

6th ANNUAL HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CONFERENCE

25th, 26th and 27th of March 2011.

Global Transformations and local mobility:

Rebuilding Pakistan after crises

Preconference Report

The summer of 2010 produced Pakistan's worst flooding in 80 years. Nearly 20 million people - an eighth of the population (equivalent to the population of New York State) - have been significantly affected. The number in critical need of assistance is about 10 million and expected to rise, while more than half of them are without shelter.

In spite of Pakistani and foreign aid/ relief efforts to save people and secure their property, the nation's worst natural calamity had washed away a significant proportion of the infrastructure— roads, bridges, health clinics, schools and communications.

Poorly executed relief efforts, corruption and nepotism have added to the mistrust that many Pakistanis already harbor for their civilian political leaders. Government officials are at the receiving end of scathing criticism from both the flood victims as well as politicians, who levy serious allegations against the former for inefficiency and corruption. Apart from the widespread destruction caused by Pakistan's worst-ever flooding to its citizenry and infrastructure, the country also stands the risk of civil unrest, exacerbating sectarian and class divisions.

Through the conference we hope to create an environment where individuals or agencies working in disaster mitigation and reconstruction may come together to discuss the varying dimensions which will help in capacity building and more strategic and practical planning in disaster preparedness, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Prior to the floods, Pakistan was already well-steeped into violence and insecurity, acting as a host to a string of brazen military attacks – the summer commenced on a grim note as the growing sectarian fissure deepened, when approximately 80 people belonging to the minority Ahmadiyya sect were killed and several critically injured in twin coordinated Taliban attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques. Later in September, amidst desperate call for funds and efforts to rehabilitate the millions of flood affected victims, three suicide bombers struck a procession of Shiite Muslim worshippers, killing at least 25 and wounding over 200 others. Both events amongst various other low-profile sectarian clashes exemplify the constantly evolving and growing sectarian schism that more than often culminates into irretrievable loss of innocent human lives.

Brutality and lack of justice was further exemplified by the murder of two young brothers who were stoned to death by an angry mob over a trivial “cricket” dispute in Sialkot – both boys were tortured to death by stones, bricks, wooden sticks and iron rods before their dead bodies were hung to a tree and nearly set on fire.

Amidst these dismal conditions, Pakistan’s problems continued to grow when the cricket-loving nation was staggered by allegations that some players on their national team had been involved in illegal match tampering or “fixing” during tour of England. The news was devastating for Pakistanis across the world, who had hoped that victory on the

cricket pitch might compensate for the devastation caused by the worst floods in its history, incessant militancy attacks, and continued political turbulence.

In conclusion, with religious extremism employing suicide bombings as a medium to voice its ideology; incidents like the Sialkot killings reflecting the inadequacies of the state apparatuses to combat brutality; an exacerbating disparity between the rich and the poor; sectarian violence materializing into violent and bloody collisions; lack of freedom manifest in a strictly monitored media and natural disasters taking a heavy toll on the nation's already lackluster infrastructure, demoralized citizenry, shattered economy and an overwhelmingly distraught society – this conference aspires to academically deal with these issues and facilitate the interaction of the academic world with real world circumstances.