

South Asia's murderous monsoons

We see climate change push the limits of damage each year as monsoon season hits the region. **Luavut Zahid** reports...

Floods and landslides are becoming a customary feature of the monsoon season across the South Asian region. At the time of writing, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have experienced separate and interconnected climate events that have left them wetter and weaker.

Much of South Asia is known for its agriculture, making the monsoon season crucial for its survival. However, it is increasingly turning into a time of uncertainty as rains turn into floods, and floods turn into devastation.

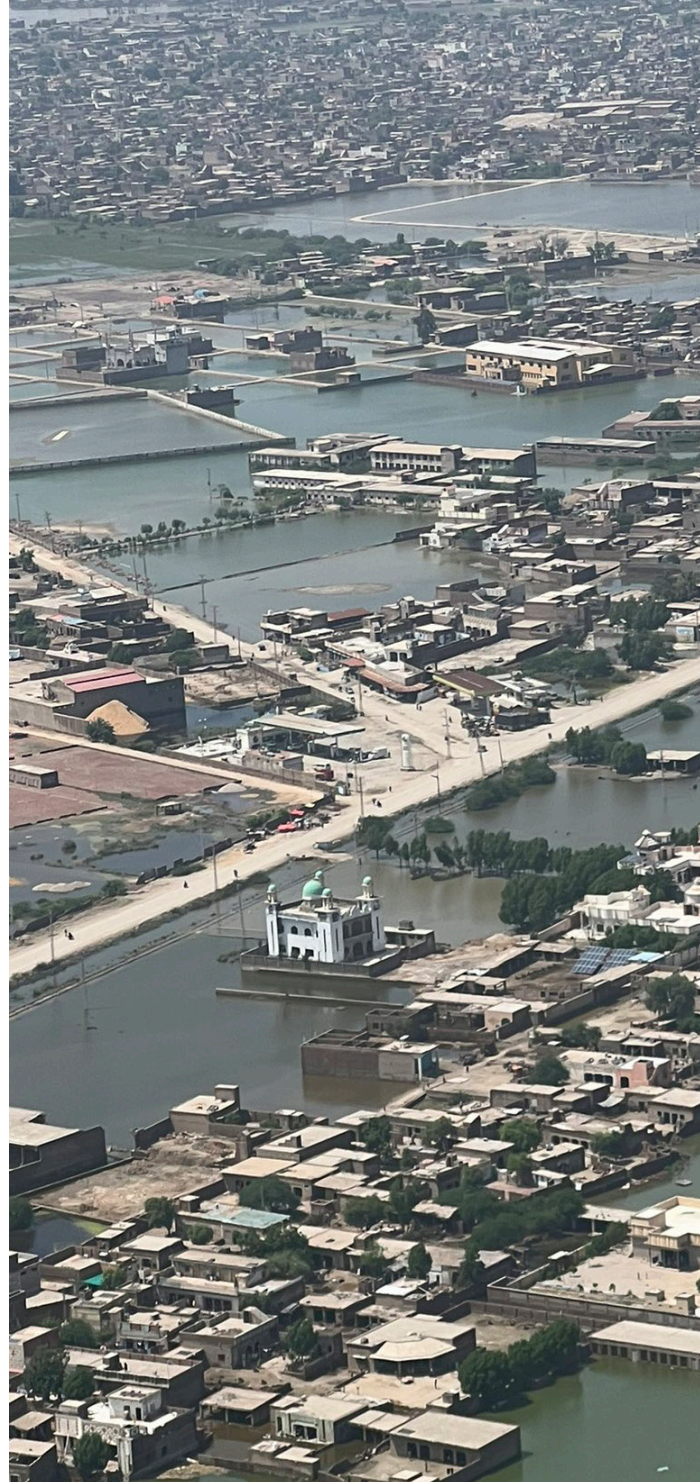
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment Report notes: "Increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, are projected to have widespread impacts across Asia. These impacts are likely to be felt most acutely in monsoon-dependent regions, where agricultural productivity and food security are already under pressure."

Dutiful damage

"One of the effects of climate is that monsoon's variability is increased considerably, not only temporally but also spatially. This means that some regions of South Asia is likely to receive higher, while others receive low precipitation," according to Dr Fahad Saeed, regional lead for South Asia and the Middle East at Climate Analytics. So where some places will get drenched, others will thirst for water.

India saw dozens of people die because of heavy rains. The effects of the monsoon surge have destroyed power lines and other infrastructure. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu reported that over 70,000 tourists had to be evacuated from the state of Himachal Pradesh because of the unrelenting torrents, which killed 88 and damaged 9,600 homes. In Shimla, landslides resulted from the rain, taking out homes, temples, and other buildings in their wake. Even the capital of Delhi experienced the highest precipitation it has ever seen in four decades, registering 153 millimetres in a single day.

In Bangladesh, the Chattogram Division flash floods and monsoon rains teamed up to wreak havoc on several districts. Reportedly, the events collectively affected 2.4 million people between August 5 and 10, of whom 346,196 are either at risk or live in areas with close enough proximity that they will remain at risk. The water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector has taken a blow because of the issue.



In Nepal, two days of severe rainfall decimated houses, hotels, schools, temples, and government buildings. The rain came with landslides that choked transportation routes and created a natural reservoir that eventually grew into a flood itself. The death toll stands at 38 as the monsoon continues.

Rain-induced flooding in Afghanistan resulted in 31 fatalities and dozens of missing persons. For a country that is already struggling, it cannot afford the damage the monsoon season is bringing with it. Afghanistan has also been struggling with water shortages, with the United Nations humanitarian affairs agency noting that it is now in its third year of drought. The current monsoon does not bring relief; instead, it has wiped out hundreds of square miles of agricultural land.

The same flash floods also hit neighbouring Pakistan. As compared to last year, Pakistan hasn't yet had a



An aerial view of multiple cities of Sindh, Pakistan inundated with flood water in 2022

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comparable amount of damage to report. However, since June, the country has seen floods across multiple cities, according to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). "Heavy monsoon rains persisted from June 25 to August 5, which resulted in 196 individuals losing their lives and 283 people sustaining injuries. Further, 3,703 houses have been damaged, mainly in Balochistan (2320), and the loss of 1,114 livestock has been faced across Pakistan as of August 5. The majority of the villages in Lower Chitral and Upper Chitral districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Kharan district in Balochistan suffered damages this time, which were not affected by the last year's floods. However, in districts Dadu, Qambar (Sindh), Rajanpur (Punjab), Naseerabad, and Jaffarabad (Balochistan), most of the affected villages are the same, which were affected last

year as well," notes a report from the International Rescue Committee.

Explaining why the weather has taken a turn for extremes, Alvaro Silva, an expert with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said: "An increasing number of studies demonstrate connections between rapid warming and the Arctic and mid-latitude weather patterns, including in atmospheric dynamics such as the jet stream. The jet stream becomes weaker and wavier when warm air is transported to the north and cold air to the south. In these conditions, near-stationary weather patterns establish and lead to prolonged heatwaves and drought in some regions and heavy precipitation in others."

More chaotic rainfall events are expected, as is severe flooding, according to Stefan Uhlenbrook, Director of Hydrology, Water, and Cryosphere at WMO.

"Developed countries like Japan are extremely alert, and they're also very well prepared when it comes to flood management measures. But many low-income countries have no warnings in place, hardly any flood defence structures, and no integrated flood management," he said.

Saeed explained that it is extremely difficult to talk about adaptation measures while ignoring mitigation: "There are limits to adaptation. Such limits are going to be breached unless we limit the temperature."

The state of low-income countries has been deemed a wake-up call when it comes to climate change, but the situation requires more than just statements. For instance, countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan are already on the brink of collapse because of their economic situations. They simply do not have the means to deal with the effects of climate change or the loss of their agricultural produce.

In 2009, the Paris Agreement set the financial commitment to tackle climate change at US\$100 billion per year by 2020. Not only was the commitment not fulfilled, but numbers from the Climate Policy Initiative also suggest that it isn't enough. Richard Kozul-Wright, Director of the Globalisation and Development Strategies Division, UNCTAD, notes that developing countries: "Require at least six trillion dollars by 2020 to meet less than half of their existing Nationally Determined Contributions."

"To put that challenge in perspective, estimates by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Oxfam suggest that the actual flow of climate finance from developed to developing countries in 2020 was between \$21 billion and \$83.3 billion.

"Furthermore, climate finance continues to be predominantly delivered as loans, a large share of which has been non-concessional. This has added to debt pressures across regions and income groups. Where required, future loans will need to be contracted at significantly lower rates than is currently the case and for a much longer duration."

On the other hand, it seems that developing countries, especially those in South Asia, are not in a position to take climate change head-on, and the developed world is not particularly interested in diverting resources either.

Meanwhile, these countries will continue to flood. And in the long run, whether we can see it or not, we will all go down. **CRJ**

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