

No relief as floods devastate Pakistan

Saturday 14 August 2010, by [Ul HASSAN Riaz](#) (Date first published: 13 August 2010).

Over 1700 deaths, 20 million affected, 666,000 houses washed away as floods cause damages to the tune of \$ 15 billion. 1.4 million acres of Punjab's cropland is swept by the deluge. Sindh suffers Rs. 35 billion loss excluding crops. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa submerged. Balochistan also suffers.

"It looks like the number of people affected in this crisis is higher than the Haiti earthquake, the tsunami or the Pakistan earthquake, and if the toll is as high as the one given by the government, it's higher than the three of them combined," Maurizio Giuliano, spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told the Associated Press. Similarly, Chairman National Disaster Management Authority Nadeem Ahmad informs that the earthquake in 2005 damaged about 611 thousand houses while 666,000 houses have been washed away by the current floods so far.

Floodwaters have followed a more than 600-mile-long trail from as far away as Afghanistan and India, and more heavy downpour is expected, which could further damage homes and crops, reports United Press International (UPI). Fuming rivers are still not ready to give up, at least not in near future.

At the time of writing this report (Aug. 12), the deluge has left a trail of devastation, destroying roads, bridges and other infrastructure. Number of affected people is about to hit 20 million with more than 1,700 death-toll and leaving some 5 million homeless. Estimates from rescue-service-officials suggest the death-toll may reach 3,000. All the four provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan have been hit by the floods. Hundreds of main roads and bridges have been washed away, electricity and telephone services cut off making access to the families stuck in remote areas a major challenge for the relief organizations. Rushing water has washed away thousands of acres of crops, government buildings, businesses, schools, bridges and homes. Flood waters have destroyed much of the health infrastructure in the worst affected areas, leaving inhabitants especially vulnerable to water-borne diseases. 45 bridges and 3,700 houses were swept away only in province Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa till August 1, leaving majors national and international highways inaccessible which eventually have disrupted the relief and rescue operations. This province is indeed submerged in water.

At the tail of flood, in province of Sindh, 3.5 million people could be affected with a loss of Rs. 35 billion excluding crops, according to the chief minister of Sindh, Syed Qaim Ali Shah. Country's food belt and largest province in terms of population, the Punjab is no exception where at least 1.4 million acres of cropland is swept by the deluge leaving behind the misery for a country heavily dependent on agriculture. Initial estimations show that total damage would be to the tune of \$ 15 billion. Agriculture sector accounts for more than 21% of Pakistan's GDP and employs 45 per cent of the labour force. The Finance Ministry estimated a couple of days ago a growth target of 4.5% for the fiscal year 2010-11. It would have to be revised downwards. Last year, growth was merely 4.1 %.

It is not just heavy rain that is to blame for the current floods in Pakistan: water management has also exacerbated the risk of such events. Activist Mushtaq Gaadi told Democracy Now that it is man-

made as well. He said: "...destruction that was brought, it was brought due to the breaches in the dykes and the breaches in embankments. And certainly, there are many man-made causes involved in what's been the situation. The main cause of the flood, worsening of the flood, was Taunsa Barrage. It was in the downstream of Taunsa Barrage. And the reason was that the Taunsa Barrage is the most tilted-up river, and its capacity, storage capacity, has been reduced. So it is not possible to hold up the water and then to—and embankments are in very bad shape." Meanwhile, a report in New Scientist magazine reveals that meteorologists have noticed a change in the jet stream's normal pattern. Consequently, blocking event coincided with the summer monsoon, bringing down additional rain on the mountains to the north of the country.

While flood victims interviewed by TV channels are holding the government responsible for providing inadequate relief, the federal Finance Minister Hina Rabbani Khar complained (Aug. 9) that volunteers and private donations were not coming forth as enthusiastically as was the case after deadly earthquake that struck Pakistan in October 2005.

'Even international charities and rich countries have not been very generous in announcing financial grants. Hardly \$ 500 million has been pledged. This is partly because media did not highlight the grave situation as was the case in 2005,' says Khalid Malik. He is director Labour Education Foundation (LEF) and is overseeing Labour Relief Campaign set up by his organization to raise donations and provide relief to flood victims. 'We have raised Rs 300000 at our camp in Lahore in a week. We raised almost over a million in as many days after earthquake. I think people are only now realizing the scale of destruction when media and the government have started to take notice,' he says. Since floods are a routine matter hence it was initially ignored by all. Only later on, people began to realize the magnitude, he thinks. Asked if floods are a routine matter, what infrastructure is there to face them up? he said: 'The infra structure is indeed poor, mainly a heritage from British colonial era.' According to Khalid, half the budget is spent on military and another half is paid to IMF, World Bank. 'Every year, Pakistan pays about \$4 billion as debt retirement to IMF, World Bank. There is nothing left to spend on development. On top of that, rulers are extremely corrupt who hardly care for masses,' he added.

Khalid Malik, blames Pakistan military as well. 'When everything is prioritized with military needs in mind, infrastructures to stave off floods cannot be built,' he says. Asked if Labour Relief Campaign has received any donations from abroad, Khalid said: 'Nothing concrete yet. But we have been contacted and we hope to receive help from abroad.' He said even internationally, the sympathy shown after earthquake was not as big as was the case in 2005 after earthquake. To a question he said flood victims immediately need cooked food. Tents are also equally urgent, he says. 'In immediate future we need medicine and in the longer run we need to build houses and of course livelihoods for peasants and workers who have literally lost everything in these floods.'

Riaz ul Hassan

P.S.

* From Viewpoint online issue no. 13, AUGUST 13, 2010:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/fullstory.php?t=No%20relief%20as%20floods%20devastate%20Pakistan&f=full-3-aug-13.php&y=2010&m=august>

* Riaz ul Hassan has been actively involved in Social Media studies since 2006. He has held diverse

editorial positions in different literary magazines including Ravi and Patras. Currently studying in Sweden and plans to pursue his PhD in the field of Social Media. Riaz graduated from Government College Lahore and has worked at the same institute for about one year as lecturer. He has keen interest and involvement in arts, theater and Social Media studies.