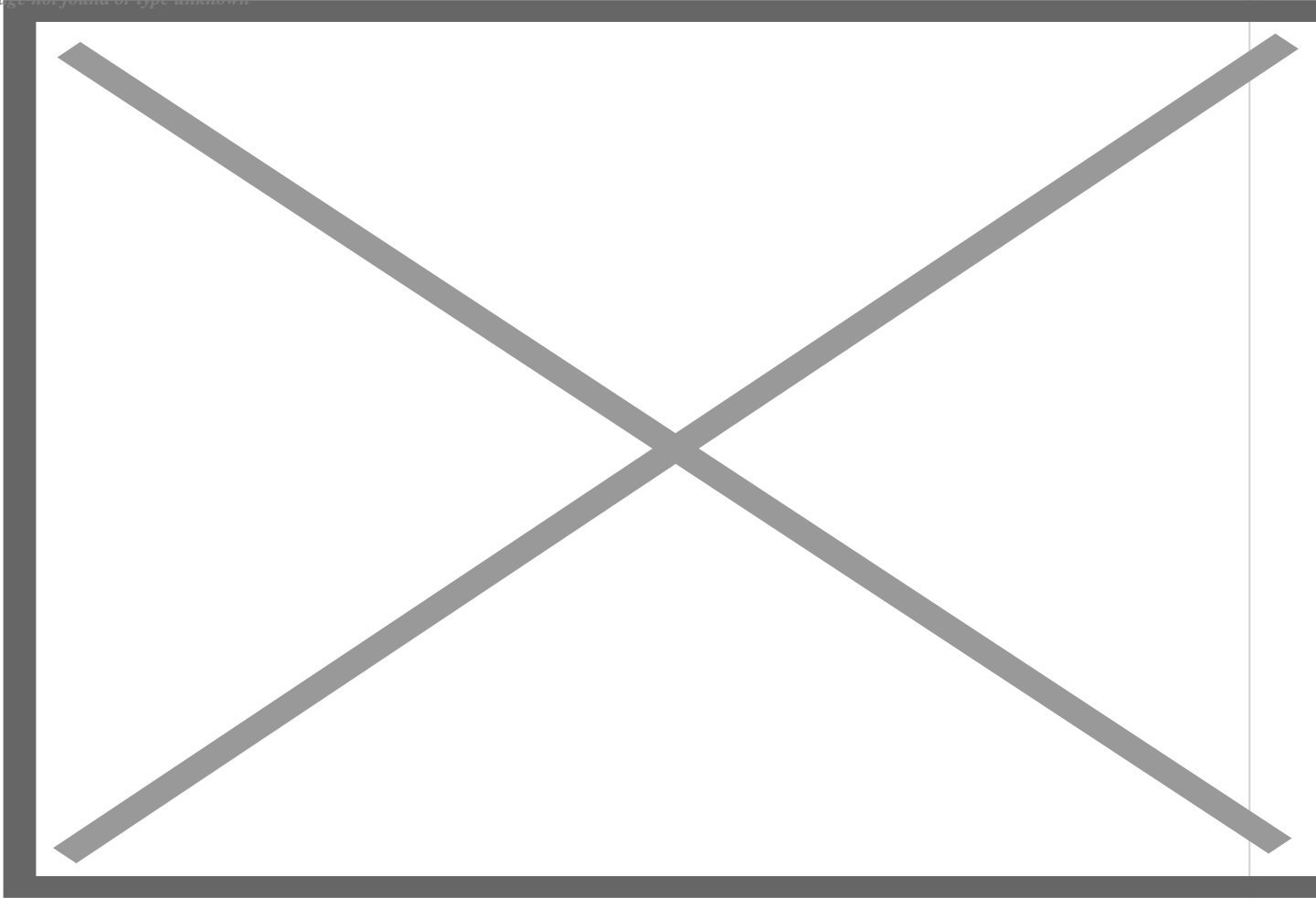


Floods force evacuation of almost 100,000 in Pakistan

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Islamabad, August 23 (RHC)-- In Pakistan, several hundred villages and thousands of acres of land in Punjab province were inundated when the Sutlej River burst its banks earlier this week.

Rescue boats have travelled from village to village over the past several days, collecting people who were forced to wait on the roofs of their houses as the water level rose around them. Others pushed motorcycles through shallower waters or held belongings above their heads until they found dry ground.

“The flood waters came a couple of days ago and all our houses were submerged. We walked all the way here on foot with great difficulty,” 29-year-old Kashif Mehmood, who fled with his wife and three children to a relief camp, told the AFP news agency on Tuesday.

“There is five or six feet (1.5 to 1.8 metres) of water over the roads,” Muhammad Amin, a local doctor volunteering at a relief camp, said. “The only route that could have been used is now underwater.”

Muhammad Aslam, Pakistan’s chief meteorologist covering floods, said the river level was at its highest in 35 years. “We have rescued 100,000 people and transferred them to safer places,” Farooq Ahmad, spokesman for the Punjab emergency services, said.

Mohsin Naqvi, the caretaker chief minister of Punjab, said monsoon rains prompted Indian authorities to release excess reservoir water into the Sutlej, causing flooding downstream on the Pakistani side of the border.

India has experienced severe monsoon rains this year, with more than 150 killed in rain-related incidents since July. Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, a climate and water expert based in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, said the water levels in the Sutlej had become so high that they were beyond India’s storage capacity.

“There was no intention or maliciousness on India’s part. The water had to eventually flow downstream to Pakistan,” he said. “In Pakistan, we were monitoring the Indian monsoon quite closely, we were expecting and anticipating it, and therefore Punjab and Pakistani authorities had enough warning time to evacuate communities and to plan emergency response,” he said, adding that both countries were facing a climate disaster.

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