks, often linked to regional proxy struggles between Iran and the United States and its ally Israel.

There has been no claim of responsibility for any of the past week's attacks, and Baghdad has promised an investigation to identify the culprits.

But a Kurdish official, who requested anonymity, blamed the recent attacks on the Popular Mobilisation Forces -- Hashid al-Shaabi in Arabic -- a coalition of pro-Iran former paramilitaries now integrated into the regular armed forces.

"We hold the Iraqi government responsible because they are funding the PMF, which is attacking the oil infrastructure," he told AFP Wednesday.

ON THIS DAY LAST YEAR

Deadliest day yet in quota protests

FROM PAGE 1

surrounding areas; and one each in Badda, Savar, and Dhanmondi. A journalist of Dhaka Times, Mehedhi Hasan, was among the dead, killed during coverage of the clashes at Jatrabari.

Thick plumes of black smoke hung over parts of the capital as buildings, vehicles, and public property burned. Protesters reportedly attacked and set fire to state-run BTV Bhaban in Rampura and the Disaster Management Office in Mohakhali. At least three police outposts in the capital were also torched.

Clashes were reported from major intersections -Uttara, Jatrabari, Rampura, Dhanmondi, Badda, Mirpur, and Science Lab - as law enforcers, aided by ruling party activists, used shotguns, tear gas shells, and sound grenades against the protesters. Students retaliated with brick chunks and makeshift barricades.

In Uttara, intense clashes turned a kilometre of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway into a battlefield.

Hospitals in Uttara and other parts of Dhaka were overwhelmed. Medical staff at multiple private hospitals treated injured protesters on the roads outside their facilities, unable to accommodate the huge number of injured. Doctors confirmed that many victims had been hit by shotgun pellets fired from close range.

Similar scenes unfolded in at least 19 districts. Two students were killed in Narsingdi, two in Chattogram, and one each in Sylhet and Madaripur. In Savar, Shaikh Ashabul Yamin, a student of Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), died after being shot during clashes.

In Chattogram's Bahaddarhat area, two young men with bullet wounds died from their injuries at Chattogram Medical College Hospital. Protesters there chased with police and briefly took control of the intersection before torching a police box.

In Madaripur, a student drowned in Shakuni Lake while trying to escape from police and BCL activists. The additional superintendent of police said they recovered the body but had not confirmed the cause of death.

At least 50 people were injured in



Rab vehicles trying to retreat amid fierce protests in Uttara on July 18, 2024, where clashes left at least nine people dead.

PHOTO: FILE

Rangpur, where students from Begum Rokeya University clashed with police.

In Dinajpur, protesters attacked two Awami League offices and set fire to 15 motorcycles. In Manikganj, Bogura, Natore, and Sylhet, hundreds were injured in sporadic clashes involving police, BCL activists, and protesters.

Internet access across the country was completely shut down after the government instructed international terrestrial cable (ITC) companies and mobile carriers to suspend services. The blackout cut off millions and disrupted reporting from the ground.

Amid the bloodshed, the government invited students to talks in the afternoon, but the call was rejected. "No dialogue will take place over the blood of martyrs," said Nahid Islam, a key organiser of the movement, in a Facebook post before internet access was cut. "It is the government that has to find the solution."

The home ministry issued a stern warning, stating that if "destructive activities" continued, law enforcement would use the full force of the law to

maintain order.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, after a meeting with deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, said the premier had instructed party leaders to take to the streets and resist "the creators of chaos."

He also confirmed that the government would appeal to the Supreme Court on July 20 to retain 80 percent of government jobs based on merit.

Meanwhile, BNP announced plans to hold programmes nationwide in support of the student movement. Jatiyo Party Chairman and opposition leader of the parliament, GM Quader, condemned the "barbaric attacks" on students, calling them unacceptable in a civilised society. He urged the government to stop the violence and accept the students' logical demands.

As the bloodshed deepened and the internet blackout tightened its grip, one thing became painfully clear: for the grieving families, the wounded protesters, and a shaken nation, the fight was no longer just about quotas. It was the moment a generation rose to reclaim its future.

Myanmar junta claims recapture of town near military academy

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta yesterday claimed to have ousted armed rebels who captured a town near the military's main officer training academy after a year-long battle.

A 2021 coup sparked a civil war in Myanmar, pitching the military against a myriad of pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic armed groups which have long held sway in the nation's fringes.

The northeastern town of Nawngkhio was seized by opposition fighters last summer, after some of the disparate groups organised a combined offensive which secured a string of victories against the military.

Nawngkhio is only about 40 kilometres (25 miles) -- roughly an hour drive -- from Pyin Oo Lwin, the town that hosts the country's main military officer school.

Its capture was a major victory for ethnic fighters from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the pro-democracy People's Defence Forces.

But the junta said in state media The Global New Light of Myanmar it had retaken the town after "566 armed engagements within 11 operational months".

A rare one-page spread in the newspaper showed soldiers holding rifles aloft in celebration and detailed the battle, admitting initial attacks led to officers and enlisted men "sacrificing their lives".

But "by combining strategic ground and air military tactics", the military captured "the whole Nawngkhio area" by Wednesday, it said.

In a statement, the TNLA did not acknowledge the junta's claim of victory.

But it said "it has been difficult to continue administrative work in the town due to the heavy offensive" and it had "moved civil administration services to safe locations".

Nawngkhio is only around 80 kilometres from Myanmar's second most populous city, Mandalay.

While the combined rebel offensive has inflicted sweeping losses, analysts say the junta's control over major population centres is secure as it wields an air force capable of staving them off.

Gopalganj reeling from four deaths

FROM PAGE 1

care ... Drives are on and will continue until all those involved are held accountable."

In response to questions on intelligence failures, he said, "The agencies had information, but not about the extent of the violence that may unfold."

Roni Sheikh, a security guard, told The Daily Star the presence of law enforcers grew as the day wore on. "I saw police detaining several people from different locations. Authorities were also using loudspeakers to urge people to return home."

The curfew brought public transport to a standstill.

Transport workers near Police Lines intersection said there were no passengers. Bus services on Gopalganj-Tekherhat, Gopalganj-Baishpur, and Gopalganj-Kotalipara-Poysarhat routes remained suspended, though long-distance services continued.

The venue for the NCP's pre-announced rally came under attack twice on Wednesday -- once before the event and again after. Four people died during daylong pitched battles between law enforcers and supporters of the Awami League, whose activities have recently been banned.

At a press briefing at the DC office yesterday, Rezaul Karim Mallik, deputy inspector general of Dhaka range, said four people were killed and 40-45 injured in the clashes, including 10 law enforcers.

He did not specify the number of security personnel deployed in the area. "Autopsies have not yet been conducted. We will follow legal procedures."

Asked if police failed to contain the situation, he said, "It cannot be termed a failure; but any negligence will be investigated."

Deputy Commissioner Sharafuddin Ahmed Chowdhury said operations to arrest the attackers were ongoing.

According to Superintendent of Police Mizanur Rahman, 100 people have been detained so far. Contacted around 9:00pm, he confirmed the arrests and said multiple cases over the incident were being prepared. "We're analysing CCTV footage to identify the culprits."

Asked whether the attack was pre-planned, DC Sharaf said, "We have intelligence that some miscreants from outside are now in Gopalganj. We're working to identify them and monitoring the situation ... It was not a planned attack, but we were prepared."

All four people killed have already been buried without autopsies,

death certificates, or official inquest reports.

Of them, clothing trader Dipa Saha was cremated at the municipal crematorium on the night of the incident. Tile mason's assistant Ramzan Kazi was buried after Isha prayers that night. Mobile phone trader Sohel Rana and crockery shop worker Imon Talukder were buried yesterday morning at the municipal graveyard, according to family members.

Dr Jibitesh Biswas, superintendent of Gopalganj General Hospital, confirmed that all four bodies had arrived at the hospital, but no autopsies were done. He added that many injured individuals also received treatment.

Gopalganj Civil Surgeon Dr Abu Sayeed Mohammad Faruq said that of the nine people brought to the hospital, three were critically injured and sent to Dhaka, while the rest have since been discharged.

Meanwhile, Gopalganj Sadar Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Mir Md Sajedur Rahman told The Daily Star that apart from the four people killed, at least nine others were shot during the clashes.

This correspondent spoke to five other people who claimed their family members were shot as well, indicating that the number of injured may be higher.

One of those people, requesting anonymity, said his nephew is currently in a private hospital in Dhaka after receiving first-aid at a facility in Khulna.

On the other hand, four people of a five-member family living in a building in Chourangi area -- a few feet away from the scene of the incident in Poura Park area -- had gone into hiding since the clashes. The remaining resident, an elderly woman, told this correspondent that law enforcers had raided their home at least four times.

"On Wednesday night, they [law enforcers] came and asked if anyone was hiding inside, and where the male members of the family were... They came again yesterday and searched all the rooms.

"I don't know what to do. They [her sons] haven't called me either."

FAMILIES GRIEVE

Prothom Alo reports: Marjina Begum sat in silence yesterday, her voice lost after losing her only son -- the family's sole breadwinner -- Ramzan Kazi, who was killed in Wednesday's clashes.

His uncle Kalim Munshi said, "I saw in a video that my nephew was shot. We rushed him to the hospital, but we couldn't save him. When we took the body to the police station,

the gate was shut. We then took it back to the hospital for autopsy, but hospital staff told us to take the body home, saying there might be 'problems' if we stayed. We couldn't even get the autopsy done."

"Ramzan's father is disabled and pulls a rickshaw van just one shift a day. The family depended mostly on Ramzan's earnings. Who will provide for them now?"

Breaking down, Kalim added, "My nephew worked as a mason. He was not involved with any party. What did he do to deserve being shot dead?"

Ramzan's ancestral home is in Harinahati village of Kotalipara upazila. His father, Kamrul Kazi, moved to Gopalganj town around 20 years ago. The family had been living in a rented house in the BSCIC area of the town.

Meanwhile, Bibha Rani Saha, mother of victim Dipa Saha, was clutching onto his clothes.

When journalists approached her at her home around 2:30pm yesterday, she cried out, "Can any of you bring my son back? If you can't, what's the point of all these questions? Why was my son killed? What did he do wrong?"

Dipta, son of Santosh Saha from Udayan Road in Gopalganj, was a garment trader.

His brother Sanjoy Saha told Prothom Alo, "My brother and I, only the two of us, ran a clothing business. When the situation got tense in the town, he [Dipta] shuttered the store and stood nearby. As law enforcers began chasing people away, he tried taking shelter elsewhere but got shot near the Gopalganj Government College Mosque. The bullet pierced through the right side of his abdomen and exited through the left."

"My cousin and some others took him to the Gopalganj General Hospital, but we couldn't save him."

Dipta's cremation was held later that night at the Gopalganj municipal crematorium.

GOVT FORMS PROBE BODY

The interim government yesterday formed a committee led by Home Ministry Senior Secretary Nasimul Ghani to investigate the incident.

According to the Chief Adviser's Office, the committee will examine all aspects of the violence and submit its report within two weeks.

"The interim government reiterates its commitment to upholding justice, maintaining public order, and ensuring that those responsible for any unlawful acts, violence or deaths are held accountable in accordance with the law," said a press release.

Ramadan is expected to begin in the third week of February.

Army used force in self-defence

FROM PAGE 1

rally called as part of a political party's month-long programme.

The initial wave of violence left several police personnel and journalists injured, while government vehicles and public establishments were vandalised and set on fire, the statement said.

"As the situation quickly escalated, both the Bangladesh Army and local police intervened and were able to bring the situation under control," the ISPR said.

During the political party's rally, the stage came under attack once again, and simultaneously, the district jail was also attacked and extensively vandalised.

According to the statement, army personnel issued multiple warnings via loudspeakers, urging attackers to retreat.

"When those attempts failed and crude bombs and brickbats were hurled at army personnel, the army was forced to use force in self-defence," the ISPR added. The army, police, and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) then dispersed the attackers.