

IDPs' problems compound in face of rising militancy

By Mahmood Iqbal

Khaista Rehman (name changed) playfully strokes a sack of wheat flour he receives from the aid distribution point of World Food Program (WFP) in Peshawar, the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The young man in his early 20s has to either share the flour with a fellow internally displaced person (IDP), because he is entitled to receive only 30 kilogram and the sack weighs 40 kg, or he will have to pay to the man for the commodity.

Khaista's family, like thousands of other IDP families from the conflict zone in northwestern Pakistan, prefers to live in a rented mud-house instead of moving into an IDP camp, where squalid conditions prevail despite the fact that a host of humanitarian organizations and government agencies are engaged to relieve sufferings of the IDPs.

"Living in an IDP camp is like compromising one's self-respect and honor", says Khaista from Kurram Agency where Taliban militants have virtually blocked the main land route to the agency bordering Afghanistan on three sides.

Scores of IDP camps sprang up across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the wake of an intense military campaign launched by Pakistani security forces in Malakand Division, particularly Swat, Dir and Buner districts, and in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), including North and South Waziristan, Kurram, Orakzai, Khyber, Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies, to wrest control of these areas from the Taliban.

The war displaced people streaming out of the conflict zone ended up in make-shift tent settlements in the neighboring and relatively peaceful districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. National and international non-governmental organizations, aid agencies and government departments channel billions of rupees to prevent a human catastrophe.

To respond to the immediate needs of the displaced people, the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa set up the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) to coordinate relief efforts and aid distribution to the IDPs.

"The government allocated Rs one billion for the ERU at the outset to prioritize needs of the IDPs, but this money was spent on the preparation of signboards, banners, promotional literature, offices and fixtures for the new body which saw the axe soon after it started functioning and the staff and equipment were shifted to a new body – Provincial Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Settlement Authority (PRRSA) – set up for the same purpose", says a former official of ERU.

Brig (ret'd) Mahmood Shah, a defence analyst and former secretary (security) Fata, says that the setting up and winding up of relief coordination and executing bodies speaks of the institutional decay in the public sector. "There are not less than half

a dozen government departments, beside a host of national and international aid agencies, working for the displaced and war stricken people, but we don't see any improvement in the lot of the IDPs", says Mr Shah.

"The government should have strengthened the civil defence institution to streamline efforts to alleviate suffering of the IDPs instead of creating more and more bodies to make way for misappropriation of funds and mess up the situation", says Mahmood Shah.

Presently, beside PRRSA, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Fata Disaster Management Authority (FDMA) and District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Provincial Relief Commissionerate, Social Welfare Department of provincial government, civil secretariat Fata, Special Support Group (SSG) of Pakistan Army, UNHCR, Unicef, WFP, UNOCHA and Afghan Commissionerate have been working to ensure relief and coordinate efforts for relief to the people displaced by the rise of militancy and the subsequent military operations, but the situation remains fluid and very volatile, says Mr Shah.

"Lack of transparency is major obstacle to effective governance in Pakistan, particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Fata. Despite having rampant corruption in their own ranks, militants have exploited visible government corruption and lack of transparency to create a favorable narrative that appeals to the communities", says a senior official of Fata secretariat.

According to the official, the creation of new mechanisms for transparency and accountability will be essential to restoring the effectiveness of the state. The existing political agent system in Fata runs counter to the control of corruption and enhancement of transparency", he says.

A report of the Auditor General of Pakistan office, which was submitted to the parliament on Sept 24, 2010, shows that Rs 2.5 billion have been lost due to "commonly occurring irregularities" in various departments of the armed forces.

Background interviews with IDPs in the Jalojai and Benazir camps and other temporary settlements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show that deficits of governance, rule of law, political representation and responsiveness on the part of the state to the citizen needs have emerged as critical dimensions of the crisis.

The ascendancy of militancy in Swat, for example, is directly linked to the perceived degradation in the responsiveness of the justice system and a trust deficit between the government and the people. The militants have effectively exploited the inadequacy and slowness of justice by presenting themselves as effective arbiters of the law.

Women IDPs say that the biggest problem in Fata is the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Under this law, the political agent (PA), who is the chief administrator of the tribal agency, wields unprecedented power. "I believe that the president of the country can not hold a PA accountable for bad administration and shady utilization of funds", says Naheeda Begum, who lives with her six children in a tent at the Jalojai camp.

Federal Minister of Finance Dr Hafeez Sheikh tells a session of the

National Assembly, lower house of the parliament that the government has written off loans worth Rs 50 billion in the past two years. He discloses these figures in a reply to a question by a lawmaker of Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM).

The National Corruption Perception Survey 2009 of Transparency International Pakistan indicates that the overall corruption in government departments has increased from Rs 45 billion to Rs 195 billion in 2009.

A report of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) shows that MNAs' assets declared to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) have increased three-fold compared to the previous assembly, which shows spiraling corrupt practices in the power corridors, says Mahmood Shah.

A distinct storyline emerges from the examination of the drivers and structural sources of crisis identified by the communities and stakeholders. IDP women say that the Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR) is the root cause of the social, political and financial woes of the tribal people.

The FCR has imbued a lack of trust among the tribal population over the government departments' working to improve the social and economic conditions of the terror stricken people. Officials point out that drastic changes and reforms in the existing system would stem the rise of militancy and create a favorable environment to restore the writ of the government in the troubled spots of the country. "Inadequate justice, rule of law and security has been an integral dimension of the crisis in FATA and other parts of the country", says the senior Fata secretariat official.

At the community level, a widely perceived sense of insecurity persists, rooted in the inability of the formal and informal government security institutions to provide security and maintain a smooth law and order in the militancy wrecked areas of Pakistan. Mohammadullah and Ahmad Jan, two IDPs from Malakand region, say: "We think that the security forces detain all the people of a tribe for the crime of a single man. The people can not even peep out of their houses when the security forces launch crackdown in the area. You will have to stay indoors. If you tell on the militants, you are inviting trouble".

"The situation is getting worse from day to day. You can see the flood situation. The situation in Karachi is a case in point. The poor are getting poorer because they are losing the sources of income generation due to the bad law and order situation", they say.

They are of the view that the conditions inside the IDPs camps could not be improved as the monster of terror is ominously rearing its head and the government's lack of will to check corrupt practices encourages the mafia to plunder the much sought after assistance for IDPs and war affectees.

A WFP official says that the donors cut on the food assistance for IDPs to discourage them and wean them away from handouts.

"We had three categories when the population got displaced from Malakand and the tribal region, but now we have a standard category for food assistance", he says.

As Khaista and his fellow IDPs settle the payment for the excess flour, local agents approach them to sell the food aid, comprising rice, sugar, cooking oil and lentils, to them. But, Khaista refuses

and beckons a pick-up truck driver to carry the goods home where his 17-member family, among them women and children, has taken temporary shelter after they were dislocated from their native Kurram Agency, south-west of Peshawar.

Ends

All persons, including government officials, interviewed in the process of field work for writing the Pakistan Notebook for Global Integrity Report 2010 are confidential for fear of job and reprisal from high-ups, because some of them are not authorized to speak to the media. Interviews with IDPs from Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) have been conducted on the condition that the identities of the persons interviewed would be protected in all circumstances. Names of some IDPs have been changed on their request to protect their identities. MI

Actual name Mohammad Rahim, resident of Sadda town of Kurram tribal region, is presently living as IDP at a rented house in Bakhshoo Pull area on the northern outskirts of Peshawar city.

Mohammad Khurshid, a freelance journalist and former official of ERU, who was laid down after ERU was disbanded.

Mohammad Zahoor, director local government and rural development, Fata civil secretariat, Peshawar.

The Auditor General of Pakistan report 2009-2010. Daily Dawn report Sept 25, 2010.

Naheeda Begum was displaced from the Bajaur tribal agency. Her family ended up in the sprawling Katcha Garhi camp in Peshawar, but her family later shifted to the Jalozei camp after the Katcha Garhi camp was officially wound up in 2009.

Daily Dawn September 23, 2010.

Transparency International Pakistan report July-Sept 2009 (Vol-XI) – Human security report project. www.pakistanconflictmonitor.org.

Interviews with Rubina Bibi, Sabria Khanum and Arifa Begum at the Jalozei IDPs camp.

Zeeshan Bangash, in-charge WFP food distribution point, Peshawar.

