

## FLATTENED BY ERRATIC RAIN, PAKISTANI FARMERS DITCH CROP FARMING

**ISLAMABAD:** In late April, after 28 hours of heavy rain, Noor Hussain and his two brothers surveyed his three-hectare wheat plot to see what they could save. An earlier hailstorm had already devastated much of the crop. Now, standing on the fringes of the sodden farm, Hussain despaired.

"Look at spikes of the wheat," he said, pointing out where the heavy weather had broken them off. "Only the small plants in the middle of the plot have survived." Hussain, 39, estimated 70 percent of the crop was ruined, with harvest only six weeks away.

Farmers all over Pakistan are suffering the same heartbreak, as a season of unusually heavy rain and cold weather continues to destroy crops across the country.

Heavily in debt and tired of struggling against the worsening effects of climate change, some farmers have decided to abandon crop farming altogether, instead turning to raising cattle and poultry as more reliable sources of income.

"How can I keep growing wheat when I have suffered so much economic damage?" asked Hussain, who said erratic rains had been hurting his harvests since 2011.

"I will grow wheat on one hectare to meet my family's food needs and on the rest I will establish a cattle pen and poultry farm," he said.

### SWAPPING CROPS FOR CATTLE

Speaking to the Thomson Reuters Foundation by telephone, farmers from districts southeast of Islamabad said that delayed or excessive rains, coupled with heavy hailstorms, have nearly flattened their wheat and mustard crops.

"I have no way to pay off my loan, other than resorting to labour at a brick kiln on the outskirts of Islamabad," said 40-year-old Mujtaba Khan, who wept as he spoke. "I don't think I will be able to grow crops for the next three years, because it will take too long for me to clear my debt."

Of the dozens of farmers in Punjab province

who spoke with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, most have already reduced their crop farming activities and started raising animals.

A mushrooming of cattle pens around towns and cities in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces reflects a growing resignation among farmers that they can no longer make a living from agriculture, experts said.

As unseasonable rain continues, many farmers are still waiting to harvest their crops, three weeks behind schedule. According to farming experts, such delays, as well as hurting harvests, can increase the chances of attack by yellow rust, a fungal disease that hampers photosynthesis and stunts the growth of grain.

Ibrahim Mughal, chairperson of the Pakistan Agri Forum, estimates that unwanted rains in northern Punjab and Kyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces have resulted in losses of up to 50 percent in wheat, mustard, and maize production. The region accounts for over 65 percent of the country's total wheat production, according

to Mughal. "If the rains come a month ahead of harvest time - usually April to mid-May - it is always disastrous," he said in a telephone interview from Lahore.

The Federal Committee on Agriculture had fixed the national wheat production target at 26.3 million tons for the 2014-2015 rabi season, which produces a spring harvest. But officials are pessimistic about achieving those figures.

Instead, "we estimate damages of over three million tons to the crop from this year's odd rainy season," said Sikandar Hayat Bosan, federal minister for National Food Security and Research.

For some of Pakistan's farmers, this year's damage is the last straw. In Gujjar Khan, about 70 kilometres (43 miles) from Islamabad, wheat and mustard farmer Fareed Khan lost \$325,000 worth of crops to heavy rains. Now he's converting his farmland into a cattle pen. "How can a farmer like me afford to continue with the cultivation of wheat, when erratic weather has become the foe of farmers?" he asked. — Reuters

## QUAKE-HIT NEPAL SUSPENDS ADOPTIONS

**KATHMANDU:** Nepal's government said yesterday it had imposed a three-month ban on adoptions to try to stop vulnerable children being trafficked after a devastating earthquake.

The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare said it imposed the ban as part of a package of measures after rescuing more than 50 children.

"We fear that traffickers might try to cash in on the situation people are in right now, and have taken these decisions to protect vulnerable children," said ministry spokesman Ram Prasad Bhattarai.

Impoverished Nepal's porous border with India made it a prime target for traffickers even before last month's quake, which campaigners say has worsened the problem.

Police and security agencies have increased vigilance against trafficking in quake-hit areas and on the border.

The government has also made it mandatory for children travelling without their parents to carry a permission letter from local authorities.

"We are on high alert 24 hours and are strictly checking papers at border areas before allowing any crossings," said police spokesman Kamal Singh Bam.

A cycle of unemployment and poverty and the impact of a 10-year Maoist insurgency has made Nepali women and children easy targets for traffickers. Several countries, including the US and Canada, suspended adoptions from Nepal in 2010 after discovering some private orphanages were faking documents to make it appear that children whose parents were still living had been orphaned.

Ramesh Bhandari of CWISH, a Nepali child rights organisation, said traffickers were "luring children with promise of education and better life".

"There is a threat that these children will be used for child labour, be sexually exploited or even be sold to sex trade," he added. More than 8,600 people died in two major quakes that hit Nepal on April 25 and May 12, destroying nearly half a million houses and leaving thousands desperate for food, shelter and water.

Thousands more have been left homeless and are camping out in the open, with just weeks to go until the monsoon rains. — AFP



**DUDH KOSI BASIN:** This handout photograph released by The European Geosciences Union yesterday, shows instruments used to study the Mera Glacier region of the Dudh Kosi Basin in Nepal on November 23, 2013. Glaciers in the Everest region could shrink at least 70 percent or even disappear entirely by the end of the century as a result of climate change, scientists warned yesterday. Researchers in Nepal, the Netherlands and France studied weather patterns on the roof of the world and then created a model of conditions on Everest to determine the future impact of rising temperatures on its glaciers. — AFP

## SCIENTISTS WARN EVEREST GLACIERS DISAPPEARING

**KATHMANDU:** Glaciers in the Everest region could shrink at least 70 percent or even disappear entirely by the end of the century as a result of climate change, scientists warned yesterday.

Researchers in Nepal, the Netherlands and France studied weather patterns on the roof of the world and then created a model of conditions on Everest to determine the future impact of rising temperatures on its glaciers.

"The worst-case scenario shows a 99 percent loss in glacial mass... but even if we start to slow down emissions somewhat, we may still see a 70 percent reduction," said Joseph Shea, who led the study.

Shea was part of a team that published a major study last year using satellite imagery to show how Nepal's glaciers had already shrunk by nearly a quarter between 1977 and 2010.

But the latest study, published Wednesday in international scientific journal *The Cryosphere*, paints a grim picture of the impact of climate change on the world's highest peak by 2100.

"Once we had tested our model and got the weather patterns right, we increased temperatures according to different emission scenarios for a look at future scenarios," Shea said.

Shea, a glacier hydrologist at the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, said melting glaciers could form deep lakes which could burst and flood mountain communities living downstream. The centre is considered by experts to be the leading authority on glaciers in the Himalayas.

The impoverished Himalayan nation was devastated this month by two major earthquakes. The first tremor

also triggered an avalanche which killed 18 people on the 8,848-metre (29,035-foot) high peak.

Shea said shrinking glaciers could also affect water supplies in the Everest region, with lower volumes of snowmelt flowing into the Dudh Kosi river, which provides water for Nepalis downstream. "The decline during the pre-monsoon period will probably have an impact on any future hydropower projects because there won't be enough rainwater to meet power needs."

Glacial loss in Nepal raises concerns over future access to water resources, particularly in regions where groundwater is limited and monsoon rains are erratic.

The IPCC, a group of scientists convened by the United Nations to warn governments around the world about the effects of climate change, was forced to apologise in 2009 for claiming that the Himalayan glaciers would melt by 2035. — AFP

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