Monsoon 'fury' batters India, leaving at least 125 dead

Rescue crews in India used boats and helicopters on Saturday to reach areas hammered by days of monsoon rain — coming at nearly an inch an hour at one weather station — that submerged homes and triggered landslides in the latest battle against extreme weather around the world. At least 125 people were killed, Indian officials said.

Emergency teams confronted thick sludge and debris in attempts to evacuate people across hard-hit Maharashtra state, which includes Mumbai. Thousands of trucks were stuck on the partly submerged highway between Mumbai and the technology hub of Bangalore. Major rivers were still in danger of rising further, the Reuters news agency reported.

The scenes in India echoed disasters around the world caused by deadly floods in recent weeks in China's central Henan province and in Germany and Belgium.

Summer of floods: The climate connection behind deadly downpours around the world

Climate scientists say that these ravaging global floods should serve as a wake-up call for leaders to take action on climate change. While monsoon rains are a regular occurrence in India, a warmer atmosphere retains more moisture, which causes heavy rainfall during storms, some experts note.

"The rain fury that lashed Mahabaleshwar ... is a strong warning against any more tampering with the ecologically fragile Western Ghats," Indian economist Ravinder Sharma wrote on Twitter on Friday, referring to a chain of mountains running parallel to India's western coast.

The Maharashtra city of Kolhapur — which sits at the banks of one of the region's most important waterways, the Panchganga River — was almost totally submerged, Times of India drone footage shows.

A landslide Thursday flattened most homes in the village of Taliye — 110 miles southeast of Mumbai — where the death toll reached at least 49, according to the Times of India. Dozens of people remained missing.

"The possibility of rescuing them alive is thin as they've been trapped in mud for more than 36 hours," Reuters quoted a government official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak with media, as saying.

"No advance disaster alert was given to the villagers," said Milind Gangawane, a Taliye resident interviewed by the Times of India. "Our tribal hamlet has 45 houses with a population of over 120. Boulders from the hill fell from a height of 100 feet in the landslide."

Around 90,000 people have been affected by the floods, the Maharashtra government said in a statement, Reuters reported. The hill station of Mahabaleshwar, south of Mumbai, recorded its highest ever rainfall: 60 centimeters, or more than 23 inches, in 24 hours.

The chief minister of Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray, on Friday wrote on Twitter to the people of Taliye: "You have faced a major tragedy. Hence, right now, you just need to take care of yourself. Leave the rest to the Government. We will ensure that everyone is rehabilitated and compensated for their losses."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in a tweet Friday that he was "anguished by the loss of lives due to a landslide" in Maharashtra. "The situation in Maharashtra due to heavy rains is being closely monitored and assistance is being provided to the affected."

Other parts of the world have also recently experienced extreme weather events — heat waves, wildfires and drought.

India's Meteorological Department warned of extremely heavy rainfall through the weekend in the Maharashtra region. Citizens staying close to rivers were advised to take precautions — but "alternate arrangements must be made" for sites with coronavirus patients, wrote Thackeray.

In some areas, the rain intensity decreased on Saturday, causing a slight fall in river levels, the Times of India reported.

washingtonpost

US ships moderna vaccine to Pakistan amid delta variant surge

WHITE HOUSE - As Pakistan deals with a surge in COVID-19 cases due to the delta variant, the Biden administration is sending 3 million doses of the Moderna coronavirus vaccine Friday, set to arrive in the country Sunday.

The doses, sent through COVAX, the United Nations vaccine-sharing mechanism, are in addition to the 2.5 million doses of Moderna already donated to Pakistan, a White House official told VOA.

Pakistan's national vaccination campaign has largely relied on Chinese vaccines, but the U.S. donations are helping officials overcome critical shortages of Western-developed anti-coronavirus shots.

Pakistani expatriate workers are required to receive European or U.S. vaccines so they can resume working abroad, where governments have not yet approved Chinese vaccines.

White House officials said the administration is "proud to be able to deliver these safe and effective vaccines" to Pakistanis.

"We are sharing these doses not to secure favors or extract concessions. Our vaccines do not come with strings attached. We are doing this with the singular objective of saving lives," the officials stressed.

Pakistan hailed the White House announcement, saying it "deeply appreciates" the shipment of 3 million doses of Moderna.

"These vaccines will give boost to ongoing vaccination drive in Pakistan," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri told VOA.

"This considerate gesture is part of the continued assistance that the U.S. has provided to Pakistan to support our COVID relief and prevention efforts. We look forward to our continued cooperation with the U.S. in our fight against the pandemic," Chaudhri said.

Washington already has delivered nearly $50 million in COVID assistance to Islamabad to help the country combat the disease.

The coronavirus situation in Pakistan, a country of about 220 million, remains largely under control.

Pakistan government data show the country currently has more than a million cases, more than 53,600 of them active. The country has had almost 23,000 COVID-19-related deaths and is dealing with rampant infections from the delta variant.

Wednesday, Karachi University's National Institute of Virology said the delta variant – first discovered in neighboring India — now accounts for 100% of cases in the country's largest city, Karachi.

According to Pakistan's Health Ministry, 24.5 million doses of the vaccine have been administered. The government plans to inoculate 70% of about 100 million Pakistanis deemed eligible for COVID-19 vaccine.

The White House official said that the administration has so far distributed close to 80 million doses to countries in need.

Aside from Pakistan, countries that have received vaccine donations from the Biden administration include South Korea, Mexico, Canada, Taiwan, Brazil, Honduras, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador, Malaysia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, Indonesia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bhutan, Moldova, Nepal, Costa Rica, Haiti, Fiji, Laos, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

In addition to a $2 billion donation to COVAX, the administration has pledged to purchase 500 million Pfizer vaccines and distribute them through the year to the African Union and 92 low- and lower middle-income countries that are members of COVAX.

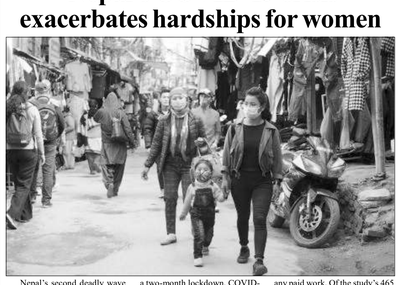
Still, COVAX is struggling to get enough doses to reach its vaccination goals. According to July 15 calculations by Doctors Without Borders -- also known as MSF, the abbreviation of its French name, Medecins Sans Frontieres – Pfizer has allocated only 11% of its vaccine deliveries to date to low- and middle-income countries directly or through COVAX, and Moderna has allocated only 0.3%. The organization is urging the Biden administration to pressure Pfizer and Moderna to share mRNA vaccine technology with producers in low- and middle-income countries so more vaccines can be made in more places across the world.

"The longer people everywhere remain completely unvaccinated, the more chances there will be for new variants to take hold and set back the global response," Dr. Carrie Teicher, MSF-USA director of programs, said in a statement. VOA

Improving health care services in rural Tajikistan

Mastona Talbakova, Head Nurse at Rakhshonzamin Rural Health Center in Dangara, Tajikistan, talks about the importance of high-quality health care services and facilities, especially for mothers and children in rural areas. The World Bank-supported Health Services Improvement Project has been helping rural communities in Tajikistan since 2014. To date, 37 new rural health centers have been built and equipped across the country, 350 primary healthcare facilities have been provided with basic PHC equipment, and over 10,500 healthcare staff have received training, including on effective care of mothers and children. worldbank

Nepal's COVID-19 crisis exacerbates hardships for women



Nepal's second deadly wave of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown have severely affected many citizens throughout the small South Asian country. Historically marginalized groups including single women – or women who are widowed, divorced, or in a female-headed household – face especially difficult circumstances as the pandemic exacerbates existing social and economic hardships and creates unanticipated challenges.

As of May, Nepal had one of the highest COVID rates in the world, alongside a major vaccine shortage. As of July 22, Nepal had reported a total of 9,661 COVID-related deaths and 674,726 confirmed COVID-19 cases since the pandemic began, surpassing the death toll from the country's devastating 2015 earthquakes.

Although cases are slowing down in Kathmandu Valley after a two-month lockdown, COVID-19 has been surging in rural parts of Nepal where health facilities are not equipped to handle such emergencies. With less than 5 percent of the population fully vaccinated, there is the looming possibility of a third wave.

The pandemic has been economically difficult for daily wage laborers and domestic workers, which make up a large percentage of Nepal's labor force. This has disproportionately impacted women, who make up two-thirds of domestic workers in Nepal. More than 90 percent of women who work in Nepal are part of the informal economy with no social protections against the loss of jobs or income.

A study conducted by the government of Nepal assessing the gendered impacts of the pandemic found a 337 percent rise in the number of women not involved in any paid work. Of the study's 465 respondents across 12 districts, 83 percent reported losing their jobs and income during the pandemic. The study also found that women's unpaid care workload increased during the COVID-19 lockdowns due to school closures and restrictions on mobility outside the home.

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The situation for many single women during the pandemic has been precarious as the sole income-earner and caretaker for their family. There is currently a lack of accurate data about single women during COVID-19 because it has been difficult to collect data during the pandemic and lockdowns, and existing sex-disaggregated data does not specify marital status.

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Kazakhstan Resumes Air Travel With Sixteen Countries

Regular international flights are operated between 16 countries on 44 routes with a frequency of 184 flights per week.

The most frequent flights are to Turkey with 52 flights per week, followed by the United Arab Emirates (31 flights per week) and Uzbekistan (32 flights per week).

Flights have also resumed to Russia (10 flights per week), Georgia (12 flights per week), Kyrgyzstan (9 flights per week), Belarus (8 flights per week), Ukraine (5 flights per week), Germany (9 flights per week), Tajikistan (2 flights per week), South Korea (2 flights per week), Egypt (2 charter flights per week), Netherlands (1 flight per week), Montenegro (7 flights per week), Poland (1 flight per week) and Armenia (1 flight per week).

All passengers departing from Nur-Sultan's and Almaty's international airport must have the Ashyq mobile app to enter the airport.

The app, which is integrated with the data from the Kazakh Ministry of Healthcare, shows a person's status ranging from green (no movement restrictions, recent negative COVID-19 test) and blue (no movement restrictions) to yellow (contact with an infected person) and red (positive COVID-19). A person needs to fill in her or his individual identification number. Citizens who passed a full course of vaccination will be identified with a green status.

The mobile app has been developed to allow businesses to continue their work amid the pandemic restrictions and minimize the spread of the virus. Since its nationwide launch in May, the system has so far revealed around 8,200 citizens with red status and 7,200 with yellow status trying to enter the facilities.

Though the app has raised concerns about the privacy of personal information, the app is used by more than four million citizens, according to the Atamaken National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. astanatimes