

LET PARLIAMENT OVERSEE  
RECONSTRUCTION WORK

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EARTHQUAKE THAT OCCURRED IN  
PAKISTAN ON 8<sup>TH</sup> OCT, 2005

The Dawn

19 November 2005

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ON October 8, a vast area in Pakistan's north, extending from the NWFP to Azad Kashmir, suffered a deadly earthquake, killing thousands of people. The question is: Can this quake that pushed those awake into the lap of unending sleep achieve the miracle of arousing 150 million dreamers and their self-indulgent and short-sighted leadership from their sweet slumber?

The basic difference between Islamic and un-Islamic attitudes in such emergencies is that while an un-Islamic approach lays stress only on the physical and temporal aspects of the rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts, the Islamic approach also takes in its stride spiritual dimension of all our actions. Therefore, a disaster is a warning as well as a test and trial. The real objective of this trial is the moral and spiritual purification and training.

Has the time not come for us to reflect what we have done with our pledge to Allah? Instead of being the pioneer of an Islamic social order, we keep our economy interest- based; indulge in over-speculation, bribery, hoarding and all forms of corruption and exploitation. As a result, 40 per cent of our population is living today below the poverty- line, while just two per cent are enjoying the luxuries of life. We have turned education into an instrument of intellectual and cultural slavery and are criminally negligent about the moral and ideological upbringing of our younger generation. Cases of gang-rape are on the rise. The common man has no security of life, honor and property.

It is time that we looked into ourselves for an individual and collective self-introspection. From Khyber to Karachi, there was an upsurge of fellow-feeling and the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all got engaged to do something for their afflicted brothers and sisters. Donations started pouring in. People began reaching the devastated areas and were clearing the debris with their bare hands. The whole nation rose like one body, determined to boldly meet the challenge. That was the sign of a new dawn.

Those who held the reins of power in the land and were supposed to be the first to comprehend the enormity of this national calamity lost a full three days in a state of indecision and apathy. The federal information minister and his media managers tried to make us believe that things were normal and relief efforts were going on well 'as planned'.

It was difficult to believe that we did not have the basic tools and machines ordinarily available to even poor nations to meet such emergencies, nor were our armed forces; the police and the fire brigade trained enough to handle such emergencies. This is despite the fact that the Civil Defence Act of 1952 and the West Pakistan's National Calamities (Prevention and Relief) Act of 1958 remain part of our statute book. In 2000, a National Crisis Management Cell was set up in the interior ministry headed by a retired brigadier. Then, there is the project of the proposed National Defence

Management Agency which remains non-functional for the last five years although a grant of Rs.155 million was given to it by the UNDP long time back.

This national calamity has also laid bare society's good and bad elements. On the one hand, there are those who are busy even today in exploiting the pathetic situation to their advantage, and on the other there are noble souls who emptied their pockets to help the needy.

It was almost unbelievable to find gangs engaged in looting valuables from the fallen structures and some notables of the AJK were seen hijacking trucks loaded with relief material, while men from the police department, though themselves adversely affected, were seeking their share in this spree of loot and plunder. The tragedy has a lesson for all of us. The good has been made distinct from the bad. It is now up to society how best it can encourage and organize the good into a dominant force and check and reform the bad to help it play a more positive role.

Whatever the government agencies and the military are doing now to accelerate the relief and rehabilitation work must be acknowledged. A greater need, however, is the urgent removal of the bottlenecks in the way of a well-thought out and well-coordinated plan of action. The lack of essential tools and technology and the absence of an effective rapport and coordination among the military, the civilian authorities, the provincial and local governments and the NGOs needs to be redressed.

The government's apathy, negligence and partisan attitude notwithstanding, the relief and rehabilitation work done by the country's religious and political organizations is extremely laudable and must be sustained. However, it is a pity that even at such a crucial moment of our national existence, General Musharraf's endeavors revolved entirely round and the army. It appeared as though there was no civil administration, no constitutional body and no parliament. The viewpoint of the political parties in this regard is quite clear and fundamentally correct. How independent observers viewed this situation has been well commented on by Ian Bremmer in International Herald Tribune: "Greece, Turkey and Indonesia (which suffered severe earthquakes in recent years) have something very basic in common. They are democracies. Their leaders govern with the consent of the people. President Musharraf of Pakistan enjoys no such popular legitimacy. He is an army general with excessive power in a state ruled by the military, whose mandate depends on an implied understanding with the Pakistani people."

The earlier the general takes cognizance of the ground realities, the better it would be for him as a person, for the military as a national institution and for the country as a whole and its constitutional structure. The military should continue to do whatever good work it can regard relief, rescue and rehabilitation, but the future programme of rehabilitation and reconstruction must be worked out in consultation with parliament. This programme needs to be implemented by the civil administration. An autonomous rehabilitation authority should be set up on a permanent basis, one each for the affected areas of the NWFP and the AJK, with the help of their assemblies and the

respective governments. On the federal level, a permanent body may be established and it should consist of the representatives of the federation, the four provinces and parliament members from all parties.

To streamline efforts for a better future following points merit immediate consideration:

- 1.** There should be parliament's supervision and overall check on the relief supplies received so far or which may be received in future. For the purpose, members of the ruling party, its allies, as well as all the opposition parties should jointly be made responsible for the entire work concerning distribution of relief goods and the rescue operation.
- 2.** A well-planned participation by all the agencies, both government and private, and continued public association and their trust are essential to effectively meet the immense challenge facing the nation.
- 3.** A three-phase plan of action may be worked out as follows:
  - a)** Tasks to be carried out during the first phase of immediate relief spread over 3-4 months should include well-planned and uninterrupted supply of the articles of daily need, water, power, Medicare, psychotherapy, provision of shelter, and opening up of roads and tracks.
  - b)** For the reconstruction phase immediate schemes will have to be prepared and necessary funds arranged to reconstruct towns and settlements on properly selected sites after necessary surveys and scientific analysis of the essential data. In an integrated manner the project should cover all the basic facilities like residence, education, health, employment, transport and conveyance, water and power.
  - c)** In the third phase, the loose ends would have to be tied up and snags, if any, removed in order to ensure normal living conditions to the rehabilitated people and proper functioning of the institutions set up at their townships and settlements.
- 4.** A separate programme for relief and rehabilitation of those who have lost their limbs will have to be launched forthwith to help them regain a semblance of normalcy in their lives and the self-confidence needed to start life anew.
- 5.** The provision of proper care and rehabilitation of orphans and widows similarly merits urgent attention. The problem needs to be tackled as a national emergency with careful planning and meticulous execution.

6. Setting up a review committee to scientifically re-examine building construction rules and regulations and improve the present standards to conform to the universally accepted and scientifically approved norms.
7. Obsolete and ill-equipped emergency relief and rescue apparatus, like the fire brigade, civil defence, scouts, etc., need to be overhauled and refurbished with necessary training and tools.
8. Future planning for such disasters should also take into account measures to prevent the spread of epidemics and the provision of emergency medical relief in affected areas.
9. Corruption and mismanagement are unfortunately the bleeding wound of our national existence. People have lost trust in the government and its institutions. The military, once known for its financial integrity, is now also badly affected by the disease, which appears incurable under the present dispensation. This is the biggest challenge facing the task of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

To achieve the desired goal, the national leadership will have to bring about a change in its perceptions and approach, translate the rule of the law into practice, turn the dream of good governance into reality. Every institution would have to be made fully capable of independently managing its own affairs within its well-defined spheres and the practice of centralizing everything in one person or a single authority would have to be discarded once for all.

Last but not least, a system of public accountability should be so devised, along with the legal accountability, that no person in authority should feel unaccountable or above the law.

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