**[Gwadar calamity](https://www.dawn.com/news/1819495/gwadar-calamity)**

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WEATHER experts have warned that a new rain system will strike Balochistan in the next few days. This will increase the extent of damage already caused by the recent bout of torrential rains. Thousands of people in Gwadar and the adjacent areas found themselves without shelter as the intense rainfall rendered their modest homes uninhabitable. Lanes, access roads, major arteries and highways were inundated. People could be seen draining the water from their homes and shops. Many lost their already meagre resources. Mass depression prevailed across neighbourhoods.

While various government agencies have sprung into action, it will take a long time and much effort before lives can be rebuilt. One can question how Gwadar is living up to claims of being at the heart of a multi-modal development corridor that can turn around Balochistan’s — in fact, the entire country’s — fortunes. A sleepy town of less than 350,000 people, it is hard to imagine how large-scale regional development can take place to make dreams of national prosperity, on the back of CPEC, a reality.

The existing settlements are not prepared to take the impact of torrential downpours that could become frequent as climate patterns change. High-scale precipitation demands a drainage system that ensures the rapid draining of rainwater. Unfortunately, while Gwadar suffers from the shortage of potable water, it does not have the capacity to store rainwater for extended periods.

The concerned authorities are busy with the Gwadar Smart City Plan meant to give direction to development. Such a plan will only benefit the people if it conserves and protects existing settlements, introduces critical infrastructure to enhance the quality of life, and up-scales livelihoods. The usual practice of identifying large swathes of land for real estate and its clandestine distribution to favoured stakeholders will not bring the desired relief for Gwadar’s residents. If the proposed development process does not factor in the lives of the ordinary and lift them out of poverty, then such development may have little value.

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The people of Gwadar also complain about being removed from self-governance. Whether they are development choices or routine administrative matters, the entire hierarchy of the provincial government, federal agencies and military establishment is involved. Decisions about development locations and land allocation and the choice between establishing enterprises or retaining traditional boat-making and fishing are made without consulting the local people, their elders or representatives, leading to protests and agitation.

As new governments begin to take charge at the centre and in Balochistan, a different approach to win back the people of Gwadar and the extended area can be considered. A broad-based steering committee should be constituted comprising members of the provincial and national assemblies from the area, community elders and administration staff to chalk out a relief, rehabilitation and redevelopment strategy. Existing plans and projects can be revised to accommodate the aspect of disaster preparedness. Executing the plans must be done in collaboration with community elders to revive a sense of local inclusion in the management of local affairs.

Relief and rehabilitation works can best proceed under conditions of peace in the larger coastal area. For this, various stakeholders can come together to restore the trust of the people. A few tough decisions are required. The incoming regi­­me must announce an amnesty for those they see as creating trouble. The top lea­ders of all the political for­ces, within and outside the assemblies, may be invited to dialogue sessions by the provincial government.

The objectives of the dialogue must be on striking a working relationship between the government, political parties and tribal elders; developing a roadmap to stop acts of violence through confidence-building measures; and the preparation of an agenda of negotiation with the centre. This is vital because there are many matters over which no provincial government possesses jurisdiction and authority. The attempt may prove futile if the establishment does not show an open approach.

The process of release of political detainees and locating missing individuals can be initiated by the establishment to convince the other side of its sincerity. Besides, dissenting voices in Gwadar and the extended coastal region must not be shrugged off. The best way forward is to provide political space so that a feeling of participation evolves. No political group can be a security threat if its concerns are genuinely accommodated in the normal political process. Fear and danger only raise their head when such groups are denied a space where they can prove their political worth.

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