

Pakistan Copes with Unprecedented “Natural Catastrophe”

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The unprecedented deadly floods and extraordinary monsoon rains which began in June, this year has destroyed lives, livelihoods and infrastructure in various regions of Pakistan, leaving one-third of the country underwater.

Media reported that owing to the floods, more than 2000 persons have died; more than 30 million of people have been affected. More than two million homes, 2 million acres of crops and some 3,000 miles of roads have been damaged. Half a million people were in displacement camps and many others were without shelter.

Officials say this year’s floods are comparable to 2010—when over 2,000 people died and nearly a fifth of the country was under water.

Foreign media called Pakistan’s flood as a result of climate change with a serious climate catastrophe.

The rain spell and floods have negative effects on the people in the flood-ravaged areas also from the pandemic diseases—as some persons have died.

Talking cognisance of large scale devastation, the Pakistan Government has declared a state of emergency. The government has established a flood relief fund, namely, Prime Minister’s Flood Relief Fund, 2022 for providing relief and rehabilitation to the flood-affected persons. The Fund accepts donations and contributions both from domestic and international sources.

Meanwhile, in a live telethon on August 29, 2022, Chairman of Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and former Prime Minister Imran Khan raised funds for victims of devastating rains and floods, and received amount to over Rs. 5.5 billion...donated by overseas and domestic Pakistanis. In a second telethon held on September 11, this year, Khan collected approximately Rs.5 billion for the flood-victims.

Besides requesting other countries, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on July 2, 2022 appealed to the countrymen, including overseas Pakistanis, philanthropists and organisations to donate money in the relief fund for the help of flood affected people.

Country's three armed forces, the entire Pakistani nation, civil society and humanitarian organisations (NGOs) have stepped forward to assist in the rescue and relief efforts which continue in the flood-ravaged regions, while the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is also playing its role in this regard.

In fact, whenever the nation of Pakistan faces a major challenge, people look at armed, naval and air forces for support. It is quite true in case of the current flood circumstances, which have wreaked havoc in almost all provinces of the country. The Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Air Force are all actively participating in flood rescue and relief operations.

These forces have established relief funds for the victims of the flooding areas. In this spirit, all the general officers of the army have also donated their one-month salary to help the victims. Apart from this, other officers are also giving financial donations on a voluntary basis. Even, the Pakistan Air Force Women's Association (PAFWA) has collected cash donations amounting to more than Rs 14 million.

And besides monetary assistance, all three branches of the country's defence are distributing rations on-ground. Army has established more than 200 relief collection points across the country and Air Force has also set up camps. Donations by various segments of society are being dispatched to these flood relief camps.

Nevertheless, these three forces have been pounding and distributing packages—basic needs of life such as ration, cooked food packs, fresh drinking water, blankets, clothing items, tents etc. These armed forces have also set up medical camps which are providing with medical treatment and medicine to the flood-affected patients.

Particularly, the Pakistan Army is engaged in a massive rescue and relief operations in the areas affected by torrential rains and flash floods. Army has established a Relief and Rescue Organisation under Headquarters Army Air Defence Command to manage these operations. Army's teams rescued a number of people stranded in the flood-affected areas, including women and children along with their belongings and shifted them to safer places. An example of the relentless bravery shown by the Army is that of Lieutenant General Sarfaraz Ali, Commander Engineers 12 Corps Brigadier Muhammad Khalid, Major Saeed Ahmed, Major Muhammad Talha Manan and Naik Mudassir Fayyaz who embraced martyrdom after their helicopter crashed during en route from Quetta to Karacha in relation to a rescue operation.



An arial view of Shahdadkot city covered with floods water in September 2022. (Photo by Ali Hyder Junejo, licensed under CC BY 2.0)

While, the fleet of helicopters of Army Aviation, the Pakistan Navy and Pakistan Air Force were deployed in flood-stricken areas. Their emergency response teams are also assisting civil administration in rescue and relief efforts of South Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh. Thus, these forces have also saved the life of thousands of individuals.

Notably, Director General (DG) of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Maj-Gen. Babar Iftikhar on September 1, 2022 stated that the nation was generously contributing to the relief efforts of the Army to support the people affected by the floods. He elaborated: "Since the beginning of the crisis caused by the recent monsoon rains, the armed forces were working day and night in the affected areas for the last 2 months".

He added: “Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa had made detailed visits to the flood-affected areas of Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab and reviewed the ongoing relief operations on ground.

It is mentionable that on non-official level, donations have poured in Pakistan’s flood-ravaged regions from some western countries especially from British citizens of Pakistani origin and UK-based charities.

In this respect, The Guardian pointed out August 30, this year: “Aleena Khan, a Pakistani living in London who has family living in north-western Pakistan, where flooding from the Swat River has affected tens of thousands of people, began fundraising on Instagram. Khan planned to raise funds to send to her family...so that they could work on relief efforts directly or pass them on to organisations working in Pakistan. What started as a small appeal on Instagram...exploded into donations pouring in from all over the world...the UK [and from] across Europe...Yasrab Shah, the director of fundraising for British charity, Muslim Hands, confirmed the charity had raised at least £200,000 in emergency relief funds.”

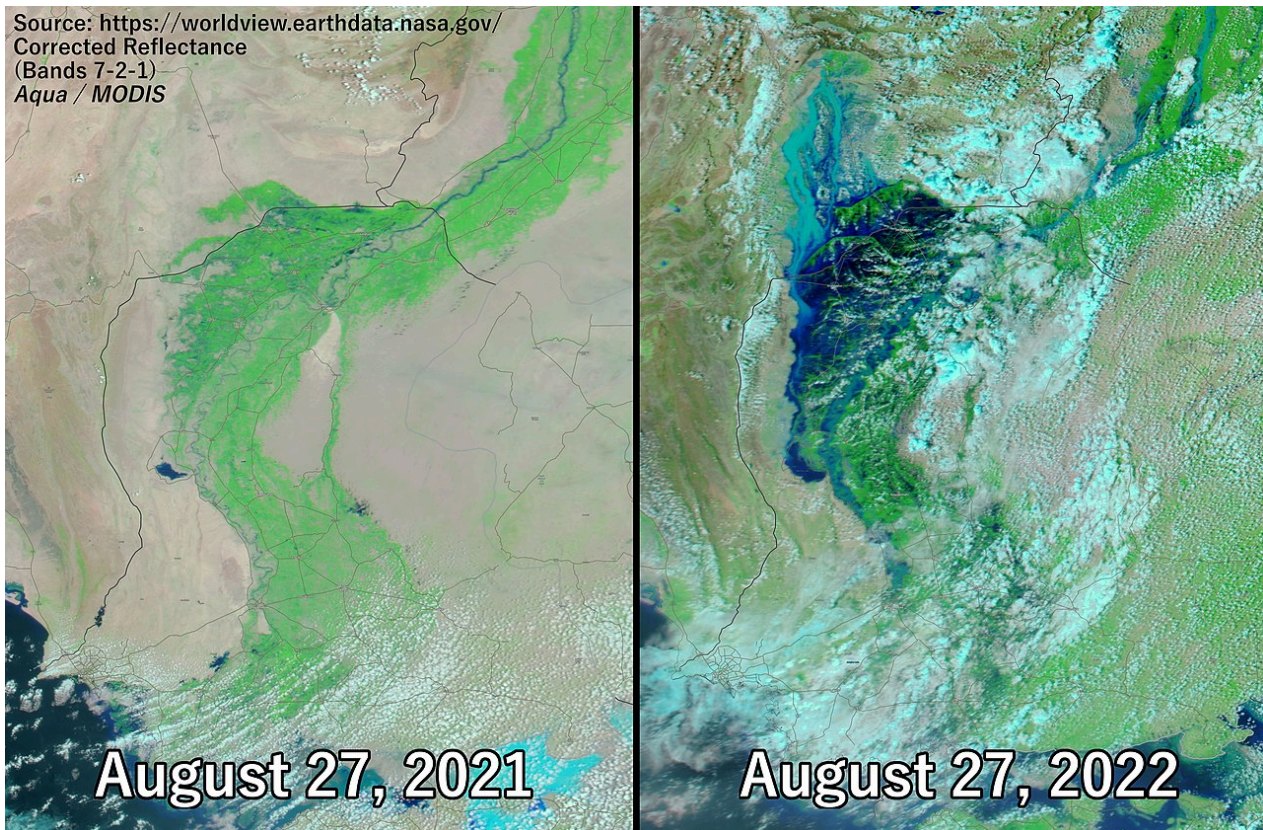
The Guardian added: “In a letter addressed to [The then Prime Minister] Boris Johnson, Yasmin Qureshi, the Labour MP for Bolton South East and chair of the all party parliamentary group on Pakistan, said about £1.5m of financial aid pledged by the UK government to assist with the immediate aftermath of the floods was “insufficient”.

It is notable that many individuals, NGOs, welfare groups, including political and religious entities set up camps in various cities and towns of Pakistan to collect basic necessities of life and have been dispatching to the floods-hit areas.

For instance, based in Lahore, Asani Trust and Bahria Town Housing Society have collected basic needs of life, including mosquito nets and sent to the victims of floods.

Another Lahore-based renowned NGO, Custom Health Care Society led by Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah, dispatched various goods as well as mobile health care vehicle with medical equipments to help the deserving persons, while he himself visited the flood-destructive places and provided the patients with medical consultation, including medicines.

In the meantime, many civilian volunteers of Pakistan are working on the frontlines to conduct rescue operations and deliver emergency relief. In this connection, a journalist of the Morning Edition spoke with one of them: Dr. Imran Lodhi, a climate activist and university teacher who led a group of students to deliver tents and food in Punjab province. Volunteer groups like his have been helping to mobilise people in communities who are trying to reach the affected areas.



2022 Pakistan Floods – August 27, 2021 vs. August 27, 2022 in Sindh Source:

<https://worldview.earthdata.nasa.gov/> Corrected Reflectance (Bands 7-2-1) Aqua / MODIS (Licensed under the public domain)

In this context, Faiz Paracha on the Website of Care International Org wrote on September 1, 2022: “Working with CARE international, I visited one of the worst affected areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa–Nowshehra and Charsada. Both districts have been devastated severely by the flood. Care has established a camp with its local partner (IDEA). This camp is accommodating some 400 families...provided tents, food items, kitchen utensils and hygiene kits. Drinking water tanks are provided twice a day...Fazilat, a 48-year-old Female Health Visitor in a small village in Upper Swat is working relentlessly in order to help the people in need”.

Pakistanis’ philanthropist contributions to the flood-affected people could be judged from another instance. A woman donated her entire gold jewellery to them.

Taking note of the drastic effects of the deadly floods and extraordinary monsoon rains, UN agencies and many western countries, including China, Japan and Islamic countries like Turkey have sent several planes loaded with aid, while the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been one of the most generous contributor, and sent so far 33 flights carrying aid for flood victims. Numerous rich countries as well as the European Union (EU) have also announced financial support. For example, the EU is providing €350,000, and the US just will provide \$30 million in humanitarian aid to respond to the floods.

But, this financial assistance is not enough, as Islamabad requires \$30bn to respond to the massive losses because of extraordinary floods and rains.

In this regard, during a two-day visit to Pakistan, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres appealed to the international community on September 9, 2022 for massive

financial support—flood-hit impoverished Pakistan needs about \$30bn to recover from the floods, which he, himself assessed by surveying these areas through helicopter.

It is noteworthy that during his repeated trip to the flood-affected areas of Sindh on September 10, this year, talking to the media, army chief Gen. Bajwa urged the people of the country to help the flood victim generously and stated that the world will help to some extent.

Nonetheless, apart from the services of the armed forces, Pakistan has a tradition of volunteer help to cope with a catastrophe. This has been seen in case of the current sea-like flood waters which ravaged Pakistan; affecting millions of people.

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