



ADDITIONAL Secretary, Cabinet Division, Jahangir Bashar speaks at the launching ceremony of a global report in Islamabad on Thursday. UNDP resident representative Onder Yucer looks on. — Dawn

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## True understanding of disasters' impact stressed

By Hajira Elahi

ISLAMABAD, Feb 12: Asia has experienced an increase of 500 per cent in economic losses incurred as a result of natural disasters compared to the 80s' decade, accounting for approximately 50 per cent of the losses suffered globally.

This was stated by the Regional Crisis Prevention Advisor, Thomas Brennen, at the launching ceremony of the global report, "Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development" by the UNDP here on Thursday.

Mr Brennen said the last four years had witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of hydrometeorological disasters and in the scale of economic losses around the globe. Asia had, however, cut the loss of life by half over the last 12 years, he said and added that Pakistan had considerably more effective relief operations in place and the loss of life in calamities was lower than its neighbours.

The newly introduced disaster risk index in the report measures and compares physical exposure to disaster, vulnerability and risk between countries and highlights a strong correlation between poverty and vulnerability to natural catastrophes. Despite the fact that only 11 per cent of the people exposed to the natural disasters live in poor countries, they account for 53 per cent of all recorded deaths.

The authors conclude that poverty is the real killer and not the forces of nature. If governments strive to anticipate the risks before catastrophe strikes, millions of lives lost in 'natural disasters' in the developing world can be saved as well as the billions of dollars' worth of assets.

The international community is focussed on mitigating losses through humanitarian actions at the cost of addressing disaster risk through develop-

ment. "To effectively combat the natural disasters, both sides of the equation must be addressed, humanitarian and economic," said Mr Brennen.

Financial losses are difficult to calculate because destruction of a particular good is only evaluated at the market price. But its effects on related industries - backward and forward linkages - and the consequent decline in purchasing power - the downward multiplier effect - are excluded.

These losses interact with and exacerbate other political and environmental challenges. The economic impact on subsistence communities is phenomenal because it threatens their means of livelihood.

The recommendations presented in the report are: develop a realistic understanding of the depth and extent of disaster hazards; base policy decisions on the best available data and systematic risk analy-

sis; incorporate disaster risk in regulatory procedures while considering factors that can lead to higher vulnerability; include disaster risk assessment as an intrinsic part of development planning.

Additional Secretary, Cabinet Division, Jahangir Bashar, who was chief guest on the occasion, acknowledged that the government must strengthen its disaster management capacity and be prepared at all levels to minimize the impact of calamities with the support of civil society.

Resident Representative, UNDP, Onder Yucer said the destruction caused by natural catastrophes was challenging the Millennium Development Goals. He said it was time to recognize disaster management as a core issue in addressing poverty. In this regard, the UNDP has presented a proposal to the Government of Pakistan to establish a National Disaster Management Agency.