

Pakistan heatwave claims 26 more, toll nears 1,300

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KARACHI: Twenty six people died today of high temperatures in Pakistan's Karachi, taking the death toll to around 1,300 as residents grappled with the week-long heatwave that has crippled life and overwhelmed the healthcare system.

Weather experts forecast the temperatures, which have been as high as 45 degrees Celsius in the past week, are again likely to soar in the next few days in Karachi, the country's biggest city and the financial capital.

Sindh health minister Jam Mahtab confirmed that out of the nearly 1,300 people killed in the Sindh province due to the heatwave, about 35 per cent were women.

Mahtab said around 25 per cent of those who died were the homeless, some were drug-addicts and lived on the streets.

The power crisis in the Sindh capital and other parts of the province has compounded the problems of residents, who have to face daytime outages lasting several hours.

Mahtab stressed that the number of casualties could have been prevented had it not been for the severe power breakdowns in the city by Karachi Electric. The power supplier's operations are being investigated by the federal government.

Bilawal Bhutto, chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party which governs Sindh, yesterday pinned down the responsibility on the federal government, saying the deaths could have been prevented had load shedding been avoided.

The deadliest heatwave in decade in Pakistan has coincided with the holy month of Ramazan, when the country's Muslim majority observes a dawn-to-dusk fast.

The healthcare system in the province has been overmatched and is struggling to cater to the medical needs of the huge influx of people seeking treatment for heat-related ailments.

Nearly 2,000 patients with such ailments were still being treated at several hospitals, though the temperature has hovered under 40 degrees Celsius this week and came down to 35 degrees today.

"Since the last three days mass burials of around 200 unclaimed bodies have been carried out and these are mostly homeless people," Mahtab said.

According to Sindh health department statistics, a total of 1,206 people have died in Karachi alone due to the heatwave since June 20.

Raza Kazim, a spokesman for the Edhi Foundation which runs a private ambulance service and Karachi's main morgue, said they were still receiving dead bodies and had yesterday buried around 160 unclaimed bodies.

- PTI