

Despite repeated disasters, Balochistan's green belt far from 'flood resilient'

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QUETTA: Over the past decade and a half, the Nasirabad division has witnessed at least four major floods.

Consisting of the Jafferabad, Nasirabad, Jhal Magsi and Kachhi districts, this region is considered the 'green belt of the province', with agriculture being the primary occupation of most residents.

Displaced from the tiny village of Chowki Jamali in Jafferabad district, Misri Jamali tells Dawn that he had lived through three major inundations, while a fourth flood that struck the region did not reach his home.

This time, however, things are worse. Much worse.

"The flood has snatched each and everything from me and everyone around; agricultural land, mud homes, livestock, grain stocks, even the small shop that I owned [is now gone]."

A father of eight, Misri tells Dawn from a camp housing flood-hit displaced persons that they were not prepared for the magnitude of the torrents that hit their village.

"Each flood, from 2010 onwards, has wreaked havoc... We are not strangers to floods, but this time we thought the water would be less. We thought it would come later than it did," he says, recounting how the waters struck while his family were soundly asleep in their beds.

"Since it was raining, we decided to wait until the morning before moving away. But we were wrong. By the time we stirred, there was water everywhere in our village and all other parts of the town," he added, saying that he only managed to save his family members and could not salvage any possessions.

But unlike Misri, Arbab Jamali was not so lucky. He hails from Gandakha, a tehsil in Jafferabad district, bordering Sindh.

The Kirthar Canal, which supplies water to Gandakha via the Indus, had dried up before the arrival of torrential rains and floods.

According to locals, the mud deposits that accumulated in the canal were not cleared since the 2007 floods. This, they believe, was one of the reasons Gandakha remained drought-stricken until now.

The torrential rains and floods claimed the lives of five members of the same family in this small settlement, sending shockwaves through the community.

Mohammad Arbab Jamali is the head of this unfortunate family. "My wife Shazia who was in her 20s, Farah, (8 months), Shela (2) Shakeela (4) and my school-going brother Azhar Ali died, but I was not there at the time," he says.

“Nobody knew the roof of the room had collapsed, since it had been raining non-stop for three days. The mud roof became damaged and fell on the children.”

For those still clinging to their lands, there is still no cellular network, electricity, and clean drinking water in the area. “The prices of daily use items like flour, rice, and potable water, among other things, have skyrocketed,” says Mehboob Jamali, who hails from the same town.

Even though the rains have abated and the sun has been shining there for weeks, many roads in Nasirabad division are still impassable.

Residents of Jafferabad, Dera Murad Jamali and other nearby areas have sought refuge in Sibi.

“We have been providing relief and food items to the residents of Nasirabad,” Mansoor Qazi, the bespectacled young deputy commissioner of Sibi, told Dawn.

This was the time for crops to ripen in the Nasirabad belt, but now all is destroyed,” says economist Mahfooz Ali Khan, putting the province’s financial challenges in perspective.

“There is nothing left here,” says Mehboob Jamali, who is preparing to leave for Quetta, the provincial capital. He is one of the lucky ones, at least he and his family have survived the worst. Many others were not so lucky.

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P.S.

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