

UN OFFICIALS BE INVITED TO VISIT CALAMITY-HIT AREAS: AJK PRESIDENT



proposed to invite the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs to visit the liberated territory, and also to organize an international conference to review the adverse effects of climate change. He made the proposal while talking to Chairman National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Lt. Gen. Mohammad Afzal who called on him here at the Kashmir House on Thursday. During the meeting, a host of issues including loss of life and property caused by the recent avalanche in Neelum valley, and rehabilitation of the quake victims of Mirpur were discussed in detail. Sardar Masood Khan said that in the proposed conference, officials of AJK and the Federal government's Ministry of Climate Change as well as international

experts should be invited to prepare practicable recommendations. The State President stressed the need of immediate relief and rehabilitation of the avalanche victims in Seri Surgan and Surgan Bakwali villages as well as payment of compensation of the destruction of their cultivatable lands and crops. "Survey of Neelum Valley, Leepa Valley and other calamity-prone parts of Azad Kashmir should be comprehensively carried out, precautionary measures adopted, and side by side with creating awareness among the local people about the safety measures, emergency steps should be taken to shift the affected people to safer places," he urged. Sardar Masood Khan said that due to unchecked deforestation and since the 2005 earthquake, the ecosystem including the soil composition of the State has become fragile, and the population living in the foothills of mountains remains under threat of floods, landslides and avalanches, while lack of proper communication system in these areas further adds to danger faced by the local populace. While appreciating NDMA Chief's committed and untiring efforts, the State President expressed the hope that the Authority would become a strong national organization in the coming years. Earlier, the NDMA Chief Lt Gen. Mohammad Afzal said that in view of the peculiar situation of Azad Kashmir, it is pertinent to discourage new settlements in areas prone to natural calamities. Besides, international construction codes should be strictly applied. He said that with the cooperation of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, the NDMA intends to launch a five year disaster management project. Besides this, the NDMA is planning to launch a sustainable fund under which relief would be provided on emergency footings to the people affected by any natural calamity without affecting the government's own development funds. He said that a disaster management university will also be established to educate and create awareness about disaster management.

