

President orders probe into reports of discrimination against minorities in relief operations



SUKKUR, Sep 1 (APP) President Asif Ali Zardari has taken exception to the media reports that some members of the minority communities were denied flood relief assistance and driven out of the relief camps in Sindh province and called for an inquiry and action against officials if found involved. Spokesperson to the President, Farhatullah Babar said that the President taking note of media reports of a protest rally in Hyderabad on Monday against the maltreatment of Dalits in flood relief called for a probe into the matter and steps to ensure that no discrimination was shown in the relief and rehabilitation operations.

The President said that floods were a natural disaster and should serve to unite the people, not divide them. It will be most unfortunate and reflect poorly on the country's image and adversely impact on national unity if relief work was influenced by considerations of caste, creed or ethnicity.

"All citizens of the country have equal rights and more so people who have been hit by the worst natural disaster in the history of the country. Discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds cannot be tolerated", he added.

President Zardari called for an inquiry into the reports of discrimination and appropriate measures to ensure that the relief work was not influenced by such considerations. The President also called for action against officials if found involved in discrimination in the relief and rehabilitation works, the spokesperson said.

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EDITORIAL

Discrimination in aid

Dawn Editorial

Wednesday, 01 Sep, 2010 | 01:40 PM PST |

It is no secret that ethnic, sectarian and religious minorities in Pakistan face discrimination, but recent reports that this deplorable mindset is affecting flood relief efforts are deeply disturbing. On Monday, a large number of people in Hyderabad were driven to taking out a protest rally against the maltreatment of minority community flood victims. They cited two occasions when they were attacked and driven out of a relief camp.

A day before that, flood-affected families at an emergency relief camp in Thatta district complained that they were being refused aid, even by government officials, because they were Dalits. There have been numerous other reports: people being refused shelter because of their ethnicity, caste or religion, being discriminated against in the distribution of aid goods and being driven away from or forced to live on the very margins of the few camps that exist.

Discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds is deeply entrenched in Pakistan and will not change overnight. Yet that it is being used as an excuse to strip people of their rights as equal citizens even during a time of calamity is abhorrent. Whether Muslim, Hindu or Christian, high caste or low caste, the flood victims are all equally deserving of the attention of official and non-official aid channels. Resources are scarce and the desperate number in millions. Providing help across the board to the best of its abilities, irrespective of any ideology, is the first task of the state and society. Apart from the victims' equal right to survival essentials such as shelter, potable water and food, the fact that the country was even before the floods rent along ethnic, sectarian and religious grounds must be kept in mind. Discrimination at this time will only deepen the divide and cause resentment that could unravel any possibility of future cohesiveness.

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Karachi

Caste becomes barrier between flood victims and relief

Monday, August 30, 2010

By Jan Khakheli

Karachi

Caste still seems to playing a pivotal role in our society even at this time of devastation and misery, as a number of flood-stricken families are being denied aid by government officials at the Mir Imdad camp, outside the historical Jhirk Town, Thatta district, simply because they belong to a low-caste ethnic group. They are Dalits.

"The government is not ready to consider us as flood victims," said Gulab, son of Kirshan, a Dalit by caste. "Despite the fact that all of our belongings were washed away by the flood, we are not receiving food or any other stuff."

Apart from Gulab, there are at least seven other Dalit families living outside camps that were set up in the same vicinity after the floodwaters inundated the Tando Hafiz Shah town and 11 other villages.

Local philanthropists come to distribute food and other items among people at the camps except the Dalits. Especially, at the time of Iftari, crowds of local people could be seen giving food, fruit and sweets to the children but Gulab's kids can only become spectators, not beneficiaries. If the children of the Dalits stand in a queue to get some food, other children identify them and elbow them out.

"It seems there is no place for us — neither at the camp nor in people's hearts," Gulab said. "We survived the flood but this discrimination is proving hard for us to endure," he said, adding that his children are still waiting for help. "Any kind of help," he emphasised.

When the water hit Tando Hafiz Shah and other villages, the low-caste families, who would cultivate vegetables in the riverbed as sharecroppers before the flood, also shifted to the Jhirk town, the only place they found safe at the time in the surrounding area.

Govindo, who is also living at a makeshift camp, took a sip of tea at a local tea stall while watching TV and told The News that the children of the urban elite visit the camps and distribute toys and sweets among the flood-hit children to express solidarity with them. "But this solidarity is expressed with those who are not Dalits," he said. "In this situation, we don't have any other option but to wait for the day we could be able to retrieve our farms, which we lost in the floods."

Gopaldas Bagri, a Dalit who belongs to the Darri Union Council of the Kashmir district, told The News that at least 50 Dalit families were displaced from the vicinity when the Guddu barrage received high flow of water and the Katcha area was inundated. He said that he had approached different organizations engaged in rescue and relief work to pay attention towards the Dalit community who have also lost their belongings to the flood.

"I cannot understand that why, even at this moment, we are being refused and deprived of food. Our children are crying in hunger at makeshift homes and we are unable to give them a piece of meal," he said.

Mussarat Mandhrio, an activist from Thatta, said that the Dalits are not the victims of the flood only but they are also victims of an abominable mindset of certain people who visit the relief camps to distribute food. It seems there is no place on earth for these people, he added.

They go to government-run relief camps in search of food but they are denied a morsel of bread. Several families belonging to groups considered to be low caste, including Kolhis, Bagris and Bheelis, are waiting for food and proper shelter in the open near the historical Jhirk town. "These people have been isolated," he said.

Mandhrio complains that the government's registration authorities are refusing to treat the Dalits as flood victims. Owing to non-registration at camps, the Dalits are not supposed to receive ration from the government or local philanthropists, he added.

More News

■ 'Seven people dying at camps every day'

KarachiThe Sindh government apprehended on Sunday that destruction in the shape of epidemics might engulf the province, as around seven people were dying at the relief camps everyday. These views were expressed at a joint briefing by the advisers to the chief minister of Sindh, Jameel Ahmed Soomro and Dr Kaiser Bengali, on Sunday evening at [View Details](#)

■ Dr Bengali said that the initial loss was estimated to be Rs438 billion.

He said that an accurate extent of the damages could be known when the water receded.OFFICIALS SUSPENDED: The Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Qaim Ali Shah, suspended five officials for their alleged "negligence" during flood duties, a government spokesman said on Sunday.These officials included the regional revenue officer of Larkana, Mohamm [View Details](#)

■ Four gunned down in Karachi

KarachiFour people were gunned down in separate incidents in the city on Sunday. Two men, including a shoepkeeper, were killed when armed men opened indiscriminate fire in the Shoe Market, Usmanabad, area in the remit of the Garden police station, to force the closure of shops.Police took into custody two miscreants for killing the shopkeep [View Details](#)

■ Husband sues actress Noor for issuing defamatory statement

KarachiPakistani actress Noor's Indian husband has filed an application in the Sindh High Court, seeking publication of court summon in newspapers against his estranged spouse in a Rs10 million lawsuit that he filed against Noor for issuing defamatory statements in the media regarding their matrimonial life.Vikram Aditya Manghnani, a UAE-ba [View Details](#)

■ LERP may be converted into development agency

KarachiThe Lyari Expressway Resettlement Project (LERP) is likely to be converted into a development agency to generate funds by auctioning commercial plots to run the project, The News has learnt.This idea was floated during a recent meeting about the LERP chaired by the Sindh Chief Secretary, Fazalur Rehman. The participants decided to st [View Details](#)

■ PSQCA team raids DHA Bachat Bazaar

Pakistan's first mobile testing laboratory equipped with testing facilities under the supervision of Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) officers once again raided the Sunday Bachat Bazaar, Block 8, DHA, Khyaban-e-Ittehad along with print and electronic media team and members of various NGOs to ensure the transparent testing p [View Details](#)

■ Number of IDPs at CDGK camps exceeds 46,000

KarachiThe number of flood victims lodged at 41 relief camps established by the City District Government Karachi (CDGK) had crossed the 46,000 mark by Sunday noon.The city government is providing food, clean drinking water, medical aid, and other items to flood victims at its camps. The internally displaced persons (IDPs) have also been pro [View Details](#)