

## The lost generation

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Article

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ON Dec 26, 2005, we recalled the first tragic anniversary of the Asian tsunami. While some are finding their way to normalcy, there are many others who are still struggling. This is not due to a lack of effort, aid or self-help. It is just that the impact of the tragedy was too devastating.

Indeed, a tremor that occurred recently, albeit a milder one, still sent chills down the spine of many people in Aceh.

Then there was the massive earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, which hit Pakistan, Afghanistan and northern India exactly three months ago on Oct 8 in South Asia.

The earthquake caused widespread destruction in northern Pakistan.

Twenty-eight after-shocks occurred with a magnitude greater than 5.0 during the four days after the principal quake.



**FINDING A LITTLE WARMTH:** A woman and her children take refuge from the freezing cold in a tent in the Mera Tanolian refugee camp in the devastated city of Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. -

Thus, just like the tsunami, this one is another unprecedented natural disaster of its kind.

In comparison, the earthquake is much worse as about four million people in Pakistan alone lost their homes, nearly half of them Children.

Of the estimated 75,000 people who died in the mountains of northern Pakistan, children make up half" of the number, according to the United Nations.

It confirms fears that the disaster had claimed the lives of one generation, in addition to more than 1,300 who died in India.

If the number of missing people is taken to be "dead", then the number of dead may actually be around 200,000.

The quake hit at the start of a school day, causing thousands of schools to collapse at the same time.

Figures from local government showed that at least 17,000 students died while they were in schools; many more were injured.

Doctors are still struggling to contain disease outbreaks, compounded by the rain and snow that is now adding to the misery of the thousands who are already homeless and deprived.

The weather forecast for the next few days is not encouraging. It predicts severe cold wave conditions associated with abnormally low night temperatures and high wind chill till the weekend.

In the last few days, most of the quake-hit areas suffered widespread rain and heavy snow, followed by a severe cold wave, according to the weather report.

This severe cold wave has already enveloped the western part of the country, and night temperatures have fallen to largely below freezing point in most of the quake-hit areas.

This weather is expected to prevail over the quake-hit areas during the current week.

Reportedly, the northern areas of Pakistan are still under the influence of passing westerly waves which are likely to produce isolated or occasional light rain or snow over the mountains.

Already, an estimated 150,000 people remain above the snowline and, given the prevailing climate, the outlook appears bleak for those who remain isolated.

More than two million people have been camping out since the quake in tents or flimsy shelters built in the rubble of their homes.

As this column is being written, Pakistan recorded heavy snow across the high ground while rain drenched the valleys overnight.

Tents have collapsed under the weight of snow and there have been landslides and rockfalls due to heavy rain across the fractured mountains, although there have been no reports of major incidents. In some places, most tents have come down as they loosen in the wet ground.

The bad weather has also caused poor visibility, forcing aid flights to be suspended.

Delivery of assistance, including tents, clothes, food and other provisions to survivors are affected, according to an official source.

The situation will worsen if the weather does not improve because roads will remain impassable due to the landslides and snow.

It is not only in the vicinity of the quake that people are facing problems. Temporary shelters and camps in the middle of the city near the tragedy, for example at Jalalabad Park, are falling apart.

Sanitation and waste disposal facilities are almost non-existent.

The number of camps are growing daily as thousands of people and survivors come down from the mountains for shelter and aid.

The fear is that the shelters will be a source of diseases and epidemics.

There are reports of increasing respiratory infections among survivors.

Already, 2,000 to 3,000 people have had their limbs amputated because they could not get timely treatment for their injuries.

International leaders estimate damage and reconstruction cost as a result of the Pakistan destruction alone will total US\$5 billion (RM18.8 billion).

Direct damage and indirect economic losses from the quake have totalled US\$2.3 billion, according to a report by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

Most aid donors have promised about US\$6 billion, most of this is reportedly for medium- and long-term reconstruction.

But what is most needed, and quickly, are immediate assistance against the bitter winter-that is beginning to grip the region.

It is forecast that at least half of the four million are in danger of freezing to death.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees chief Antonio Guterres said recently:

"Pakistan has been the most generous host country in the world for refugees and it's time for us to be strongly committed to help the people who have suffered much in this disaster."

He urged the world to prevent a further tragedy in the winter. Unfortunately, Pakistan's official website (<http://www.earthquakepakistan.com>) said the country had only received 12 per cent of the promised aid: tents, stoves and shelter.

In contrast, for the tsunami, 80 per cent of the aid pledged to the UN was realised in two weeks although some did take the opportunity to dump their worn-out longings and expired food items, according to the website.

All the heart-breaking and harrowing stories we have been hearing about in East Asia have been happening just three months after the earthquake. What more is in stock for the miserable quake victims?

And in a couple, of days as the Muslim world marks the day of sacrifice (*korban*), it is apt that we join hands to "sacrifice" the little we can for fellow human beings who have suffered from all forms of disasters, not least from the epic earthquake.

Wishing Muslim readers Eid ul-Adha.

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