

Death Toll of Iran Floods Increase to 46



TEHRAN (FNA)- Official reports in Iran say that 46 people have been killed so far in the recent unprecedented floods across the country.

“46 people have been killed in the country so far (in the floods), 21 of them in the first few minutes of the flood incident in Shiraz,” Health Minister Saeed Namaki announced in the flooded Khuzestan province in Southern Iran on Monday afternoon.

He also said that the vacation leave of all presidents of medical universities across the country have been cancelled and they should be on alert for aiding the flood-hit people if the need arises.

On Monday, Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri ordered mobilization of all possibilities and equipment of several bodies, including the municipalities of large cities, to aid the people entangled in unprecedented floods in different parts of the country.

“I have ordered the interior minister to mobilize and use the possibilities of municipalities of large cities to help the flood-stricken provinces,” Jahangiri told reporters before leaving the flooded province of Lorestan in Western Iran for Khuzestan province in the Southwestern parts of the country which has been put on alert too due to the high volume of water flowing as a result of the recent showers.

He appreciated all Armed Forces and governmental bodies for their assistance to control the situation in flooded areas, and asked them to continue efforts to protect people’s lives and properties during the upcoming showers in the Western and Southern parts of the country.

All Iranian Armed Forces and governmental bodies have rushed to help the flood-hit people in different parts of the country.

On Sunday, Commander of Iran’s Army Major General Abdolrahim Moussavi

traveled to the Northern province of Golestan, emphasizing protection of people's life as a priority.

"Protecting people's life, supplying food and hygiene possibilities and accommodating people is a highly important issue," General Moussavi said.

He underlined the need for efforts to empty the flood-stricken areas of water as soon as possible and preparedness for future showers and more floods.

"We will make our utmost efforts, under the management of Golestan province's governor-general office, to resolve the existing problems for people," General Moussavi said.

Also, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari underlined on Saturday that the IRGC was prepared to mobilize all its possibilities to reconstruct the houses and villages destroyed in the recent devastating floods in Iran.

General Jafari made the remarks during his visit to a flood-stricken village in the Northern province of Mazandaran.

He called on the government to pay the loans considered for the flood-hit people as soon as possible so that the IRGC will be able to help them in reconstruction of their houses.

"The bodies like Basij (volunteer forces), the IRGC, Army and the jahadi groups which are responsible for relief operations should accompany people to resolve the problems and adopt effective measures to reconstruct and clean the towns," General Jafari said.

General Jafari had also on Saturday traveled again to Golestan province, one of the main centers of the recent floods in Northern Iran.

"We have mobilized all our possibilities to resolve the problems in Golestan province although a part of the IRGC's possibilities are engaged in other provinces, including Khuzestan, which have been flood-stricken too," General Jafari told reporters.

He expressed the hope that the problems would be settled as soon as possible with correct management and concentration on priorities.

Iranian authorities announced on Monday that the death toll from flash floods across the country had risen to 46.

The tragedy started in the four Northern provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan, Semnan and North Khorassan on March 20. Thirty provinces of Iran have been hit by severe weather conditions since then.

Over 56,000 people were affected in various cities and rural areas in Golestan and Mazandaran as a result of heavy rainfall that hit the two provinces on March 19 and 20.

While the nation was shocked by the casualties and magnitude of destructions in the Northern regions of the country, another round of floods hit the country in the Western and Southwestern provinces on March 25.

The most shocking images were relayed from Shiraz, a very popular tourist destination homing historical monuments from ancient times to the present age, where the Northern opening gate of the city witnessed a tragic pileup of cars swept away by a flash flood.

The Gate of Quran has been built on a dry river bed and ten minutes after the start of sudden torrential rains at around 11:00 am local time on March 25 more than 50 cars were washed away to the down of the slope into the city. Hitting trees and other streets signs and curbs the overrun cars piled up one another a kilometer down from the city gate.

Families, many from other cities and provinces visiting Shiraz for New Year holidays, trapped inside and stranded between the cars were the main victims.

Governor General of Fars Province Enyatollah Rahimi said that the sudden flash flood happened in less than 10 minutes with the flow of water from Allah-o-Akbar gorge converging into the main road and affecting the moving vehicles.

After the incident, police blocked traffic to the flood-hit parts of the city, to speed up rescue operations and avoid further casualties.

Army units stationed in the city were among the many entities which rushed into the help of the flood stricken tourists and residents. All-terrain rescue vehicles, crane trucks, and armored personnel carriers were deployed to help the vehicles stacked one against another.

The flooding also inflicted financial damage upon the city's markets, including the Vakil Bazaar, which has been registered as a national heritage.

Some homes and neighborhoods were inundated by water and domestic properties and appliances were damaged.

The Director General of the provincial office of Iran Meteorological Organization in Shiraz Masoud Dehmalayee said that in parts of the city precipitation rates overpassed 107 percent on March 25.

Officials said that the reservoirs across the country had been already emptied because of the flood warnings issued by the National Meteorology Organization.

The public relations department of the regional water organization of Fars Province also said that all dams in Fars were sitting pretty with 1.5 billion cubic meter unfilled capacity "which is perfectly capable of containing any flood water".

In the Southwestern province of Khuzestan flash floods cut off many roads including Andika road connecting Andika to Shehr-e-Kurd, the capital city of the neighboring province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari.

In Sarpol Zahab county of Western province of Kermanshah a shepherd lost his life while trying to save his herd.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in a statement last week, offered condolences to the bereaved and affected families, and ordered swift reaction by all relevant executive bodies and aid agencies.

He also tasked the interior minister and the governor general of Fars province to explore the reasons behind the March 25's deadly flood in the city of Shiraz and deal with all possible parties who have failed to fulfill their duties in this regard.

He had already last Sunday put all governors, governors general and officials in all Iranian provinces on full alert as widespread flooding continued in many parts of the country.

Iran's IRGC announced in a statement on March 24 that units of its Aerospace Force had been dispatched to help people stricken by flood in the Northern Iranian province of Golestan.

The statement added that the IRGC forces are using helicopters to provide flood-hit people with provisions, including food and drinking water, and transfer necessary equipment for relief workers.

Campaigns calling for collecting donations to help the flood-hit families have been launched by aid agencies, celebrities, and public figures.

Campaigns are aimed at raising money and gathering basic commodities required to start the reconstruction and rehousing operations. Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF) offices around the country are ready to receive the aid items and deliver them to the flooded areas.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society, a non-governmental organization (NGO), launched a similar campaign.

On March 23, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei called on officials and the nation to assist the flood-affected people.

The Leader's official website has since been updated with a new feature that allows direct contribution to relief efforts.

Iranian celebrity figures have also joined in on the effort by encouraging their huge online fanbase to help relieve the difficult situation.

It was reported on March 25 that donors have already contributed large sums of money to speed up the reconstruction process in Mazandaran.

Senior official Kamal Akbari said the Ministry of Interior had received numerous requests from NGOs offering voluntary aid services in flood-hit areas, adding they would begin their work from last week.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said after the floods that he had ordered additional and coordinated efforts to help the relief campaign.

He has authorized commanders in the IRGC, the Iranian army, police, and the defense ministry to use forces under their command to provide "full and organized" assistance in flood-hit areas in a coordinated manner.

General Baqeri has appointed his deputy, Major General Ataollah Salehi, as the

field commander at the head of a group of high-ranking military chiefs to coordinate relief efforts between the armed forces and civilian organizations on the ground.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, who has been touring the flood-hit regions, told reporters that relief efforts had been going forward at a strong pace thanks to coordination among all sides.

Authorities in Aqqala, one of the cities hardest hit by flooding, said they had to detonate a small part of the railway network in the area in order to speed up drainage and prevent greater damage to the tracks.

During the operation, explosives were placed underneath the tracks to help drain the flood waters.

According to local officials, no parts of the tracks were damaged in the explosion and the network would resume operations soon.

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