

Pakistan's Sindh on High Alert for Floods

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Heavy rains were expected to lash areas already struck by the worst floods in 80 years.

Considerable damage was expected in mainly rural areas in Sindh after floodwaters roared down from the northwest and through the central agricultural heartland of Punjab, along a path at least 1,000 km (600 miles) long.

"At least four districts are on high alert as the flood wave prepares to enter Sindh," the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said.

UN officials said more than half a million people had been evacuated in Sindh.

Flooding was also taking a toll over the border in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, where rain was hampering rescue and relief efforts. Flash floods have already killed at least 113 people in the Himalayan region of Ladakh.

In Pakistan, The floods have stoked popular anger at absent Asif Ali Zardari, who went ahead with visits to Paris and London at the height of the disaster, which swallowed up entire villages.

Zardari rejected harsh criticism, telling the BBC's Newsnight program that Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani was dealing with the crisis and keeping him posted on developments.

On Saturday, the president was to address Britain's Pakistani community after talks with Prime Minister David Cameron in which the two leaders agreed to do more to fight Islamist militancy.

Many Pakistanis were already critical of Zardari's leadership of a country where militants still pose a security threat despite offensives, poverty is widespread and corruption is rampant.

Although many of Zardari's powers have been handed over to Gilani, he still wields influence, and his departure to Europe as parts of the country were under water made Pakistanis lose more faith in an already unpopular government.

The military, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half its history, has spearheaded relief efforts.

Zardari has in the past antagonized the military.

But even though he hurt Pakistan's image abroad and at home by leaving during the crisis, analysts do not expect the army to make a grab for power as the military's top priority is fighting a stubborn Taliban insurgency.

Key ally Washington would not want to see an unstable Pakistan as it leans on the country to help its campaign against Taliban militants in Afghanistan.

Gilani, addressing the nation on Friday for the first time since the floods struck, described the loss of human life and infrastructure as "colossal" and appealed for international aid.

Food supplies are becoming a serious issue. In many areas, drinking water wells are also full of mud.

Source: bdnews24.com