

NOTE

Pakistan : After the Deluge

A Correspondent writes :

Floods in Pakistan have marooned more than 17 million people. Over 1600 people have been killed. The farm sector which is primary to Pakistan's economy has been severely damaged. The country's weak infra-structure is impaired. The Pakistan government's plans of bringing prosperity and peace to the nuclear empowered country have suffered serious setbacks. It will be difficult for the Pakistan authorities to repel a growing Taliban insurgency that has sprung out of the border region with Afghanistan. The Pakistan economy was showing an inability to serve Pakistan's largely poor and young population of 180 million, which contributed to deepening poverty and militancy. The collapsed economy will take a long time to rebalance. Despite the history of military rule, democratic government is threatened by the flood disaster, popular discontent and militant extremism. The flood deluge has temporarily abated the urgency of military campaigns to curb Islamist terror outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, or raising more tax.

Pakistan's sphere of influence in the region has also been damaged. While emergency efforts to render assistance to the flood displaced millions have not disrupted military deployment in the border areas with Afghanistan, any expansion of operations against militants is ruled out in the near future. The flood disaster has disrupted agreed targets on economic growth, curbs to inflation and reduction of budget deficits. Over the past two decades, Pakistan's agrarian and textile producing economy had deteriorated considerably. Excessive rains and floods have led to displacement and damage to the agricultural sector, which have further imperilled economic recovery and strained the banking sector. The humanitarian emergency has raised Pakistan's number of people below the poverty line from 33% of the population to 40%. An eighth of the people in Pakistan, that is about 20 million people, have been affected by the floods. Millions of dollars worth of crops and livestock are lost. Destruction has afflicted every region.

The floods have added to the long term hardships of lack of housing, food shortages and price increases. Economic and Security problems can precipitate larger-scale social upheavals. There are angry accusations that officials have guided relief to their own party supporters. Powerful landlords and politicians have diverted onrushing flood waters, to protect their own lands, at the loss and expense of others. Besides the immediate hardships, there are prolonged hunger and homelessness. The government has intentionally redirected floodwaters through Baluchistan. Homes and farmlands of one million people have been inundated in Baluchistan, which is Pakistan's poorest province and a thorn in the flesh of the Pakistani ruling elite because of a separatist movement. Political struggles have erupted locally and nationally in Pakistan, degenerating into ethnic turf wars. The continuing threat from the Taliban and other militant groups have not subsided. □□□