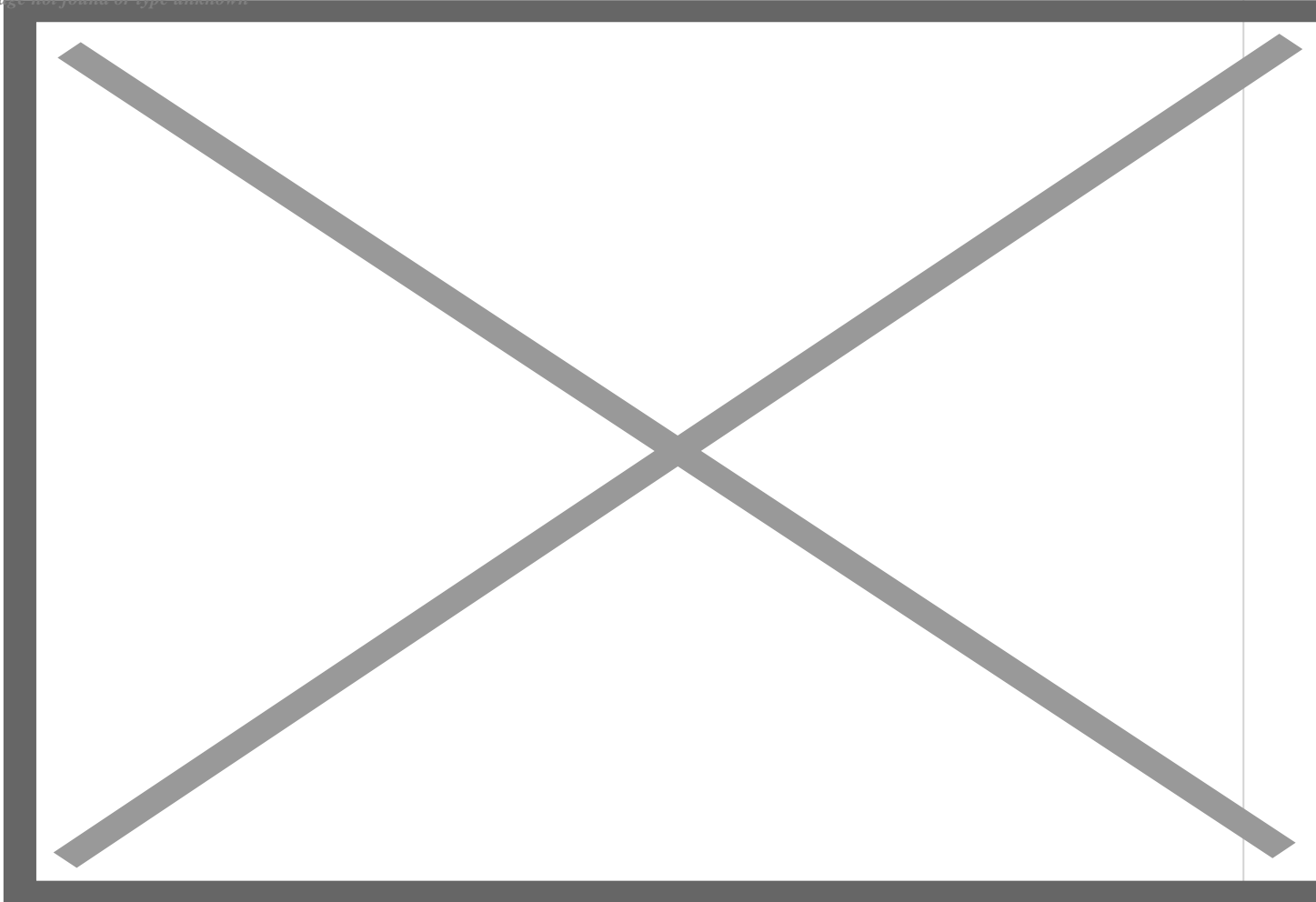


Pakistan prime minister decries climate carnage

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People displaced by floods travel on a boat as they head back to their village in Sehwan, Pakistan [Reuters]

Islamabad, September 25 (RHC)-- Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has appealed for global support to face the consequences of the climate catastrophe that ravaged his South Asian nation. The flood-induced devastation means it is incumbent on Pakistan to "ensure rapid economic growth and lift millions out of poverty and hunger," he said at the United Nations.

“No words can describe the shock we are living through or how the face of the country lies transformed,” Sharif told the UN General Assembly in New York City. “For 40 days and 40 nights, a biblical flood poured down on us, smashing centuries of weather records, challenging everything we knew about disaster and how to manage it.”

More than 1,500 people have been killed in the floods, including 552 children, and 33 million have been affected, according to the United Nations. Like many nations in the Global South facing the wrath of climate change, Sharif noted Pakistan had little responsibility for it.

“Pakistan has never seen a starker and more devastating example of the impact of global warming ... Nature has unleashed her fury on Pakistan without looking at our carbon footprint, which is next to nothing. Our actions did not contribute to this,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who visited flood-ravaged Pakistan earlier this month, said he had “never seen climate carnage” on such a scale. He blamed rich nations for the devastation with G20 nations responsible for 80 percent of current carbon emissions.

“Wealthier countries are morally responsible for helping developing countries like Pakistan to recover from disasters like this and to adapt to build resilience to climate impacts that unfortunately will be repeated in the future,” Guterres said.

More than one-third of Pakistan was submerged by melting glaciers and record monsoon rains that began in June. The estimated cost of the catastrophe is more than \$30 billion.

The urgency of the climate situation is not being matched by actions of countries responsible for emissions, Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated. “They don’t act. They can talk but they don’t act,” she said in New York. “The rich countries, the developed countries, this is their responsibility. They should come forward. But we are not getting that much response from them. That is the tragedy. I know the rich countries, they want to become more rich and rich. They don’t bother to do anything for others.”

Bangladesh – one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable – has produced a miniscule amount of the greenhouse gas emissions that have already contributed to the warming of the planet by an average of nearly 1.2 degrees Celsius (3.4 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

The 2016 Paris climate accord called for \$100bn a year by 2020 from wealthy nations to help developing nations cope with climate change. That year, \$83.3bn was committed, including through private sources, according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development figures.

One key issue facing the next UN climate summit, to take place in Egypt in November, is whether wealthy nations also need to pay for losses and damages from climate change – not just to pay for adaptation and mitigation. “We want that fund to be raised. Unfortunately, we didn’t get a good response from the developed countries,” Hasina said.

Pakistan needs a “stable external environment” – that means peace in South Asia, which Sharif said hinges on a resolution of the decades-long dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. “At the heart of this longstanding dispute lies the denial of the inalienable right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination,” Sharif said, outlining what he called India’s “relentless campaign of repression” and “serial brutalisation” of Kashmiris.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and has been claimed by both since they won independence from the British empire 75 years ago. Sharif accused India of its own colonial ambitions by trying to change Kashmir’s demographics from majority Muslim to majority Hindu. While he described Islamophobia as “a global phenomenon”, he specifically accused India’s Hindu nationalist government of

engaging in “the worst manifestation of Islamophobia.”

India — which has said Kashmir is an internal matter and one of law and order — is scheduled to speak at the General Assembly on Saturday. Rights groups have accused Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s governing party of looking the other way and sometimes enabling hate speech against Muslims.

Modi’s party denies the accusations but India’s Muslims say attacks against them and their faith have increased sharply. The two South Asian nations lobbed barbs past one another later on Friday night. An Indian diplomat shot back at Sharif by accusing the prime minister of seeking to “obfuscate misdeeds in his own country and to justify actions against India that the world considers unacceptable.”

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