

David Cameron heckled while touring flood-hit northern region in UK

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London: British Prime Minister David Cameron was on Monday heckled by the victims of devastating floods during a visit to the worst-hit historic city of York in the UK.

"No more cuts to public services", he was shouted at by one woman. However, Cameron who on Sunday described the flooding as "unprecedented", defended his government's spending on flood defences and pledged to do "even more".

"We've spent more in the last Parliament than in the previous parliament and we're going to spend even more in this Parliament. So it's a rising budget: 2.3 billion pounds (USD 3.4 billion) on capital schemes that will make a real difference right up and down the country," he told Sky News.

Hinting at a rethink on the flood defences, he said, "As I say though, let's have a look and see whether more needs to be done and whether the flood defences need to be made even higher than they are already," he said.

Explaining the situation in York in detail, Cameron said, "There are two sets of flood defences: the flood defences on the (River) Ouse which have worked and then the flood defences on the River Foss which weren't able to work and that's why there has been the flooding that there has been."

He stated that a lot of money was being spent on flood defences and they are going to spend "even more in the future", adding that the defences had protected many "thousands of houses" from floods but they don't always do enough.

"But obviously after any one of these events it's right to sit down and look at what you've spent, what you've built and look at what you're planning to spend, look at what you're planning to build and work out: is it in the right places? Are we doing it in the right way? Do we need to do more? And we'll ask all those questions," he said.

His comments came as the UK Environment Agency called for a "complete rethink" on flood management and invoked nine severe flood warnings in north-east and north-west England, and more than 100 other flood alerts across England and Wales.

"I think we will need to have that complete rethink and I think we will need to move from not just providing better defences and we've got a 2.3 billion pound programme to do that over the next six years - but also looking at increasing resilience," Agency's deputy chief executive David Rooke said.

Many places in northern England have seen record river levels over the past 24 hours, including the River Aire in Leeds, and the rivers Calder and Ribble, affecting places such as Whalley, Hebden Bridge and Ribchester.

Thousands fled their homes to rescue centres yesterday and extra soldiers were deployed to aid emergency services to tackle the chaos during the Christmas holiday season.

Meanwhile, the Met Office has issued yellow (be aware) warnings for rain on Wednesday in areas of northern England, Wales and Northern Ireland, bringing the threat of further flooding. Amber (be prepared) warnings for rain are also in place for parts of Scotland on Wednesday.

- PTI