

# EARTHQUAKE CALAMITY

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## SPEECH ON THE SENATE FLOOR

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1. The earthquake of 8<sup>th</sup> October 2005 was a national calamity. It is unfortunate, that the Senate is discussing the earthquake and its consequences after one month. Yet it is an important opportunity to review the whole situation and set some guidelines to appropriately meet this challenge.
2. Such calamities have two dimensions: one the physical aspect and the other the moral, spiritual and civilisational message they convey. Non-Islamic approaches confine their concerns to the physics dimension only. The Islamic approach takes full cognizance of the physical dimension but also seriously addresses to the moral and the spiritual aspects. The Quran integrates the physical and moral approaches and informs human beings to rise above the physical to apprehend the moral dimension. Alhamdulillah, the people of Pakistan have responded to this change with faith in Allah (subhanahu wa Ta'ala) and the Western media was wonder struck to see how even young boys of 9 or 10 said that the Divine Will (Allah ki Raza) is supreme and we accept it. This is a great source of strength and an effective shock absorber. However, the leadership and those in authority in every level of national life must do some honest heart-searching to realize how we have departed from our Islamic precepts. Everyone must commit to bring about the changes in their personal and collective behaviour that could please Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala and be in conformity with the objectives for which Pakistan was established. Moral regeneration and establishment of justice and fair-play in society is the ' real recipe for physical and socio-economic security.
3. It is important that the Nation has faced this calamity with faith and fortitude and the best in the society has come out to share the agony and sufferings of their fellow countrymen. All political differences were set aside and the Nation responded as one solid fraternity. It has also become very clear that our best friends are our brothers in the Islamic Ummah and the support from the peoples and Governments of the Muslim world has been overwhelming. According to one estimate some 76% of the external aid has come from the Muslim Ummah. While we thank all countries and people who have extended support in our hour of need the feelings of the Pakistani people and leadership are that the Western world, for whom Pakistan has taken many unnecessary risks, has not come upto the expectations in view of their resources. There is also discrimination if we look to the manner and extent to which they extended help in case of calamities like Katrina and Tsunami. It is time that we

review our Foreign Policy and recast it in a manner that is in keeping with the ground realities and Pakistan's vital interests.

4. While we should be forward looking, it is also important that we should have an objective and critical look on our failures. Some vital deficiencies and shortcomings of Pakistan have been badly exposed in the face of this catastrophe. The Geological Survey of Pakistan is ill equipped to monitor seismic changes and there is no other institution to provide timely warning in case of another similar situation. There is not a single highly qualified seismologist in Pakistan. It is a pathetic situation.
5. There is no civil or military agency capable of facing such a calamity and provide timely recovery and relief to the affected persons. We do not have necessary technology or expertise even to cut RCC plates, monitor symptoms of life from the debris and rescue injured persons. All over the world there are standby arrangements to face such calamities. But Pakistani leaderships have failed to develop any such facilities. This is alarming that even Army did not have that type of equipment and capability. The fact is that similar situations can, God forbid, arise even in the face of enemy attack and if we lack such infrastructure it is simply disastrous. The equipment and the expertise that was made available by Turkey, Iran, UK, Italy and Japan is something we must have by way of standby arrangements.
6. It is extremely important that Crisis Management and Disaster Relief should be among our national priorities. It is known that there is a 1952 Civil Defence Act, and there was also another enactment known as 'National Calamities (Prevention and Relief) Act, 1958'. A Disaster Management Cell was established in the Prime Minister's Secretariat in the wake of 1974 earthquake in Northern parts of NWFP and in 2000 a Centre for Crisis Situation was established in the Ministry of Interior for similar purpose which is headed by a retired Brigadier. It seems that these laws were only dead words and the so called Disaster Management Cell had no operational relevance. It is also reported that UNDP had initiated a Project of National Disaster Management Agency with a financial support programme for five years to the tune of 155 million rupees. Unfortunately all this has been dumped in files. Even the Fire Brigade is not equipped to meet such situations. There is no Civil Defence Agency to immediately come into operation when any calamity visits the country. This state of affairs is alarming and deserves to be addressed to immediately. The Nation must always be prepared to face such challenges. Turkey and Iran have developed highly efficient and technologically upto date infrastructures during the last few years. Development of such facilities should be our priority. Moreover it is important that civil defence training programme and fire brigade facilities should be upgraded to meet such calamities. Revamping of the

curricula of schools and colleges should also be reactivated to equip our students with capabilities to meet such challenges. It is unfortunate that Scouts Movements and National Cadet Corp facility that were available even during British Raj find no place in our educational system. We are more interested in "performing arts" and less in preparing the nation to face the hard realities of life. A total mind change is needed.

7. We appreciate what the Government and the Armed Forces are NOW doing in respect of rescue, relief and recovery. The efforts made by all participants: Government, NCOS, national and international volunteers deserve to be acknowledge and appreciated. But it would be height of folly to ignore the fact that the Government machinery took too long to realize the gravity of the situation and put up appropriate response. Gen Pervez Musharraf is on record to have acknowledged that he had no idea of the extent of the calamity till late in the evening on St<sup>^</sup> October. It took eleven hours for the President/Chief of Staff of the Army to become aware of what has really happened on the ground. The Information Minister was telling Private TV channels hours after the quack that life in the city is normal and business is taking place A Corpse Commander of the effected province had the audacity to say on the second day of the earthquake that media is exaggerating the extent of causalities and the number of dead is around 1000. Army took three days to get mobilized to reach the affected areas. We have fleets of Mercedes Benzes and bullet proof- cars, but we lack helicopters to ferry supplies in calamity and rescue the dying hurricanes from the affected areas. This is a very farming situation and we cannot condone it only because now the Government has "awakened to the calamity. There should be accountability for what has happened. The nation deserves to know why the Armed Forces available in the region and regions close by were not mobilized immediately after the calamity. Why forces from Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Mangla were not moved immediately and why the NWFP and Azad Kashmir had to wait for the forces to move from Gujranwala, which is over three hundred kilometers from the affected areas. This question cannot be put under the carpet.
8. The question of continued lack of coordination between the Army, the Civil Government, the Federal Government and Provincial Government the NGOs and the International Aid Groups and local volunteers has come into sharp focus. Despite some improvement the problem persists. A more fundamental question relates to the total bypassing of the Parliament and marginalizing all the civil Governments from top to bottom. In fact the much acclaimed local governments were conspicuous by their absence. Parliament was totally ignored. There is no evidence that even Cabinet was involved in key decision-making. AH major decisions were made by one person in the name of unified command. This has lead to an overall

militarization of the entire process. Army has to play an important role in such situations in any country. But Army has to come in support of the Civil Authority and has to operate to assist it and not to dominate it. The appointment of a Relief Commission, the establishment of Earthquake Relief and Rehabilitation Authority, the question of opening of borders along LoC in Kashmir, the permission to have NATO forces on our soil, were key issues involving national sovereignty and constitutional propriety. All these decisions were made by one person without consulting the Cabinet and without taking the Parliament into confidence. This is against the Constitution and its concerned structure. The Earthquake Relief Authority headed by one Lt Gen is expected to receive and manage billions of rupees, an amount expected to be almost equal to one third of the total national budget. It was established simply by an administrative order and not by an act of the Parliament. There is no evidence and even this order has emanated on the basis of any decision of the Cabinet. A Cabinet Committee was formed but there is no evidence that it ever met. This type of centralization makes the entire rule process arbitrary. The Parliament's direct oversight over the whole process is a must and the Parliament must assert its authority.

9. The challenges that we may face for the future are grave. It is only through national consensus, effective Parliamentary oversight, total transparency and complete accountability that we can acquit of our responsibilities. I would like to conclude by making followings suggestions:
  1. There must be a all-powerful Committee of the Parliament with representation from all major parties represented in the National Assembly and Senate to immediately review the whole programme and recast it to cater for the relief affairs in the changed situation. This Committee should be the final authority and should be responsible for financial control as well as administrative policy decisions.
  2. The Earthquake Authority should not be a temporary institution and it should be re-structured through an act of the Parliament, laying down its functions, powers and system for accountability. Its reports must go to the Parliament every three months. The arbitrary powers given in the present arrangements should be done away with. There should be involvement of all Provinces in this Authority.
  3. There is an urgent need to establish proper and well-equipped Crisis Management Authority to face such calamities in the future.

4. The restructuring phase should start as early as possible and in such a manner that the whole process becomes part of the Civil Government with close cooperation between the Centre and the Provinces. All operational arrangements must be through the Provinces and the Local Governments should also play a key role. Without this devolution the whole thing could become counter-productive. The earthquake should not be used to impose a unitary presidential system on the country with Army as its operational Wing. It is important that the Army's role should be restricted to what is bare essential. It is the civil administration which should take over the whole process of reconstruction and rehabilitation. This is also in the best interest of the Army because its reputation would suffer due to its involvement in such activities, a process that has unfortunately begun. Its immediate role in relief and recovery was necessary but to use it for a paradigm change from civil system to a kind of Marshal Arrangements would be disastrous both for the country and the Armed Forces. It is a very sensitive and urgent issue and should be addressed without delay.
5. It is important to realize that continuity of Khaima cities and perpetuation: of refugee camps would be a national disaster. Proper planning should be made for the re-development of the devastated regions, with active participation of affected persons and their families, and involvement: of local and provincial governments in this process. Sooner this is done the better. Otherwise it is going to have serious economic social moral 'and: political consequences. Governments should concentrate on infrastructure development and facilitate people to build their houses and find out new- avenues for economic support themselves. Any other option would create more problems.
6. Reform of to introduce first aid, disaster management and such other subjects and facilities and promotion of scouts movement and NCCs should be given priority. This is much important than the so-called volunteer corp. which is going to be in fiasco. We already had many a Mujahid Force and Janbaz and what not. It is of no use repeating old mistakes.
7. The question of effective medical aid to and support system for the affected particularly those who have lost their limbs, is also important. So is the question of permanent long period

arrangements for widows, orphans and the incapacitated. This calls for a comprehensive master plan for these victims of the quack.

8. Finally the question of mobilization of financial resources is also a very important one. The support that has come from abroad is much less than what is needed. It is only through self-reliance and mobilization of support from within; the Pakistan diasporas and the Muslim Ummah that support from recognized international agencies and friendly countries should also be further developed. We must shed off all complacency and face this challenge realistically and with honesty.
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