

## 'Timber mafia' behind Pakistan's floods

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Global warming might be one explanation for Pakistan's devastating floods, but scientists believe poor land management, outdated irrigation systems and logging are at least as much to blame.

Flooding has battered Pakistan since the onset of heavy monsoon rains a month ago, affecting a wide central belt.

More than 1,600 people have died and more than 6 million are homeless, according to the UN. The total population affected is at least 17 million.

Water covers a fifth of the country, much of which is agricultural. About 14 percent of Pakistan's entire cultivated land area has been damaged.

A major factor that led to the massive flooding is illegal logging in the northwest province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, experts said.

Jamshed Ali, secretary-general of Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI), an organization meant to protect forests in the province, said in parts of Malakand district more than 70 per cent of forests had been felled by a well-connected "timber mafia" that was difficult to stop.

In the militant-infested Swat region, the Taliban were behind much of the illegal logging, he said.

Over-grazing by livestock - common in rural Pakistan - can also remove layers of topsoil and stunt plant growth, reducing the soil's ability to hold water, said Asad Jarwar Qureshi of the [International Water Management Institute](#).

Abdul Qadir Rafiq of the UNDP said that without vital topsoil, flash-flooding in northern, mountainous areas can send silt downstream, which then reduces the amount of water the river channel can hold.

*Reuters*