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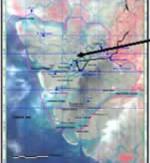




* Bridges have been washed away and the WWF says no one knows what has happened to the villagers

By Amar Guriro

KARACHI: Nearly 20 villages of Keti Bunder that straddle the three creeks of the River Indus were not only inundated by last week's high tide but many of them have also been cut off from the world after their bridges were washed away.



"Nobody can reach them as the high tide is not allowing anyone to go inside and we don't know what happened to the people living in these villages," said Zahid Jalbani of the WWF-Indus for All Program to journalists on a visit Tuesday. The disappeared villages he refers to are located inside the creeks.

Bridges connecting small Thatta towns to Karachi have been destroyed. One of them, on Khari Sim Nalla (drain) between Garho and Buhara town, collapsed last week and disconnected large areas from Karachi. The bridge is in the constituency of PPP MPA Sassui Palijo, who is now the Minister for Tourism. Several other bridges, including Kamal Hotel bridge, Ambra Mroi and others are ready to collapse. "I just see her [Sassui Palijo] on television wearing big sunglasses and talking about big things but we have not seen her here since the elections," said Yaqub Mallah.

Babu Dablo is one of the 19 villages with 17,600 residents that have suffered and many of their residents are quite elderly. "Sea water is not new for me as I was born inside the sea but now it seems as if the earth is moving," said Ayub, a 60-year-old sciatica-crippled resident of Babu Dablo. "I have to move, but my body doesn't let me." The 18-house settlement constructed a protective mud embankment but even that was breached.

In Hajamaro creek, the sea inundated four villages, Tipan, Khariyon, Siddique Dablo and Phirat, in Chhan creek Beerum and Yusif Dablo, in Khobar creek Goth Ramzan Lakhiyo, Misri Rajiro and Bhawi and in Tar Chhan creek, Cheer, Ali Shivani, Haji Maamon Dablo, Ali Khan Jat and Haji Sheedi Dablo. The problem is that the sea water has also started flowing up into the small channels which are meant to drain saline water from water-logged agricultural areas.

Keti Bunder located 200 kilometers from Karachi and has four major creeks - Chhan, Hajamro, Khobar and Kangri. When downstream Kotri flows of the River Indus thinned, vast scattered mangrove fields vanished

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and the sea started to flow back and flood 28 of its 42 Dehs, explained Nasir Panwher of the WWF. Sea intrusion has engulfed about 1.4 million acres of district Thatta alone over the last 10 years. The tail end of the Indus was divided into 17 small rivers spread from Badin to Karachi but as their flows went down the sea started flowing up them.

"A high tide is not new for our village but I have never seen the water rise to such a level in my life," said Rukiyat, Ayub's blind wife whose two sons Musti and Moosa drowned about last year.

As a relatively larger village, Keti Bunder was given the status of a Union Council (UC) and taluka headquarters. It and Kharo Chhan of Thatta are unique talukas which comprise a single UC. Thatta, a hub of historical buildings, the necropolis of Makli, was once famous worldwide for its red rice and betel leaves. Its fertile lands have since turned white from the salt deposits.

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"They must move us to a safer place but it must be at the edge of the sea because we can not live without the sea," said Ayub Dablo.

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