**[Monsoon menace](https://www.dawn.com/news/1837681/monsoon-menace)**

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WITH the approach of the monsoons, timely precaution is needed. The South Asian Climate Outlook Forum has anticipated above-normal rains in the region during the season. Rainfall and temperature outlook maps from the SACOF-28 report forecast heavy rains in all the provinces and excessive temperatures in Pakistan’s snow-capped mountainous belt. This suggests looming flood conditions.

Sindh is the most vulnerable province as it is the final destination of glacial melt in the north and the hill torrents of southern Punjab and eastern Balochistan. A closer look at the temperature and rainfall maps of the report indicates the following perilous scenarios for Sindh:

(1) Scorching temperatures in the north triggering snowmelt and consequent flooding of the Indus river.

(2) Excessive rainfall in southern Punjab unleashing hill torrents from Koh-i-Suleman, which will eventually join the Indus river to swell its flows.

Timely steps can avert a disaster.

(3) Abnormal rains in eastern Balochistan, which can produce gushing spate flows entering Sindh from the Kirthar Hills. This flow can exert stress on the Flood Protection (FP) Bund and embankments of the Right Bank Outfall Drain (RBOD), turning Lake Manchhar into a threat.

(4) Heavy downpours in Sindh can choke malfunctioning drainage networks on both sides of the Indus and create ponds in case there are breaches and spill-overs. Sindh witnessed a combination of the first two scenarios in 2010, while an amalgam of the latter two was endured in 2022, causing calamity.

The next monsoon season is set to begin in a few weeks. The authorities remain in a state of slumber until disaster knocks. Precautions are delayed. They should realise that urgent actions can mitigate the repercussions.

A monsoon monitoring and coordination cell should be established at the Provincial Disaster Management Authority and equipped with technical, financial, logistical and human resources to enable swift action in case of an adverse situation. In 2022, a major disaster was unleashed due to record-breaking rains in eastern Balochistan in July and August. An enormous quantum of water entered Sindh along the foothills of the Kirthar range. The FP Bund couldn’t withstand the water sheet and was breached at five locations. The banks of the RBOD and Suprio bund also collapsed, inundating vast areas in Kambar Shahdadkot and Dadu districts. The Sindh irrigation department should devise a communication mechanism that can be put to use by the department and its counterpart in Balochistan to obtain timely updates on the rainfall and the consequent flows likely to veer towards Sindh. The FP Bund and the banks of the RBOD need critical surveillance to avert breaching.

After entering Sindh, the floodwaters travel the length of the 277-kilometre-long FP Bund before reaching Manchhar. The irrigation department has to ensure the timely emptying of the lake to absorb these flows. In 2022, delayed emptying resulted in breaches and relief cuts to save Sehwan town. Dozens of villages between Sehwan and Dadu towns were inundated. Dadu, Johi and Mehar just about managed to avert a disaster, thanks to the concerted efforts of the local community and authorities.

Clogged natural waterways are a chronic cause of flooding. In a bid to appease a few political favourites, the government exposes millions of poor people to flooding risks. A study commissioned by the Sindh Irrigation and Drainage Authority in 2012 enlisted all blocked waterways and suggested a plan for the rehabilitation of the drainage network on the left bank side. In January 2021, the Sindh High Court ordered the removal of encroachments from irrigation department lands by June 30.

More recently, the court’s Sukkur bench issued a verdict in February 2023, asking the government to improve the drainage of storm water from both sides of the Indus by reviving the natural waterways via the construction of new surface/storm drains in the remaining area. The verdict identified 11 obstructions in waterways from Balochistan to Manchhar on the right bank side, and advised the authorities to rectify matters. These efforts yielded no result.

Obstructions created by the Left Bank Outfall Drain against the natural flow of the Puran river caused havoc in Jhudo in Mirpurkhas and put parts of Badin at risk in 2022. LBOD underpasses and regulatory infrastructure at zero point need to be completed before the monsoons. Similarly, the Aral Wah canal, which has been adequately remodelled, was meant to drain the surplus flows of Manchhar to the Indus, but the old regulator on the Indus Highway has not yet been removed. It can potentially cause a bottleneck and make Sehwan and Dadu vulnerable as in 2022. Devastation due to delayed action can cost far more than investment in resilience.

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*Published in Dawn, June 4th, 2024*