

# 10 day after: The earthquake in Pakistan, an eyewitness report

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I had never seen before such a devastating scene in whole of my life. The city of Bagh in Kashmir was like a real ghost city. On 18<sup>th</sup> October, we a team of 10 from Labour Relief Campaign and newly formed Citizen Relief Committee Lahore visited the city with some local volunteers.

There were no children or women in the streets. A city with a population of 2,03,915 according to official figures was a deserted city. The natural catastrophe has hit very hard to this city which is located in the valley encircled by the mountains. A beautiful city at one time was now a total collapse. There were only few local men in the streets. Rest of them have either died or have shifted to another city or in a relief camp.

While passing through a totally destroyed bazaar, one local person Mohammed Nazeer told us around 6pm while he was carrying drinking water cans, "This was a bursting bazaar; now every collapsed shop has bodies inside. When the earthquake struck the bazaar, it was around 9am and many shops were open and shopping for Eid was going on. But it was all over in 5 seconds".

The whole bazaar was stinking like any thing because of the smell of the bodies coming out of the rubble. We had to cover our noses as we were not very well prepared for this. We had no masks.

Suddenly we saw three soldiers of Pakistan army running to us and asked if we have seen a team that is treating the bodies with chemicals. Who they are, I asked. They told us that they are putting some chemicals on the bodies so they should not stink. We have just found three more bodies but they are so much stinking, that no one has the courage to pick them up and bury.

The soldiers told us that this team is spraying the area now and then on the rubble so the stink should be reduced. We had not seen them so the soldier went further to look for them. Some few relatives still are insisting that bodies to be brought out so they could bury them with honor.

Further down, there was Bagh bus stand. It was deserted and there were only few trucks that had brought the relief items. It was time of ending the fast. Sun has just set down. There was no restaurant, no tea stall, no food item sellers, no chappati makers, no one selling any cheap items, that could have been the seen in normal circumstances. Suddenly we saw some people in the dark crying for some thing. We went there. It was a small shop, the only one selling tea. He has also made some chic peas and rice. The price was Rupees five each. Around a dozen people wanted the shopkeeper to serve them first. They were afraid that they will be without food if it is finished. Despite all the claims of the government that they are providing the immediate relief and hot food, we saw no sign of that.

At Bagh, we saw a four story hotel now totally collapsed and bodies of the guests inside. But it was unbearable to see the total destruction of boys Degree College. There were eight class rooms. The classes were going on when the disastrous earthquake hit Bagh. There were some at the three story hostel. Some were in the science laboratories. The total strength of the college was around 1500. Over 1000 were in the buildings. Very few were able to survive.



Nisar Shah, chairperson of Labour Party Pakistan was with us and he had studied at the college in early nineties. Suddenly he recognized the care taker of the college who was walking near by us. He called Akram and he also recognized Nisar.

Akram told us, „I had just finished my night duty at 8am. I left college to go home after some time. While in street, the earthquake struck. The earth was shaking in full swing. I tried to further one step but the earth threw me back. Then I saw building of a hospital and nearby houses falling down. I started to go back towards the college while hearing massive cries from every where. At college, it was all over. Almost over 1000 were trapped under falling buildings. There was no way, I could help them. I was there for some time, the only one as a matter of fact. I went back to my home to find my wife seriously injured.

Akram told us that the first help came after 10 hours. It was the people of Kotli, another town of Kashmir which survived as it was quite far from the center of the earth quake. But these people could not do much. What could they do with their hands? They had no equipment to dig those who were still alive under the rubble crying for help.

The army came after 24 hours but also had nothing to help the trapped one. It was not one's and twos, it were thousands in every part of the city. After four days, some foreign teams arrived with sophisticated equipment and they were able to bring out three alive from the rubble.

There were very bodies recovered from here. They are all here under these, Akram pointed out to all the different department buildings who were now on the ground.

We went up to the grassy ground of the college where a temporary tent hospital has started working. We met the army brigadier in charge of this site. Mr. Saeed asked our opinion of the city. We told him of our feelings. He told us that General Musharaf was here today this morning and has spoken of the rebuilding of the city. But what can be done? Not much, he replied to himself. He said the foreign teams of doctors and specialist for bringing the trapped one out have helped but for two three days. They can not stay in this stinking city, no one can stay here more than few days in any case, Mr. Saeed told us. They go back soon and we have to rely on our own resources, he said.

After visiting the injured one who have a lot to tell us about the way they were treated. One said where is the government? it was no where for few days. We were left to see our injured one dies. I was the lucky to survive.

While coming out of this tent hospital, where there were a lot of medicines but all in the open mostly ruined by the previous day heavy rain, we were stopped by another local who told what has happened to his family, He is the lone survivor from his family of eight. We asked him about the politicians of Kashmir, he said they are all media politicians. We see them over the tv and not here. How many would have died, we asked him. Over 60,000 in this city, I guess, he told us. Government is lying about the facts of the dead ones.

We asked him where are children and women of the city. He said that most they are dead; the few survivors have left the city. How they can live here? Most of the dead are women and children.

There was no electricity in Bagh even after 10 days. But there were some telephon lines set up by the military where you could call free of cost.

All of us had cried several times during this short visit of few hours to this dying city. Nothing is alive in the city. While coming to Bagh from Rawalkot, we stoped to go the house of Nazir Shah, a leader of health workers in Kashmir who died at his hospital during this earthquake. Nazirhas known to me for several years, he has visited us in Lahore. His house not far from the main road was also



damaged. His brother, a leader of the government clerical staff in Kashmir received us at home and Nazir wife was crying when she saw us. They could not believe that we will come that far to their house for the condolences.

Earlier we visited Rawalkot, another district badly hit but not on the scale of Bagh. Rawalkot is around two hours from Bagh by bus. It was not like Bagh which was based in the valley. But, a little on the height. So the damage was mainly to the buildings and not to the human lives on the scale of Bagh. Here a Combined military hospital, a college and a private hospital had collapsed with over few thousands dead and many injured.

The relief camp of Jamaat-i-Islami, the main religious fundamentalist political party was empty but many were at the relief camp of Pakistan Peoples Party. Here at PPP relief camp, we met several left activists who had read our weekly paper Mazdoor Jeddojuhd and knew Labour Party very well. Here a group of women encircled us pleading for more tents and blanket rather than food.

Before here, we were at Paniola, a small town in Rawalakot district, where Labour Relief Campaign was sending the food, cloths and tents during these days. Nisar Shah, a local from this town was able to come to the town a day after the incident. He flew from Karachi, where he is a practicing advocate, a family car took him to Rawalakot and then via taxi to Paniola.

"I was first one to come to the town from outside. Bodies were coming for burial here from other towns particularly from Bagh. Here, there was not much physical loss but more to the property and the animals". Nisar told us. LRC relief truck was the first one to reach here. So far, even after ten days no government team has visited this area for even consolation. He took us down to the valley to visit some damages. But it was colossal damage. Not a single house was there without damage.

Every effected person begged us for more tents and blankets. Every one said that It is only Nisar team who have visited us regularly and helped us with what ever they have received. One student from a Muzafarabad university told us that I am the only survivor from my class. Because, I was not there. All my class fellows are dead, Rehana told.

We were introduced to a mother of two children who was brave enough to walk all the way to Bagh by foot on the same day of the earthquake, to find her one son who was studying in a school. Luckily, the boy did not go to the school and was playing in the street at the time. So he survived. She came back to the town by foot with her son. It took her nearly 10 hour of walking.

Everywhere, we heard, „where is the government%? Most of the effected area of Kashmir,s 20,000 kilometer is not yet visited by evn one person from the government of socalled Azad Kashmir or from the Pakistani military government even after 10 days of the most devastating incident of Pakistan history. It seems that there are over 100,000 dead and more than that injured.

On the way back, 20 kilometer from Bagh, we stopped for some food in a small café. Here we met a team of Action Aid Pakistan. They told us that this is the first hot chapatti in four days. We are distributing tents and blankets. We were lucky enough that we had ordered 5000 tents to a Lahore factory on the first day of the earthquake, they told us.

It was mainly help by ordinary citizens and social organizations that is reaching Kashmir most areas. We saw dozens of truck load of relief goods coming here.

We also noticed that every public transport coming out of Kashmir was full of small belongings of the people. They are fleeing the area. May be, escaping to safe places in Punjab and other areas. There is rush of internal migration. It will grow in next few days as more roads are being open.



We left Bagh at 7pm to reach Lahore at 5 am. Every one was full of sorrows and also determined to do more what they have done earlier.

Please help the victims, contact us what you can do

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