**[April enigma](https://www.dawn.com/news/1833960/april-enigma)**

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THE country is in the grip of an enigmatic weather cycle. Snowfall drifted its way from December-January to February-April. A startlingly wet April baffled weather oracles. Upcountry mountains were enveloped in snowfall, and westerly systems brought frequent and heavy rain spells. Torrential rains in southern Balochistan during February-April avoided the previous trajectory. Gwadar, located on the shore, experienced nightmarish urban flooding. Standing and harvested wheat in the fields of Potohar was battered by untimely downpours.

Regional countries were also pummelled by cloudbursts. The UAE, dwarfing a 75-year record, received almost two years’ rainfall in a single day, leaving Dubai’s drainage system crippled and the city under waist-deep water. Just before, Oman had been lashed by an abnormal downpour, leading to fatalities.

Moving eastward, in April, southern China experienced over double the normal precipitation for the month, the second-highest level since 1961. Guangdong’s provincial emergency department had to relocate over 100,000 residents amid a massive surge in the Beijiang river. The El Niño-stricken East and South Asian countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh and India, endured blistering heatwaves. Half the districts in the Philippines experiencing a drought and heatwave, compelled the government to suspend in-person classes.

In Bangkok, muggy weather pushed the heat index to 52 degrees Celsius amid real temperatures of over 40°C. Bangladesh also had to close schools as temperatures soared to 42°C in some areas. In India, an intense heatwave has affected the voter turnout in the ongoing elections. India’s election commission has constituted a task force to monitor the impact of heatwaves before each round of voting. Inclement weather attacked East Africa where at least 155 people lost their life in Tanzania and more than 100 in Kenya in the flooding generated by the rainfall in April.

A dangerous situation is anticipated during the next monsoon.

Bewildering bouts of rain and snowfall in April could be the precursor of a wet monsoon. In April, the weather took a sharp turn in Pakistan. In early April, the Indus River System Authority (Irsa) predicted a 30 per cent water shortage in the early Kharif season. (This was subsequently reversed after improved Kabul river flows.) Sluggish flows in the Indus river forced Hyderabad’s water and sanitation authority to stop the consumption of drinking water from the Kotri Barrage canals due to contaminated flows from Manchhar lake. Additional water had to be released to lessen the intense pollution at Kotri Barrage.

However, soon Pakistan was struck by a series of westerly weather systems that brought substantial rain, hailstorm and snowfall. A flood of over 110,000 cusecs in the Kabul river augmented flows in the Indus zone. Within a fortnight, an abrupt climate twist nullified Irsa’s calculations regarding the early Kharif flows. By the end of April, the country received rainfall which was more than 150pc of the usual for the month. Balochistan received an astoun­ding 500pc excessive rainfall. In KP and Sindh, the amount of rainfall was almost double that usually observed in the month.

This portentous behaviour of climate can lead to a dangerous situation during the next monsoon. The climate outlook for the 2024 southwest monsoon season was finalised during the 28th session of the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum held on April 29 in Pune, India. The outlook anticipates above-normal rainfall during 2024 in most parts of South Asia except some areas in the northern, eastern and north-eastern parts.

This forbidding monsoon scenario should be taken se­­riously by the aut­horities. Sindh and Balochistan, the two worst-affected provinces in the 2022 floods, have not yet recovered from that apocaly­ptic disaster. Although breaches in dykes and cuts in roads have been plugged, the root causes of the disaster remain unaddressed. The Sindh High Court’s Sukkur bench, in its verdict on a petition filed by several flood affectees, ordered the revival of natural waterways and storm drains.

The court order reads “there is also utmost necessity to improve the drainage of storm water from both sides of Indus river by reviving the natural water ways including constructing new surface / storm drains in the left over area. Simultaneously, there is need to accelerate the work of RBOD (Right Bank Outfall Drain Project)”.

Sadly, neither have the encroached waterways been unclogged nor the two major drains, namely, the Left Bank Outfall Drain and RBOD, improved to transport flows of a similar scale. Inadequacy of flood prevention measures is a cause of consternation. Trepidation is mounting as the monsoon approaches. The fact is that, just as in 2022, this year, too, we are not prepared to manage a freshet.

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