

Govt has taken timely steps to face flood challenges: Wajid

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LONDON, Aug 24 (APP): Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK Wajid Shamsul Hasan has said Islamabad has taken measures in accordance with the challenges posed by the floods. In his guest contribution for Reuters, he said simultaneously, the international response has been quick and robust and it is gathering pace. "The panic button on a slow response pushed by some international NGOs was understandable as they must have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the crisis." The international media, he added, has been asking why there has been a lukewarm response to the massive floods in Pakistan. Various explanations have been offered ranging from a trust deficit to a negative perception about Pakistan. Such commentaries are not only alarmist but portray Pakistan in bad light.

Hasan said there is a need to put the record straight that there is no lukewarm response to appeals made domestically or internationally. "It is natural that in a calamity of monumental proportions damage assessment takes some time before a comprehensive response is made."

Explaining how the flood situation unfolded in Pakistan, the High Commissioner said the massive rains which inundated Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa province had such a ferocious intensity that it took a while for the government and NGOs to realize how big was the challenge.

Subsequently, the remaining parts of the country received abnormal rains which swelled the rivers to dangerous levels. The images on TV screens have not only been scary but have shaken everyone to gear up for action.

Naturally, the immediate concern was to save lives. This was effectively done by the government which is why the casualty rate has been minimal (approximately 1,600) if compared to the Asian Tsunami of 2004 when 230,000 people died while in the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar 146,000 people lost their lives.

UN officials have admitted that the floods in Pakistan have been worse than the Asian Tsunami. Having learnt lessons in the 2005 earthquake, the armed forces and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) immediately moved to save lives for which the government should be given credit.

He mentioned that the international media is rightly pointing out that the magnitude of Pakistan's current tragedy is almost more than the mind can take in. As for the damages, a fifth of the country (135,000 Sq km) is flooded by torrential monsoon rains; 20 million people have been driven from their homes or otherwise affected; six million children need emergency assistance, such as food and clean water; millions of acres of the country's best cropland are underwater; thousands of livestock have drowned; medical clinics have been destroyed while cholera and other water-borne diseases are threatening the survivors.

These are the immediate challenges which the government has to grapple with. The United Nations has launched an appeal for \$460 million for immediate relief.

Looming ahead, he added, is the enormous challenge of rebuilding the country's shattered bridges, roads, structures and agricultural and economic base.

The government is determined to rebuild the destroyed infrastructure through its own resources as well as international assistance. Already efforts are afoot to negotiate international assistance through friendly countries and international financial institutions.

“As a government we are determined to rebuild the shattered lives of our people come what may. The propaganda against the government regarding a lack of transparency or trust deficit is an attempt to defame democracy and the country’s politicians”.

Such propaganda is not only misleading but dangerous for the country. Despite being overwhelmed due to the enormity of the situation, the civil and military institutions of the country are busy in providing succor to the affected people.

The High Commissioner expressed amazement on doubts about the credibility of the government and said these are cast by those elements in the country that do not represent the people.

“And internationally, by those who do not want a stable and democratic Pakistan in the region. But this is not the first time we would be grappling with such a crisis as a nation. However, one thing is certain that we will prove the doomsayers wrong and defeat the forces of obscurantism with determination.”