

Earthquake update - 3.5 months later

Dear Friends,

Our work on earthquake relief and rehabilitation continues, albeit at a slower pace because of snow and the freezing winter cold.

As of the present time, donations totaling approximately \$425,000 have been received by the Eqbal Ahmad Foundation (Princeton) and the Eqbal Ahmad Memorial Education Foundation (Islamabad). This was far beyond anything we had expected. We were quite stunned to receive a check for \$200,000 from an anonymous donor, who is most probably on this mailing list, and would like to say a special thanks to him or her.

Approximately \$250,000 of the received funds have so far been spent, the bulk of this has gone towards the construction of 843 primitive shelters (wooden frame with corrugated iron sheets on all sides and some basic insulation on the inside). These are distributed across Kashmir and NWFP. Prof. A.H. Nayyar and Mr. Iqbal Bali have put in a huge amount of effort in assuring that purchased materials have been sent to the right people. In addition, the reconstruction of 15 houses is in progress and some relief materials are still being provided. We are tempted to use the remaining funds for rebuilding of schools, over 16,000 of which were destroyed or damaged. However, we are still exploring possibilities on this point and cannot accept any more donations until we are clear about this. In any case, no construction activities can seriously begin for another 2 months because of weather conditions.

Having just returned from Batgram (in NWFP), I would like to share a number of observations with you. Dr. Arif Mumtaz and I had gone there to monitor the use of building materials supplied to two villages in that area (Shinglipayeen, and another one further north). Among the noteworthy points:

(1) Life has limped back to a kind of normalcy, but most people are still living in tents in spite of the bitter cold. There are two reasons. First, there are daily after-shocks. Most are small but enough to scare. Second, and more importantly, people feel that if they somehow fix their houses and move into them, they will be denied compensation (if and when it comes) by the army authorities.

(2) We learned from residents of the two villages that the army has distributed checks amounting to Rs 25,000 (\$425) to most, but not all, villagers. This is a small amount and it is not known to the villagers whether this is a first installment, or if it will be followed up by others. Some think that there will be five more similar installments, but nobody

really knows. However, to cash these cheques requires a bank account and almost no one has one. This explains why we saw an incredible mile-long queue outside Habib Bank in Batgram town on the way to Shinglipayeen. The bank's business hours are only between 9:00am and 12:00pm. People have stood outside for days on end. We were told that one man froze to death just the night before. What a crying shame. How can the bank people be so utterly callous?

(3) Relief has become a major industry. Aid agencies are present in huge numbers now, and they have put up large banners along roadsides to announce their presence. Islamic organizations predominate, but there are several international organizations present as well: Turks, Cubans, Chinese, UNICEF, USAID, World Food Program,... We saw Chinook helicopters ferrying goods, but the flights are now far fewer than before. There is less army presence in this area as compared to Kashmir, where it is seeking to make a political point by being more active.

(4) All said and done, the forces of God have emerged as the true beneficiaries of his Wrath. Jihadist organizations, which are formally banned as terrorist organizations by the government now, have achieved a new legitimacy and strength in the earthquake areas. They freely use Pakistan army vehicles and facilities, display huge banners, and flaunt their weapons. A month earlier, I had the opportunity to ask the army's official spokesman in Islamabad how this could be permitted but did not receive much of an answer beyond a shrug of his shoulders.

Other than Dr. A.H.Nayyar and Mr. Iqbal Bali, who were mentioned above, those involved in the relief work include Dr. Abdul Hameed Toor, Dr. Faheem Hussain, Dr. Khurshid Hasanain, Dr. Arif Mumtaz, Ms. Hajra Ahmad (EAMEF), Dr. Zia Mian (Princeton, EAF), Dr. Sharon Weiner (Princeton, EAF), and myself. We all thank you for your support, and look forward to the time when the balance of funds goes to zero and our responsibility come to an end.

With best regards,

Pervez

Pervez Hoodbhoy
Professor of Physics
Quaid-e-Azam University
Islamabad 45320, Pakistan.
Phone (R): 92-51-2824257
Phone (O): 92-51-2829914
hoodbhoy@lms.mit.edu