

Over 800 dead due to flooding

By Zulfiqar Ali

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Residents taking shelter in a mosque wait to be evacuated as army soldiers move past in a boat in Nowshera.—Reuters

PESHAWAR: The death toll from devastating floods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has risen to 800. More than 27,000 people are still stranded, over 100 missing, thousands of houses have been destroyed and vast farmland affected.

Dera Ismail Khan district, where a disaster was being feared, has ‘miraculously’ remained safe.

Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain said at a press conference on Saturday that most parts of the Nowshera district were still under water, although the flood level had receded in rivers. He said floods and landslides had claimed 141 lives in the Shangla district alone.

According to AFP, the United Nations has estimated that almost one million people have been affected by the flooding, and 45 bridges destroyed. Another 150 people are missing and more than 3,700 houses have been swept away.

Army personnel and volunteers have been waging an uphill struggle to reach marooned people in Nowshera, Charsadda and northern districts of the province. They have so far rescued 3,790 people, including women and children.

The administration began efforts to rehabilitate communication links as standing water in Charsadda and Peshawar has started receding, which helped in restoring their linkage with some other areas.

Officials said that about two dozens military helicopters took part in the rescue and search operation on Saturday and airlifted a number of people trapped on rooftops.

But rescue teams could not reach the stranded people because most boats were either out of order or short of fuel.

Rail and road links between Peshawar and Punjab could not be restored as most parts of the GT Road and tracks are still under water.

The closure of major highways, including the Motorway, and railway caused shortage of petrol, vegetable and food in Peshawar.

Mian Iftikhar confirmed that US helicopters were also taking part in rescue and relief work in different parts of the province where monsoon rains and flash floods had caused widespread devastations.

He said that President Asif Ali Zardari had provided four helicopters being used in the rescue operation and air lifting of foodstuffs to the stranded population. A total of 24 choppers took part in the rescue operation.

But the marooned people complained about the slow pace of rescue and relief work and said that thousands of trapped people's lives were at risk.

The flood has levelled an Afghan refugee camp in Azakhel, Nowshera district, rendering around 10,000 families homeless.

The displaced people, along with their cattle, are living in makeshifts along the GT Road between Peshawar and Nowshera.

Thousands of people have taken shelter in schools and mosques. Some of them have moved to their relatives' houses.

Over 1,200 tourists, who are reported to have been trapped in Swat's Bahrain area, are facing shortage of food and water. Flash floods have destroyed hotels, restaurants, houses and roads Kalam, Madian and Bahrain.

A number of far flung areas in Swat have been cut off from the rest of the country. The communication network could not be restored.

The officials said that 90 roads had been badly damaged and 58 were unfit for traffic. Mian Iftikhar said the threat of flood in D.I. Khan had gone and troops rescued stranded people and started relief operation in the area.

According to initial reports, 567 houses had been completely damaged across the province.

Shakeel Qader Khan, director general of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority, said at a press conference that rescue operation in the flood-affected districts would be completed by Sunday and the Charsadda-Peshawar highway would also be opened.

He said that 5,500 tourists were stranded in different areas of Swat and their airlifting was in progress. He said that 500 tourists in Swat and 50 Chinese workers in Kohistan district had been rescued.

Mr Khan said that assistance sought from international humanitarian organisations was expected within a couple of days.

Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/03-over-800-dead-due-to-flooding-mian-iftikhar-ss-07>