



## Pakistani Floods 2010: An analysis of its impact on the country and its people

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As if the situation in Pakistan was not bad enough before the floods with the country-wide instable security situation, the shortage of electricity, and the on-going war in the tribal areas (FATA); in July 2010 its people were hit by severe flooding during the monsoon season which inundated about 20 percent of Pakistani territory, killing and displacing tens of thousands of people and destroying millions of their cattle, while devastating thousands of villages and the agricultural land of whole regions. The flood hit all the provinces of Pakistan starting from the northern areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, all the way through Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab and down to Balochistan and Sindh. Millions of people had to flee their houses and villages often without being able to take with them any of their belongings and are until today living at the roadside or in open spaces, the refugee camps being too far to reach and too few to accommodate all of them.

One example for the helplessness and confusion which was created by this displacement was the case of refugees from villages in Thatta district in the southern part of Sindh who found shelter on the high-lying area of the necropolis of Makli outside Thatta, a main tourist site of Pakistan. Makli is one of the largest cemeteries of the world covering an area of about 16 square kilometres where thousands of beautifully carved and decorated tombs of former Sindhi rulers, warriors and Sufi saints are to be found. It is a unique historical monument that tells the story of centuries of Sindhi history. One can imagine what the presence of thousands of refugees at this historical site has done to the monuments. No government – be it local or provincial – cared to relocate the refugees for several weeks who were living under the open sky without any provisions made for them. No arrangement for drinking water, no proper food supply, no health service and no sanitation (The News 01.09.2010).



Months after the water had receded, information from other locations poured in reporting that diseases were spreading in the refugee camps: cholera, dysentery, skin diseases. Child mortality ran high and mothers were unable to feed their newborn babies. Even in this calamity there were people who took advantage of the dismal situation of the flood victims; there were reports about armed muggers and burglars who were raiding refugee camps and depriving the refugees of the little which they had managed to save from their houses (WWWa). Complaints from Dalit families were coming in that reported that they had not only lost their houses and belongings but that in the relief camp of Jhiruk food was being refused to them because they belonged to a low-caste group (The News 30.08.2010). Even more shocking are allegations that wealthy landowners in Sindh broke bunds intentionally and diverted flood water into unprotected villages in order to save their own agricultural land and crops from the floods (The News 03.09.2010).

### **Causes of the disaster**

The list of miseries caused by the unprecedented flood in Pakistan is of course much longer. But the question is: what were the reasons for this devastating flood in Pakistan? Of course, among the possible causes is the much-talked-about climate change, a challenge which cannot be tackled by a single country alone. Furthermore, Pakistan is situated at the western fringe of the Indian subcontinent, which lies within the monsoon zone and therefore, heavy rains during the monsoon season are to be expected. Ironically, prior to the flood, Pakistan had been rather infamous for insufficient water supplies which had affected agriculture, fishing, drinking water supply and therefore, the livelihood of millions of people in Pakistan. As a matter of fact, monsoon rains have been very scarce during recent years. The Sindh minister for Irrigation and Power, Jam Saifullah Dharejo, has pointed out that since the 1970s a certain pattern of droughts and floods can be observed. After years of poor monsoon and drought there was flooding during the years 1972-76. This was followed by drought conditions for 12-13 years which was again brought to an end by severe flooding in the late 1990s. This was also followed by a period of about 15 years of drought and now the country has been hit by a super flood (The News 01.09.2010). It seems that the significance of this pattern has only recently been identified



and, if accurate, Pakistan can expect floods in the forthcoming years which require the immediate initiation of preventive measures. This pattern also explains why the disaster has been so vast. During the years of drought, the upkeep and repair of the bunds and barrages have been neglected. This negligence on the part of the concerned department and as a consequence of the state has been admitted by the Minister for Irrigation and Power in an interview.

Another point is the total lack of any emergency contingency plan which could have responded to the situation and given structure and coordination to the relief efforts. It was a tragic repetition of the response to the 2005 earthquake, which struck the Pakistani side of Kashmir. In the aftermath of that powerful earthquake the then government of General Musharraf had initiated efforts to develop such contingency plans and to build an institutional structure to cope with emergency situations in the form of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The plan had been devised but the implementation had not been followed up, especially in the provinces and districts. In addition, this organization has been infested by inefficiency and corruption as is unfortunately the case in many places and institutions in Pakistan. One factor which has surely contributed to this lacuna is the fact that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government which came into power in 2008 undermined the local government system which under the previous government had been working and working well and which was supposed to implement the decision to develop a contingency plan.

The same lack of organization and coordination as on the local level can also be seen in the central government. It took the government of Pakistan two weeks to recognize that a disaster had struck the country. Though the situation was already known to be difficult and the public opinion asked for full dedication of the government to tackling the catastrophe, the Pakistani leaders displayed an amazing amount of disinterest in the situation of their country. President Zardari, for instance, insisted on leaving for his visit to France, where he was to inspect his real estate portfolio and attend a family meeting with his father, which he followed up by a trip to Great Britain. In Pakistan, as in most countries, personal engagement of government officials in tackling relief efforts is an important demonstration of solidarity and commitment on the part of leaders. This commitment has been lacking or at best has been superficial. This explains how the



refugee camp that Prime Minister Gilani finally visited after a couple of weeks turned out to have been a fake one; an arrangement by the local administration to show him a nice and conveniently located camp.

### **Response by government, army and civil society**

It is therefore no wonder that the collection and distribution of donations and relief goods was and remains slow and inadequate in Pakistan itself. While during the earthquake in 2005 there was an immediate wave of solidarity that swept over the country, it took much more time for the support for the flood victims to gain momentum last summer. The army being the best organized and disciplined institution in the country was the first to take on the challenge and started evacuating people from the northern parts of Pakistan where the floods and rain had damaged almost all the bridges and left entire villages cut off. When after a while it became clear that the Prime Minister's flood relief account was not drawing enough donations the army set up an account of its own and started independently collecting donations and providing the needed help. The image of the army which had been tainted as a result of its involvement in administrative jobs and corruption during the rule of General Musharraf has seen a major improvement since Pakistani soldiers have been seen extending helping hands to thousands of flood victims. The army high command as well as ordinary soldiers have gone out of their way to organize and provide help for the needy.

Interestingly, army support for flood victims is not considered as state support by the Pakistani people. Army and state, military and civilian institutions are perceived as separate and even competing entities in Pakistan. This is surely a result of repeated army rule in this country and efforts of the Pakistani army to play a political role since the early years of Pakistan's existence, whether openly or covertly. At any time when the Pakistani state and its institutions fail or do not live up to the expectations of the public, voices are heard asking for the army to come in and put things right. Army rule has mostly started with a bang, being welcomed by the public with sweets and cheers, but it has also almost always ended with a whimper. As a matter of fact military regimes have also failed to 'put things right' and by now business interests of the Pakistani army in different



sectors of economy have contributed to the spread of corruption in the military.

Alongside the army, local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have started collecting funds and relief goods and distributing them among the needy. Edhi Foundation, one of the well-known organizations, has 300 centers across all of Pakistan and has an immaculate image of staying away from corruption and mismanagement. In northern Pakistan some of the organizations helping the flood victims in Swat, Buner, Malakand and the settled areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have a religious profile. One such organization, Al Khidmat, has kept a record of selfless and efficient relief work since 2005 and has been busy extending help in Charsadda, Nowshera and Swat. The head of Al Khidmat, Karachi's former mayor, Naimatullah Khan – who belongs to Jamaat-e Islami – said that his organization has a large number of volunteers who work around the year making it easy to step up efforts in response to the flood calamity. Falah-e Insaniyat is another religious relief foundation which specialized in despatching doctors and paramedical staff into flood affected areas in Southern Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (The News 22.08.2010). Pakistani media were discussing the question why religious organizations are much more efficient in raising funds from the population than government authorities and secular NGOs. Asked for the reason, Salman Shahid, spokesman of Falah-e Insaniyat told the Pakistani journal Newsline that his organization has a presence in almost every district of the country and runs 95 dispensaries, 101 ambulances, four hospitals, a large number of schools and regular medical camps throughout the country on a day-to-day basis, not only in emergencies. Therefore, they are well aware of the needs of the population and are trusted by them (Newsline 10.09.2010). It is interesting to note that, in spite of this, the United States on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2010 added Falah-e Insaniyat to its official list of blacklisted terror organizations.

There has been a discussion in the media about the question whether religious organizations that subscribe to a conservative ideology and may have contacts with Taliban forces should be allowed to extend help to the flood affected, especially in the areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, professor of political science at LUMS, Lahore, the workers of such religious organizations do welfare work without any direct political motives but rather for motivations of personal religious piety. He points out, however, that this does not mean that they may not one day use the trust and popularity which they have



built up amongst the population as a means to oust the ruling parties run by the feudal and business elite of the country, a scenario that was witnessed in the elections in Turkey. According to Professor Rais, this is the only way to uproot such feudal lords and tycoons (The Express Tribune 21.11.2010). Therefore it should not come as a surprise that it was Asif Ali Zardari, one of the top feudal lords of Pakistan himself, who cautioned local and international communities about the threat posed by "right-wing" religious forces to a flood-ridden Pakistan.

At the deeper level, this discussion is of course connected to another one that runs like this: Should flood relief be a purely humanitarian action or should it keep in mind political realities and interests? The idealist would of course insist that only humanitarian intentions should be implied, but a look at ground realities shows us that the US for instance sees its engagement in flood relief as a major effort to counter anti-American sentiment among sections of the Pakistani population. Parallel discussions have been observed in Germany, where the need for flood relief was connected to the aims of strengthening Pakistan as a partner in the war against terror. In contrast the motivations of Islamic organizations, instead of being labelled as politically motivated, can just as easily be seen as local efforts to deal with this crisis, considering that their members mostly stem from the same or neighboring areas. As a matter of fact, during a podium discussion organized by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Berlin on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2010 the representative of the German Red Cross Dr. Johannes Richter who has been active in Pakistan recently denied the possibility of a growth of Taliban influence in the wake of flood relief extended by Islamic organizations.

But help from religious organizations make up only a section of the Pakistani effort. There is much more to it. Ordinary citizens took time off to serve as volunteers in the relief effort; many members of the civil society were and continue to be involved in helping the flood victims. A former student of mine sent an account of his voluntary service at a relief goods distribution point in Sukkur. Here is a glimpse of his impressions:

"The desperation and need is so strong here that after a while I did not want to see it anymore. Somehow then I ended up doing warehousing for the WFP/SRSO (Sindh Rural Support Organization) project. The warehouse is a world of its own, four walls, huge compound, small offices with intermittent electricity, a lot of people doing labor, drivers, contractors, trucks and rations. There are characters



here, H, the 22-year-old who suddenly found himself to be 'the logistics guy', N.P., the guy who is actually supposed to be in-charge of logistics but does not quite know what it means, then the two guys doing ration counts on and off the trucks who seem to be always together and then there is the contractor, B. B. is big, and he is the contractor for trucks and labor, and also president of transport for Sukkur. An admin told me that he is also a part-time kidnapper, has slapped a politician and not someone to mess with. B laughs and gets pissed off at people in about equal measure and told SRSO the first day they would not be able to mobilize 5 trucks without him. I don't know how the contract negotiations went but there are 45 trucks at our disposal running round the clock and B is present at the warehouse 24/7, where his *chelas do malish* (massage) as he lolls about on the *charpai* at night. Sukkur is hot but it's the humidity that gets you. It's like a sauna room without shade. You sweat all the time and in the sun you sweat profusely. I noticed for two days that I don't use the bathroom all day although I try to drink a fair amount of water. It's all sweated out which I think explains the constant headache that is immune to Ponstons (pills against headache). In this heat the laborer works all day and night, loading and unloading trucks. Over five days they have handled over 1,000 tons of rations. My estimate is that about 30 to 40 people are rotating so that's about 5 to 7 tons per person per day of lifting, moving, loading. Then the drivers, who drive non-stop, all the way to places like Kashmore, normally 2 hours from Sukkur but now about 6 to 8 because the shorter routes are cut off by water. The poor in Pakistan work very hard for very little – the poorer you are the harder you work for a pittance."

Very different from this is the performance of the government. The communication between the center and the provinces was and remains insufficient, further straining their relationship. At the height of the disaster, there were daily allegations that distribution of relief was unequal and provinces like Balochistan complained of being neglected. The northern areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, where the disaster had started were soon all but forgotten by the center, although the situation there to date remains dismal due to the damage the flood has done to the already scarce infrastructure. In general, officials in the provinces have failed to record how much relief has been received, how much has been spent, they are uninformed about how to apply for money and have done a poor job in prioritizing allocations. Furthermore, the different players have not coordinated and at best work alongside each other.

When the water started to recede, rehabilitation had to start as soon as possible especially in the north where winter was approaching fast.



Though an amount of Rs. 20.000 was agreed upon as compensation for the flood victims the payment was delayed because the data required for distribution, i.e. the names of the victim families, could not be supplied by the districts and provinces; one of the reasons was that the identity cards which had been lost in the floods by the affected people needed to be issued anew. Needless to say, the process of distribution of the money was also marred by corruption, with reports mounting that the staff distributing the money asked for commission from the flood victims. A report from the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2010 stated that the Prime Minister's fund for flood relief remained entirely unspent. The spokesman of PM Gilani, Mr. Shabbir Anwar, said plans for the money were still being finalized by the financial division. Insider reports, though, alleged that inefficiency and infighting between federal and provincial authorities was the main reason for the delay (WWWb). With regard to the government plans for rebuilding houses, schools and infrastructure, the head of the Disaster Management Authority, General Nadeem Ahmad, said that he had "strong reservations" because there was no system in place to oversee the locations. Out of 1.6 million houses that need to be rebuilt about 400,000 have to be relocated because they had been standing in riverbeds and earthquake-prone zones.

### **International relief operations**

158

But it was not only Pakistani help that took a long time to start flowing, but international help as well. The fastest response came from the American side, who had their army and helicopters in neighboring Afghanistan and who were best informed about the dangerous situation in Pakistan. As a partner in the "war against terror" Pakistan has been playing an increasingly important role for the US in their efforts to turn the tide in Afghanistan and to prepare for a negotiated and orderly withdrawal. Any destabilization of Pakistan is, therefore, not in their interest. By the end of August 2010, US aid had reached 200 million dollars (Times of India 27.08.2010). Helicopters were rescuing people, especially from the mountainous areas in the north where all bridges had collapsed. American help also arrived rather quickly because it could be re-directed from the supplies meant for the US army. The hope was that, as in 2005 after the earthquake, this rescue operation would boost the American image in Pakistan, especially in the north-





ern areas among Pashtun people (Los Angeles Times 21.08.2010). However, because of the mounting number of drone attacks on Pakistani territory from August 2010 onwards that killed an unrecorded number of tribal Pashtuns – elderly, women and children among them – anti-American feelings in Pakistan were again on the rise, a matter of concern for the US and an issue that has been discussed during official visits of US officials to Pakistan.

The UN, the European Union and others took more than a month to realize the severity of the flood devastation and only after UN Secretary, General Ban Ki Moon, visited Pakistan and grasped the scope of the disaster, were efforts to collect donations stepped up. The UN issued an appeal for \$460 million in August. Speaking at a special UN meeting on August 19<sup>th</sup>, Ban Ki-Moon called the crisis “one of the greatest tests of global solidarity in our times”. Nevertheless, the actually amount of money given internationally for the flood relief work has not been able to meet the needs, with NGOs many a time complaining that they are running out of relief goods. By early October, donors had only funded about one-third of the amount for which the UN had appealed. As late as ten weeks after the beginning of the floods not all displaced people had received shelter in tents, which according the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mengesha Kebede, was a situation that put the internal stability of Pakistan at stake (WWWC).

When thinking about the reasons why international donations were slow in coming and relatively small in size, several reasons can be identified. Of course, one must take into account the phenomenon of donor-fatigue, keeping in mind the major earthquake in Haiti in January 2010 and other recent catastrophes, as well as the worldwide economic depression. However, this does not suffice as an answer; there are no doubt causes that are Pakistan-specific. One major reason seems to be the negative image of Pakistan as such. Even prior to 9/11 and the “war against terror”, Pakistan had been getting mainly negative media coverage. At the top of the list, Pakistan was and is associated with the Kashmir issue and the constant tensions in relations with India. Military rule and corruption are additional negatives that can be added to that list, alongside with reporting on Pakistan as a “failed state” and on the situation of Pakistani women. Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in November 2001, the European consciousness has connected Pakistan with the Taliban and Talibanization. Even today Pakistan’s role as an ally of the US in that war mostly goes unnoticed and the sacrifices



which the country and its people suffer in this connection are rarely appreciated in Europe and the US. This situation, as well as the growing antipathy and rejection of Islam in Europe, have contributed in no small amount towards the lacklustre solidarity with the flood victims. This, for example, is evidenced by an analysis of a discussion forum in the online version of the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* (*Spiegel online*).<sup>1</sup> When looking at the arguments made by readers of that forum or even listening to opinions voiced in the media, another reason can be detected: the lack of information available to the general public and the want of understanding or tolerance for “other” cultures, religions or countries; a situation that has many complex reasons one of which most certainly is the inadequacy of education in this regard in Germany and Europe. As far as critique from those more involved in and informed about Pakistan is concerned, it centers around reservations about the reliability of the Pakistani governments’ and international aid organizations’ handling of donations.

### **Social and economic consequences**

With the worst of flooding over and the waters receding, what are the consequences of this disaster? Among the short-term consequences one has to list the displacement of millions of people, the destruction of major parts of infrastructure, especially in the northern part of the country (Karakorum Highway and bridges and roads in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), as well as the destruction of a part of the crop and the loss of agricultural land buried under a thick layer of mud and sludge. Available satellite images show higher than normal sediment loads carried from mountain slopes. These sediment laden waters moving towards the ocean are resulting in a significant deposition of rocks, sands, silts, and clays leading to the geometry of many rivers being altered. It is, however, difficult to quantify the crop losses. Different sources give different estimates and such information is often politically motivated. The province of Sindh is certainly the hardest hit, but Punjab and KP have been affected as well. On the bright side, there are reports of an extremely good harvest in those areas, which have received much rain but did not experience flooding. So much so that on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010 the Economic Coordination Committee of the government of Pakistan decided to lift its ban on the export of one million tons



of wheat. Therefore, it seems that while rehabilitation of the affected areas is needed there may be no shortage of food grain in Pakistan as such. In any case, much will depend on the way in which the next crop is going to be sown in order to overcome any shortfall of food grain.

The main focus of relief is to support the local population in the affected areas, to clear the land from mud and to provide seeds in time for sowing the next crop so that production is resumed as soon as possible. This is being done in KP and Punjab with good results. Before the end of 2010, most of the population owning land had gone back in order to resettle and carry on with their lives. The situation was more difficult up north, an area which has traditionally been neglected by the center and where the harsh winter was approaching. In this area, China has started rebuilding the damaged parts of the Karakorum Highway, no doubt motivated by their economic and political interest in keeping their route to the Arabian Sea open. A project for reconstruction and extension of this major road connecting Pakistan with China along the ancient silk route including the construction of a railway line had been initiated even before the flood and has now been extended. It will of course take time to rehabilitate the infrastructure high up in the north because of the difficult terrain and climate. At the level of regional politics, it should be mentioned that India is worried about the growing Chinese cooperation and investment in Pakistan, but this is of course not a new concern (Indian Express 05.09.2010).

Taking a look at the social impact of the floods on the population, what jumps to the eye is the rising inflation, partly a result of the flooding and partly due to the otherwise weak economic and political situation in Pakistan. It is quite clear that rising prices of food and construction material hinders the provision of flood relief. The situation of the displaced people in the refugee camps does not give much reason to rejoice. Since the beginning of the relief efforts, the provision of food and drinking water has been lacking in quantity as well as quality and general hygienic conditions were below Pakistani standards. This resulted in outbreaks of cholera in many places. But even more dangerous seems to have been the outbreak of high-fever diseases, especially in Sindh and Karachi. Though cases of Dengue Fever are normally recorded during and right after the monsoon season, the numbers were clearly much higher this time round. Besides Dengue, there were a rising number of Malaria and Typhoid Fever cases reported in the media though no exact statistics exist. Public and private hospitals reported sick people coming



in in droves and this situation has not been ameliorated to date. Most of the hospitals lack adequate medicines and even know-how about how to deal with the diseases. There were reports that patients with Dengue – a disease which is transmitted by mosquito bites and not by human-to-human contact – were kept in isolation wards, an unnecessary measure which only restricts the access of family members and blocks those wards from being used for patients who really need to be isolated. The number of deaths from any of the mentioned diseases is not certain but it seems to be considerable and is not confined to inhabitants of refugee camps.

The flood disaster also means trouble for Pakistan's economy and financial situation. Pakistan is heavily dependent on loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and other international donors and has been grappling with the problem of meeting the payment schedules for those loans and their conditions even before the onset of floods. After the floods, this situation has been exacerbated and voices asking for re-scheduling of loans or payment relief can be heard. The insistence of the IMF on implementing an extended version of General Sales Tax (GST) in Pakistan from October 2010 as a precondition for the next tranche of the ongoing IMF loan program will – if implemented – result in another price hike of commodities and services and is therefore being opposed by most opposition parties. The Pakistani government is trying to implement the Revised General Sales Tax (RGST) against all odds but might face political destabilization in the process.

With regard to social consequences of the flood another observation can be made. While people who own land or property, even if small, are eager to go back to their villages and towns to resume life as soon as possible, it is the landless poor who are reluctant to leave the refugee camps in towns and cities to go back to the villages they came from. Rather than a curse, they consider their displacement a blessing in disguise. There are reports that they even consider their situation in the refugee camps as a step up from to their earlier lives. One report on such a case tells the story of Usman, 65, son of Saif al-Naseerani, belonging to Shikarpur district. He says the people of Shikarpur do not want to continue living under the same circumstances that prevail back home. "Neither are our families safe nor we are living with free will (sic.). It is pathetic to narrate the plight the people face in their routine life in tribal system. A tribal jury decides about the fates of our girls and boys. Killing people in the name of *karokari* (honor killing) and persis-



tent tribal feuds is a norm. Nobody can dare ask why their children are being killed," he said. "In this situation, it is a better opportunity for us people to stay away from the tribal system" (The News 18.10.2010). They also complain that any money that would be given to them back in their villages would end up in the pockets of the tribal or village elders. In addition, there are no schools and no health facilities in many villages, which are located in remote areas without even road access. These reports indicate that the restrictive and exploitive tribal and feudal systems, strongest in Sindh and Balochistan, are resented by the poor who see the flood as a welcome opportunity to change their lives, to escape from their bondage and to start anew in one of the cities or towns in freedom. That in return will cause or is already causing a new strain upon the lacking infrastructure of the towns and cities of Sindh, with slums emerging rapidly and pressure on the labour market growing.

On the other hand, there are reports that too much dependence on aid is breeding a sort of idleness among the flood-affected people in the refugee camps. Representatives of local administration in Meeran Mullan, Punjab are on record with complaints that they are in need of labour to build the first model village but that there are no laborers available because all are busy receiving aid. Those who are ready to work, demand daily wages of Rs. 450, which is double the amount of what they would have received before the flood. One Turkish NGO distributed shovels and sickles among farmers who were also getting free wheat seeds and urea fertilizers, but at some point realized that most farmers were selling the tools in the market (Dawn 01.12.2010). This may not be the case everywhere but it illustrates the hiccups in dealing with the situation.

In the case of Karachi this phenomenon has an additional ethnic implication. Many of the displaced Pashtun flood victims have sought refuge with their family members living in the suburbs of Karachi. The new inflow of Pashtun population after an earlier one in connection with the military operation going on the tribal areas will further widen the existing strain between the Pashtun and Muhajir<sup>2</sup> segments of Karachi's population, both of which are fighting for pre-eminence in this city. With the number of Pashtuns in the city reaching seven million or even more according to some estimates the power balance of Karachi is disturbed which has resulted in a rise of violence and target killing since last summer.



### **Political consequences**

This flooding drama going on in Pakistan has displayed the vulnerability of the Pakistani political set-up and the weakness of the state and its institutions. Though the aggravation of the law and order and governance situation has been especially visible during the last two years of PPP rule, this trend has been underway for quite some time now. While this weakness can in part be blamed on historical reasons and on frequent army rule in Pakistan, it has to be taken into consideration that the model of parliamentary democracy which Pakistan is trying to implement in a post-colonial set-up might not be well-adapted to a basically un-secularized, pre-modern and partially tribal society. Values and loyalties in such a pre-modern society do not match the Western ones that are required for democracies to function credibly. The insistence of upholding this volatile, corrupted and, in a way, fake type of parliamentary democracy by the West despite the disputed relevance of democracy for economic development of underdeveloped countries may not be helpful for stabilizing Pakistani society.

In any case the recent flood has in no small terms contributed towards another cycle of erosion of the state in Pakistan, provoking repercussions inside and outside the country. Within the country, in the columns of newspapers and in TV discussions, frequent voices are heard predicting the break-down of the elected government and musing about another army intervention. While the last army rule under General Musharraf has come to an end quite recently and its unpopularity during the later years of its presence has not yet been forgotten, the corruption and bad governance of the present rule has produced yet another proposal: that of an army take-over according to the Bangladesh model. In early 2007, General Moeen staged a coup in Bangladesh that was in full concurrence of the Supreme Court (SC). General Moeen set a tremendous precedent by handing over power to the elected representatives in early 2009 after conducting free and fair elections; he then retired a few months later at the end of one year's extension as chief of army staff (Daily Times 02.09.2010). In Pakistan, the cry can be heard for some kind of "national government" under army protection.

Another call for army intervention and even for revolution came from the head of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Altaf Hussain, who has been living in London for the last many years but continues to main-



tain a firm grip over his party, the MQM, and its mostly well-educated middle class members. His critique of the current political elite aims at their feudal character which he wants to do away through a French-style revolution. That is but a distant dream of a man who has been living outside the country for many years and seems to have lost touch with its realities. Though the MQM had made some inroads into Punjab province by broadening its social base and its provincially limited character by dropping the title of "Muhajir" and replacing it with "muttahida" (united), it lost much of its gains during the violent struggle between MQM and PPP in the wake of the lawyer's movement in May 2005. MQM also suffered from the aftermath of violent struggles in Karachi in the 1990s, which earned it the image of having a mafia-like structure and a readiness for violence. Therefore, the chances of an uprising under the leadership of MQM are quite farfetched. In addition, the recent revelations from US diplomatic despatches leaked by Wikileaks have vividly shown what the ruling and main established parties of Pakistan think about democracy and good governance. Their own private hold to power is dearer to them than the well-being of the larger public or the country. Though the content of these leaks are no real surprise, to see them reported black on white does shake the trust in democracy, even of those who up until now were ready to close their eyes to certain insufficiencies in Pakistani politics and politicians.

Apart from the above mentioned Pakistani "models of change", there are unfortunately strong foreign vested interests in Pakistan, those of the US being the most prominent among them. A report prepared by the Congressional Research Service and distributed by the US State stresses the importance of a strong and stable Pakistani state in full control of its territory for the national security of the US, as opposed to a Pakistan that could potentially become an operational base for anti-American forces (Dawn 24.08.2010). It is quite clear that this strong fixation of the US on Pakistan results in all kinds of political interferences into the internal affairs of the country. Almost on weekly basis American representatives of the government, the US military, the US Congress and the Senate are touring Pakistan while trying to get their messages through. A recent and prominent example of this is the comment of US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, on the decision of the Pakistani government to reverse the announced hike of petrol prices, saying that it was a "mistake" for Pakistan to do so (The News 07.01.2011). Many more examples can be cited. This kind of micromanagement of inter-



nal affairs from the outside cannot but cause a negative influence on the image of the Pakistani government which is already under severe pressure.

### **Conclusion: Turning odds into blessings**

Summing up the impact of the flood in Pakistan on its economy, society and state, there can be no doubt that a catastrophe of this extent certainly has brought in its wake destruction and displacement on a considerable scale, in the first place for the people directly affected by this destruction and displacement. As the Kashmir earthquake of 2005 has shown, it is also likely that the rehabilitation of the affected people will take time – many months if not years. One result of this is certainly that slums in the towns and cities of Pakistan will grow and security in such areas will deteriorate even more. However, it must be mentioned that as a result of the heavy rains and flood of summer 2010, many areas have received good rain for the first time in many years leading to much better crops in those areas.

When reviewing the immediate rescue efforts we have to observe that US helicopters and other aid did come in almost instantly following the first flooding in the Northern Areas. It was the Pakistani army and Pakistani NGOs present on the ground who did not respond as quickly to the emergency. The overwhelmingly late and ineffective reaction by the Pakistani government and administration stands in contradistinction to the US response. International help did flow in after a certain delay and continues to date, especially in trying to support the reconstruction work. Nevertheless it has to be noted that this help does sometimes turn out to be counter-productive when the situation on the ground is not taken into full consideration.

With regard to the secondary or indirect impact of the flood on the government and state of Pakistan, on its economy and financial situation, it has to be said that that influence is rather limited. The floods certainly do impact all those areas but that impact is not decisive or fatal. The weakness of the Pakistani state, corruption and economic crisis, fiscal indiscipline and budget deficit, all existed before the floods and have only been deepened and not caused by it. Poverty has been rising in Pakistan to unprecedented heights due to inflation and price hikes for items of daily use, which has led to a





large number of lower middle class people joining the ranks of the poor. The country-wide outcry over the hike in petrol prices and earlier the introduction of a reformed GST under the pressure of the IMF which both would have resulted in another rise of inflation are a vivid demonstration of this.

Finally, in the face of the unprecedented floods of last summer, Pakistani people have again shown amazing resilience against all odds. But this resilience should not be overstretched. The problem of poverty will have to be addressed and tackled urgently. One can only hope that the next government will be in the mood to do so. And last but not least, a large part of Pakistan's agriculture depends on irrigation. If the rains which came last summer were to fall regularly, the gains in the long run would outdo the losses. With appropriate preparation, including better maintenance of the water management system of the Indus River and resettlement of people from the areas which are prone to be inundated, a larger amount of rain could be a blessing instead of a curse for Pakistan.

## Endnotes

1 See for instance the discussion about flood and charity for Pakistan in Der Spiegel <http://forum.spiegel.de/showthread.php?t=19339&page=44> [retrieved 23.10.10]

2 *Muhajirs* is the Urdu word for immigrants. It describes the Urdu-speaking population of Pakistan that has its roots in the regions of Bombay, Bihar and U.P. (in what today is India).



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