

HUMANITARIAN SOLIDARITY IN SOUTH ASIA-TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

“February 06, 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes”

Report 2023





GÜNEY ASYA STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
SOUTH ASIA STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTER

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PREFACE

The South Asia Strategic Research Center (GASAM) was established in 2004 to inform the public accurately and objectively about the historical, political, economic, sociocultural structure, strategic, and geopolitical balances of South Asian geography, covering Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Within the framework of “Human Solidarity in South Asia and Türkiye Relations,” the aim of our report is to raise awareness of the relief provided by South Asian countries in the aftermath of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake and to maintain the existence of humanitarian aid and solidarity. The report has been prepared in order for humanitarian diplomacy between Türkiye and South Asian countries to be a source of humanitarian information that will enhance and contribute to relations at the national and international level. One of the essential objectives of the report is to raise awareness of humanitarian diplomacy by researching in-kind and financial aid from South Asian countries from open sources.

The report consists of four parts. In the first section, “Humanitarian Aid by the South Asian Governments”, the donations and rescue teams sent by the South Asian state institutions to the earthquake region were in-

vestigated. The second section, “Humanitarian Aid by the South Asian Non-Governmental Organizations and Businesses”, focuses on the social awareness demonstrated by the South Asian NGOs and business world. In the third section, “Humanitarian Assistance by the South Asians Residing in Türkiye”, the assistance and activities of South Asians residing in Türkiye for earthquake zones were explored. In the fourth section, “Reflections in the South Asian Press and Social Media”, the South Asian press coverage of the earthquake disaster in Türkiye and the information and news reports on social media were looked into. One of the most important features of this report, which is a region-based study in the context of humanitarian diplomacy, is to demonstrate that humanitarian aid will always be remembered.

As a think tank, GASAM has researched all humanitarian aid without making a distinction in the traditional sense and has produced a very precious and significant publication in terms of its content for Türkiye and South Asian societies.

8 We would like to thank all individuals and institutions for their intellectual, financial, and moral support in the development and publication of this report, and we sincerely hope that this work will contribute to the covenant of humanitarian diplomacy between Türkiye and the South Asian communities.

Cemal Demir
President of GASAM

INTRODUCTION

What kind of world would you like? Ask the question, “What kind of life would you like?” The answer is very important and precious. In the answer to this question, the view that humanity consciously or unconsciously agrees with their words or behaviors determines and shapes the world or life of tomorrow. As GASAM, we provide an answer to this question through our decision to develop a report, the report we present, and our efforts to deliver the report to the relevant persons and organizations. It is a simple answer that allows us to underline a fundamental characteristic not only in the context of South Asia and Türkiye but with a universal vision.

Imagine such a horrible world in which some people collect gold rings, watches, and other valuable devices from lifeless bodies after a war. While some lie lifeless in the places that were once their homes, the people who collect light-weight but heavy-value items from the closets of those homes and load them into cars... Our report does not propose any ways or means to “exploit a country’s people for cheap labor”. When you read it, you will see between the numbers and lines how South Asian states, civil society organizations, media outlets, and South Asians themselves “complement and strive to complement each other for soli-

ilarity without expecting anything in return”. States, according to their structural characteristics, civil society organizations, according to their dynamics, media organizations, according to their *raison d'être*, and individuals, according to the limitless variety of ways they can contribute, have stood by Türkiye and the Turkish nation in its most critical period.

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, which are referred to as South Asian countries, have worked at the highest level to alleviate the suffering, heal the wounds, meet the needs, and “contribute to the extent of their own means” in several earthquakes in Türkiye as of February 6. The states and peoples of this region have suffered so many hardships, from earthquakes to floods, from terrorism to wars, that they know and feel very clearly what to expect in the aftermath of a disaster. Similarly, they know, feel, and remember that Türkiye and our nation have demonstrated great solidarity and support in times of disaster, without expecting anything in return, without seeking any advantages, and have endeavored to be supportive in areas of need. Moreover, it has done this more frequently and effectively than states and societies with more abundant resources compared to Türkiye’s resources. History is full of repeated examples of this.

In the context of Türkiye and South Asia, cooperation and solidarity are not about giving a check with a date and amount written on it. In other words, it is not like “how much, on what date, what Türkiye has sent or done to us, let’s do the same”, but both Türkiye and South Asian states, NGOs, media, and South Asians have been acting like “what is needed, how much, and when, let’s do what we can afford”. The fact that there is no intention of seeking interests and advantages underlying this act of cooperation, solidarity, and assistance is evident from the fact that Türkiye’s trade, tourism, military, and civilian cooperation with these countries is much lower than with other countries.

The solidarity that South Asian countries and people have demonstrated towards Türkiye in response to the Disaster of the Century has a very distinct and varied content and nature. The fact that the disaster was an earthquake and occurred in the winter has shaped the type of relief

and support. For example, one of the most urgent needs was for rescue teams. Hundreds of buildings collapsed, and hundreds of people were trapped under the ruins. In those conditions, the most urgent and important requirement was to rescue the survivors under the wreckage. It was a priority to heal the wounds of people who were under the ruins or who had somehow escaped from the buildings, to protect them from the cold, and to provide them with shelter in winter conditions. Therefore, every member of the rescue team, every plate of food, every glass of water, every size of clothing and blanket, and every type of tent were regarded as urgent needs. Every second each of these was delayed, lives were lost, suffering increased, and wounds deepened. There was also the need for communication and media to inform societies. And most fundamentally, the prayer of the human mind and heart to the Creator, in whom they take refuge and surrender when they feel powerless and desperate and shed their tears. The need for prayer, in which they say, “I have done everything I can think of, everything I can afford; please help me”. All of this flowed from South Asia to Türkiye, just as it had flowed from Türkiye to South Asia in the past, in those most desperate moments.

We have prepared our report mainly based on government documents, institutional records, and media reports. Relevant ministries have announced their work and operations in the context of the disaster of the century in an effort to inform the public. Similarly, non-governmental organizations published information on their activities to inform both their followers and supporters. Press and broadcasting organizations released news both from the earthquake site and from the areas of rescue and relief operations. Our publication contains information and documents from these sources, thus giving the present report the quality of a historical document. We hope that this cooperation and solidarity will be acknowledged, that studies based on such documents will always be carried out, and that South Asia and Türkiye’s solidarity in this regard will set an example, become widespread and enhanced.

If the whole world consisted of the relationship between South Asian countries and Türkiye, or if this relationship could be a common and

valid form of international relations, there would be no wars, no enmity between peoples, no exploitation, and no imperialism, all of which cause pain and distress to the world. All human beings would try to understand each other as these nations do; they would find reasons to use their diversity and differences for improvement; and they would be in a state of cooperation and solidarity even in times of disaster. The fact that these two geographies, which have a common history and have contributed to each other throughout history, have mastered each other's differences, values, and meanings is an achievement and a great positivity for the lives of the people in these regions.

GASAM is committed and determined to strive to raise this status to a much higher level through its work and the reports it publishes. It is not a preference but an obligation for GASAM to work shoulder to shoulder with every person and organization within the framework of this vision and mission, which is extremely beneficial for humanity.

Lokman Ayva

President of GASAM High Advisory Board

HUMANITARIAN AID BY THE SOUTH ASIAN GOVERNMENTS

South Asia encompasses a vast region of Asia, from the Indo-Gangal Plain and the Indian Peninsula to the Himalayas. South Asian countries are listed as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The Kahramanmaraş-based earthquake on February 6, which deeply affected Türkiye, has also been on the agenda of South Asian countries that have struggled with many natural disasters so far. Many South Asian countries, which have recently experienced disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis, have demonstrated examples of solidarity with Türkiye in different dimensions based on their own means. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have made solidarity and relief initiatives at the state level. These solidarity and relief initiatives have made history as important steps of friendship and humanitarian support.

1. Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the third-largest country in South Asia by land area, and it borders Iran and Pakistan to the east and south. Having suffered numerous natural disasters such as floods, droughts, landslides, and avalanches, the country immediately put the earthquake in Türkiye on its agenda.

Afghanistan's Taliban administration decided to send about \$165,000 in donations to Türkiye and Syria to help respond to the devastating 7.8-magnitude earthquake, according to the Foreign Ministry. Afghanistan's Ariana News television channel confirmed the news on February 7, 2023, stating that "15 million Afghans have been allocated as humanitarian aid to the victims in Türkiye and Syria." A statement by Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry on February 7, 2023, emphasized the willingness of Afghan doctors and rescue workers to help the earthquake victims.

Mohammed Zahir Agbar, Afghanistan's ambassador to Tajikistan, said more than 200 sleeping bags had been delivered to the Turkish Embassy in Dushanbe to be sent to the earthquake victims, Anadolu Agency reported on February 15.

2. Bangladesh

Bangladesh, which has land borders with India in the west, north, and east, Myanmar in the southeast, and the Bay of Bengal in the south, is one of the most populous countries in the world.

The government and people of Bangladesh were quick to express their solidarity and support in the aftermath of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake. On February 9, 2023, the Council of Ministers issued a circular announcing, "The government has decided to declare a one-day mourning on Thursday due to the loss of lives of Turkish and Syrian citizens in the recent earthquake." Following this announcement, Bangladeshi flags at public and educational institutions, private institutions, and foreign missions were flown at half-mast to mark the national mourning.

On February 8, 2023, Bangladesh Public Relations Services (ISPR) announced that a 46-person aid and rescue team consisting of 24 army members, 10 medical personnel, and 12 firefighters would go to Türkiye. Shortly after this announcement, a team led by Lieutenant Colonel Ruhul Amin of the Bangladesh Army arrived in Türkiye on February 9 and began search and rescue operations. The 46-member Bangladeshi team that carried out rescue activities in Türkiye worked actively in the region until February 21, 2023.

According to the Dhaka Tribune, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. AK Abdul Momen made a phone call with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on February 8, 2023, expressing his solidarity with the Turkish government and people and assuring additional support. Momen informed the Turkish Foreign Minister that Bangladesh would send another 10,000 tents to Türkiye for the earthquake victims, including 2000 in the first place. Momen also asked Çavuşoğlu to report if anything else was needed, explaining that Bangladesh wished to send construction workers for reconstruction in the impacted regions.

Following these announcements, the fifth private cargo plane carrying aid materials from Bangladesh arrived in Türkiye on February 10. The plane, which departed from Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, had 70 tons of relief equipment for earthquake victims in Türkiye, according to the Anadolu Agency. According to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Tika), 400 tents, 300 beds (mattresses), 300 sleeping bags, and 700 blankets were transported on this flight. For a period of one week, about 500 tons of relief supplies were transported from Bangladesh to Türkiye by air.

In addition to rescue efforts, 104 people were provided with medical care, and 32 cartons of medicines were distributed to those in need, according to reports in the Bangladeshi press. The team also provided medical care to patients who experienced physical and mental trauma due to the earthquake.

3. Bhutan

Bhutan, one of the smallest countries in South Asia, is located in the Eastern Himalayas, between China in the north and India in the south. Bhutan, a mountainous country, does not share borders with Nepal or Bangladesh, although they are geographically close.

The Bhutanese people and government have shown great concern for the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. According to The Bhutanese newspaper, on February 10, 2023, Bhutanese Queen Jetsun Pema organized a prayer ceremony in which 1000 butter lamps were lit based on the Buddhist faith. The ceremony, which was widely covered in the Bhutanese press, was held in memory of the deceased and as an expression of solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria. Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, senior government officials, foreign diplomats, and representatives from international organizations also attended the ceremony held at the Tashichho Dzong Monastery in the capital, Thimpu.

16 4. India

India, the country that covers the largest geographical area in South Asia, consists of thousands of ethnic groups in which hundreds of different languages are spoken. India, which has about one-sixth of the world's population, borders Afghanistan and Pakistan in the northwest; China, Bhutan, and Nepal in the north; Myanmar in the east; and Bangladesh in the east of West Bengal.

One of the most comprehensive post-earthquake reliefs came from India. The efforts, which were initiated under the name “Operation Dost”, turned into an important wave of support and solidarity. The name “Operation Dost” highlights a common word, “dost” taken from Urdu, a word shared by the Indian and Turkish languages, which means “a close friend”. India's Ambassador to Türkiye, Virender Paul, said in a statement that the Operation Dost launched to provide emergency aid following the severe earthquakes affecting Türkiye and Syria is a significant symbol of New Delhi's solidarity with Ankara.

One of the first international aids to arrive in Türkiye was through Operation Dost, organized by India. According to the Times of India, on the evening of February 6, 2023, the Indian Air Force sent a C-17 to Adana with 47 rescue personnel, three senior officers, and a specially trained dog team. The staff were accompanied by medical supplies, drilling machines, and other equipment needed for relief operations. According to the ambassador's statement, more than 250 trained Indian personnel, who were brought here along with special equipment and vehicles on six C-17 military aircraft, actively worked in search and rescue operations. They also provided medical treatment through an independent field hospital equipped to perform life-saving surgeries. Ambassador Paul visited the earthquake area in person and received information about the rescue operations.

Speaking to TRT News, Indian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi reported that a plane containing 23 tons of aid supplies was on its way to Türkiye on February 12, 2023, in addition to the aid sent previously. "The aircraft shipped includes supplies for our search and rescue teams in the field, as well as patient monitoring devices, ECGs, syringe pumps, and other emergency equipment," Bagchi said. The Indian Air Force has also sent a "C-17"-type transport plane containing aid and medical supplies for earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria. India managed to send seven planes full of supplies to help the affected areas in the first week of the earthquake. In the same week, the field hospital established by the Indian army in Hatay started to operate in order to provide help to people affected by the earthquake. The military field hospital in Hatay started its operations with medical, surgical intervention, emergency services, x-ray, and medical equipment facilities and worked 24/7 to provide assistance to people affected by the earthquake.

5. Maldives

The Maldives, an independent island nation in the north-central Indian Ocean, or the Republic of Maldives in its full name, consists of about 1,200 small coral islands and beaches grouped into clusters or islands.

There are about 200 settlements on these islands. The Maldives, which is famous for tourism, has experienced many natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, storms, and tsunamis throughout history.

Following the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that affected Türkiye and Syria, the Maldives government issued messages of condolence and solidarity. On February 10, 2023, President Ibrahim Mohammed Salih announced that the Maldivian government would provide in-kind aid consisting of one million canned tunas to Türkiye and Syria, which were damaged by the earthquake disaster. The Maldives catches about 100,000 tons of fish a year, and tuna is the country's largest item of export. Canned fish, which is vital for the country's economy, is one of the symbols of the Maldives.

The Maldives has decided to deliver earthquake aid other than tuna fish through the Maldives Red Crescent. In a press release on February 8, 2023, the Maldives Red Crescent launched a campaign targeting mainly financial aid until February 14. According to the news from The Edition, one of the country's leading media organizations, a donation of over MVR 9 million was collected from the Maldives, where aid boxes were placed in all mosques.

6. Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country on the southern slopes of the Himalayan mountain range, located between India in the east, south, and west and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China in the north.

Nepal, which has experienced numerous painful earthquake disasters, was one of the countries that acted fast in solidarity with Türkiye. On February 10, 2023, at a meeting of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council held at the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office, it was decided to provide necessary supplies and health personnel to Türkiye. During the meeting, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal instructed the relevant officials to make the necessary preparations to provide all possible support to Türkiye at this time of national

crisis. Prime Minister Dahal expressed condolences for the loss of life and property and announced that medical response teams, equipment, and emergency supplies will be urgently transferred to Türkiye. Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has assumed responsibility for coordinating with relevant government agencies to expedite the urgent dispatch of relief supplies, search and rescue, and medical teams. Foreign Ministry officials said Nepal is preparing to send emergency kits, health workers, warm clothing, medical supplies, including mats and tents for temporary shelters, and medical supplies to help those affected by the earthquake and its aftershocks.

According to the official statement by Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated February 13, 2023, the government of Nepal sent the first shipment of aid weighing over 22 tons. The shipment included medicines, medical equipment, warm clothing, and other essential items for basic needs.

7. Pakistan

Pakistan is a country located in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent in South Asia. Located in the south of the Sea of Oman, the country is adjacent to Afghanistan, China, India, and Iran. Pakistan is the sixth-most populous country in the world, with a population of 208 million.

One of the best organized relief efforts after the earthquake was carried out by Pakistan. Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif established a special aid fund for Türkiye. The Prime Minister and the Pakistani federal cabinet decided to donate their one-month salaries to the relief fund. The relief efforts planned on the orders of the Prime Minister of Pakistan started with the transportation of rescue and medical teams and need-based food and non-food aid supplies to Türkiye.

According to Pakistan Today, Khawaja Ahmad Hassan, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, told reporters that Islamabad and Ankara were like “two hearts, one soul”. With these words, he was emphasizing the strength and continuity of solidarity between the two countries. “The

people of Pakistan feel the same pain and suffering as their Turkish brothers and sisters and are determined to provide all kinds of support until full recovery and rehabilitation are achieved. True to our glorious history of supporting each other in all circumstances, Mr. Prime Minister is personally monitoring the earthquake aid from Pakistan.” “In line with the instructions of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, earthquake relief supplies, especially winter tents, are being transported to brotherly Türkiye by air, land, and sea. Relief operations will continue in Pakistan until the rehabilitation of the earthquake victims is completed,” the statement said.

The Pakistan Army Search and Rescue Team, consisting of 33 people with the PAF C-130 aircraft, was the second team to reach the earthquake area. Another rescue team was sent from Lahore on February 7, 2023. The largest air bridge in Pakistani history has been created for the rapid delivery of aid between Türkiye and Pakistan. Navy ships and civilian container ships also played a role in the delivery of relief supplies. Pakistan was active in the region with 69,332 tents, 95,293 blankets, 700 tons of aid and food supplies, as well as two rescue teams of 33 and 52 people. Pakistan has also provided great support in the field of health by establishing two field hospitals in the earthquake zone.

8. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, formerly Ceylon, is an island country in the Indian Ocean, separated from the Indian subcontinent by the Palk Strait.

Sri Lanka’s concern over the earthquake tragedy that struck on February 6, 2023, was first expressed by its Foreign Minister. Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Ali Sabri said that, on the instruction of President Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sri Lanka contacted the Turkish Foreign Ministry to offer assistance for search and rescue efforts. “When the tsunami hit our country in 2004, Türkiye provided emergency humanitarian assistance and built a housing complex for those who lost their homes,” the Foreign Minister tweeted, emphasizing that Sri Lanka is ready to provide any assistance to Türkiye at this difficult time.

Following these statements, the Sri Lankan government held a special meeting on February 10, 2023, under the direction of the President, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, on the provision of humanitarian aid to the Turkish people affected by the earthquake. At the meeting, representatives of state institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector discussed the basic facilities and labor contributions that could be provided to the Turkish people. As a result of the meeting, it was decided to send a military battalion consisting of doctors and engineers trained in UN humanitarian aid operations to Türkiye for support and to ship state and private sector products to Türkiye. Sri Lanka's humanitarian program was led by a committee chaired by Prime Minister's Secretary Anura Dissanayake. "The Sri Lanka Army is making available a contingent of military personnel from medical and engineering units to support search and rescue operations in Türkiye. This contingent will be mobilized upon the request of the Government of Türkiye for such urgent assistance," the official statement said.

Sri Lanka also shipped tea to Türkiye as a country tradition, which is considered a symbol of solidarity. According to Reliefweb, the Sri Lankan Government, with the support of Ceylon Tea Exporters, donated "Ceylon Tea" to the Turkish Ambassador in Colombo to be delivered to earthquake victims on February 13, 2023. The shipment was presented to Turkish Ambassador Demet Sekercioglu at the Turkish Embassy in Colombo by Amir Ajvad, Director General for Emergencies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The donation was coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Sri Lanka Tea Board.

HUMANITARIAN AID BY THE SOUTH ASIAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES

Solidarity and relief efforts from South Asian countries were not limited to governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations and businesses in various countries in South Asia also provided support based on their own means and organized various activities to raise awareness for those who lost their lives and suffered losses in the earthquake.

The hand of friendship extended from South Asia to Türkiye after the earthquake was further strengthened with the thoughtful support of prominent representatives of the business world. Some businesses that sent donations to the earthquake-affected regions preferred to remain anonymous so that their solidarity efforts would not be perceived as an advertising activity. For these reasons, it is only possible to identify a limited number of the contributions from the business world.

1. Afghanistan

The Afghan Red Crescent Society has donated \$50,000 to earthquake victims in Türkiye, Al Arabiya reported. The Afghan Red Crescent, which was recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1956 as the 83rd member of the aid network as an independent national organization after fulfilling the rules and regulations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), has been carrying out important humanitarian relief work for nearly half a century. Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) President Mawlawi Matiul Haq Khalis, who was part of Afghanistan's negotiating team during the US talks in Qatar, delivered the donations to Turkish Ambassador to Kabul Cihad Erginay. In a statement released by the Afghan Red Crescent Society, Khalis was quoted as saying, "Türkiye is a compassionate and friendly country that has always helped and sympathized with the people of Afghanistan in difficult situations."

The Turkish Alumni Association in Afghanistan also rolled up its sleeves to help earthquake victims in Türkiye. The association organized a commemoration program with the support of the TİKA Kabul Office and held a hatim and prayer program for those who lost their lives in the earthquake disaster.

Afghanistan's business community also conveyed their aid and support through various sources. According to Anadolu Agency, following the call for humanitarian aid from the Afghan Embassy in Ankara for the earthquake victims in Türkiye, Kam Air Afghanistan, Afghanistan's first private commercial airline and an active member of IATA Geneva in Afghanistan, donated fifty thousand dollars to be delivered to the earthquake victims through the embassy.

2. Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, which declared a one-day national mourning immediately after the earthquake, non-governmental organizations accelerated their efforts to collect donations. Anadolu Agency reported on February 10, 2023, that the people of Bangladesh were making donations

to support the earthquake victims in Türkiye. The donation campaign organized at the office of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in the capital, Dhaka, attracted great interest. Thousands of Bangladeshis provided tons of aid materials, especially winter clothes. “We are overwhelmed by the support of the people of our fellow country, Bangladesh,” Şevki Mert Barış, coordinator of the TIKA office in Dhaka, told Anadolu Agency. The TIKA office was overflowing with packages, mostly containing warm winter clothes. Aid supplies were delivered to Türkiye on Turkish Airlines flights on a daily basis.

The Bangladesh CNG Filling Station and Conversion Workshop Owners Association stood out in the relief efforts. Business people gathered under the chairmanship of Ferhan Nur, the general secretary of the association, which pioneers the field of environmentally friendly fuels, and delivered the aid they collected to TIKA’s Dhaka representative on February 12, 2023. The aid materials collected by the businesspeople included 3900 coats, 1000 sleeping bags, 33 large tents and 35 medium-size tents, 17 generators, and 20 room heaters.

3. India

The civil society in India, which carried out extensive work as a part of Operation Dost at the state level, also organized important solidarity and aid operations in the aftermath of the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş.

According to the Anadolu Agency, Niyaz Faruki, one of the leaders of the Indian Ulema Society, one of the largest Muslim organizations in India, said that they decided to send aid materials worth 10 million Indian rupees (approximately 121 thousand dollars) to Türkiye. Barkatullah Youth Forum Coordinator Anas Ali emphasized that Indians stand with the Turkish people in this difficult period. People from different parts of the country donated and sent emergency supplies to the aid campaigns launched by charity organizations in many cities in India. Mufti Omar Abidin, Secretary General of the All India National Council, which operates in the southern state of Telangana, said that they collected aid to

help those affected by the earthquakes and shared the list of urgent needs with the Consulate General of Türkiye in Hyderabad. Pointing out that the Consulate General only accepts equipment, Abidin said that they started to supply the items on the list from across Telangana. Surinder Pal Singh Oberoi, founder of Sarbat Da Bhala Charitable Foundation, said that relief supplies, including medicines, were sent to Türkiye.

The Kahramanmaraş-based earthquake also became a special agenda in Jammu and Kashmir, which was ruled by India. On February 10, 2023, a group of people gathered and prayed for those who lost their lives and were harmed in the earthquake in Jammu and Kashmir. Earthquake victims were the focus of prayers at important shrines and mosques in the area, including the historic central mosque, Jama Masjid Srinagar.

On February 18, 2023, students at a primary school in India announced their solidarity with those suffering from the earthquake as part of a heartfelt event, Anadolu Agency reported. The students of a school in India wrote loving messages on a 72-meter-long card to convey their solidarity and condolences to the Turkish people. Turkish Ambassador to India Fırat Sunel shared on his Twitter account that 5,100 little students with hearts of gold created this long banner to express their solidarity with Türkiye.

India's support extended beyond India's geographical borders. Indians living in the US raised over \$300,000 for earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria. Under the leadership of Dr. Hemant Patel, former president of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), the donations were delivered to Türkiye. Türkiye's Consul General in New York, Reyhan Özgür, and Türkiye's Ambassador to the United States, Murat Mercan, attended the fundraising event, and Patel was awarded the Medal of Honor.

4. Nepal

The earthquake in Türkiye drew attention to Nepalese non-governmental organizations for humanitarian aid and solidarity fraternity, as well as both the common earthquake experience and the Nepalese in Türkiye.

According to The Nepali Post, there are approximately 2,000 Nepalese in Türkiye. The NRNA Media and Broadcasting Task Force launched a charity campaign to support the efforts of the Association of Nepalese Living in Türkiye. Nearly 5,000 euros were reportedly raised in 10 days. The donation was handed over to Ujjwal Kumar Ghising, President of the Association of Nepalese Living in Türkiye, by Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives Indira Rana Magar, Chief Guest of the program, together with Baba Rajeshwori Thapa, Deputy Coordinator of the NRNA Media and Broadcasting Task Force, during the virtual program held on March 12.

5. Pakistan

Several non-governmental organizations in Pakistan played a significant role in the collection of donations to be sent to earthquake victims in Türkiye. Alkhidmat, one of them, made a significant contribution with both the aid campaign it organized and the search and rescue team of 47 people who arrived in the region. After the severe earthquake in Türkiye in May 2023, Alkhidmat was awarded the State Medal of Superior Sacrifice of the Republic of Türkiye for their indispensable contributions to rescue operations and humanitarian aid efforts. Ikram ul Haq Subhani, who led Alkhidmat's rescue team, received this prestigious award on behalf of the Alkhidmat Pakistan Association.

The Pakistan Red Crescent, which has impressive international experience in humanitarian aid, also offered significant support to the victims of the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. Founded on December 20, 1947, after Pakistan gained its independence, the Pakistan Red Crescent, based in Islamabad, stands out as Pakistan's largest humanitarian organization. On February 8, 2023, the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) donated \$50,000 to the Turkish Embassy in Pakistan to help rescue earthquake victims in Türkiye. The donation check was sent by the Chairman of the PRCs, Sardar Shahid Ahmed Laghari, to Ambassador Dr. It was presented to Mehmet Paçacı. Speaking on this occasion, Laghari said that the PRCS is with the Turkish people in their sad and troubled moments and will provide all possible cooperation and sup-

port for the assistance and recovery of the earthquake victims.

The Pakistan Baitussalam Welfare Association and the Edhi Association also organized relief campaigns for earthquake victims. Both associations called for solidarity by announcing campaigns on social media channels and websites. The Association of Physicians of Pakistan Descent of North America (APPNA), founded by Pakistani doctors living in the US and Canada, sent medical supplies to the earthquake zone.

According to the Pakistani prime minister's statement on February 11, 2023, a Pakistani living in the US donated \$30 million to the families of those killed and injured in two earthquakes in southern Türkiye and Syria. "I was deeply moved by the meaningful act of a Pakistani who visited the Turkish Embassy in the US and donated \$30 million to earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria and asked to remain anonymous," Shahbaz Sharif said in a statement on his Twitter account.

Officials were informed that a donation campaign was launched in all educational institutions in Pakistan for the benefit of those who were harmed by the earthquake, that a fraternity of letters was held in schools, and that students wrote letters to students in the earthquake zone, sharing their sorrow and offering their wholehearted support.

6. Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan society has not forgotten Türkiye, which extended a hand of solidarity to them after the Tsunami disaster in 2004. According to the Sunday Times, prayers were offered for the people of Türkiye and Syria at a special ceremony held at the Gangaramaya Temple, presided over by Dr. Kirinde Assaji Thero, temple trustee and head of the Sri Sumangala Dhamma School. A 19th-century historical building, Gangaramaya Temple, is of cultural significance. It serves as a Buddhist house of worship and a center of learning, including a home for the elderly, a vocational school, and an orphanage, and is a model for Buddhist welfare work. Ambassador of Türkiye Demet Sekercioglu and Secretary to the President of Sri Lanka Saman Ekanayake were also present at this meaningful ceremony in Gangaramaya.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE BY THE SOUTH ASIANS RESIDING IN TÜRKİYE

South Asians residing in Türkiye have shown tremendous efforts to extend their helping hands to the victims of the earthquake and have been involved in relief operations both through various organizations and individually.

1. Afghanistan

According to the Anadolu Agency, Hamidullah Ahmadi, an Afghan civil activist living in Türkiye, said that Afghans living in Istanbul have been mobilized to collect donations and humanitarian aid in a spirit of solidarity since day one. “The collected donations were delivered to the relief centers by the coordinator offices to be delivered to the earthquake victims. This is a beginning; our contributions will continue, and in-shallah, we will contribute to alleviating the suffering of the earthquake victims in need,” Ahmadi said, adding that they are committed to solidarity.

In the same news report, Merziye Azad, an Afghan women’s rights

activist living in Samsun, told AA that Afghans living in Samsun also supported the aid campaign for the earthquake victims and said, “We collected as many donations as we could and delivered them to relief organizations in Samsun province to be transported to the earthquake-hit regions.”

2. Maldives

Maldivian citizens living in Türkiye also led aid campaigns both in Türkiye and in their countries. The aid collected under the leadership of Ahmed Haitham, Member of Parliament of the Republic of the Maldives, who lives in Antalya with his family, reached Antalya from thousands of kilometers away. The relief materials transported to Konyaaltı Özgecan Aslan Cultural Center were distributed to the earthquake victims placed in the dormitories of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Ahmed Haitham and his wife, Shhajan Muaz, called for help in the Republic of the Maldives and prepared sets of blankets and food parcels according to the reported demands.

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3. Nepal

Due to the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, the Nepalese people gained important experience in dealing with disasters. Nepali media outlets reported that 82 rescue teams from Türkiye reached Nepal within the first 24 hours after the earthquake in 2015 and called on all Nepalis to support Türkiye by saying “Now it is our turn to help”. This call was immediately responded to by Nepalis living in Türkiye. A group of Nepali university students studying in Türkiye started working in the earthquake zone.

According to The Nepali Post, the Non-Resident Nepalese Association of Türkiye, a group of Nepali students studying in Türkiye, played a very active role in helping the earthquake victims.

REFLECTIONS IN THE SOUTH ASIAN PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The solidarity spirit that South Asian countries and communities demonstrated in the aftermath of the earthquake was widely mentioned in the press and social media. The hand of solidarity that reached out from South Asia to Türkiye became the starting point of many heart-warming memories. In this respect, the press and social media mostly featured solidarity messages from celebrities in India and Pakistan and news and images about the operations of South Asian rescue teams working in Türkiye. In addition, South Asian media and social media frequently shared the news about the rescue teams working in Türkiye being seen off with applause at the airports on their return to their countries and their representatives receiving honorary plaques in Ankara.

1. Bangladesh

The efforts of the Bangladesh rescue team in Türkiye were closely monitored by the Bangladeshi press. According to Tbsnews, the team mobilized by Bangladesh first worked in Adıyaman and then went to Hatay. The team's rescue of a 17-year-old girl under the ruins was welcomed with joy on social media.

The medal of honor given to Lieutenant Colonel Mo Ruhul Amin and Brigadier General Muhammad Rashid Iqbal on behalf of the people of Bangladesh for the rescue team's work was also widely covered in the Bangladeshi press. The 60-member special rescue team, including members of the fire brigade, civil defense, and air force, was personally led by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The team focused on conducting search and rescue operations and providing medical assistance in the hardest-hit areas of Adıyaman and Hatay.

The solidarity and enthusiasm of the people of Bangladesh were frequently shared on social media. The donations that Bangladeshis working in the United Arab Emirates handed over to Turkish pilgrims to be delivered to earthquake victims became the subject of social media posts. In the videos on social media, Turkish pilgrims do not understand at first what the Bangladeshi workers who approach them at the airport with money in their hands are saying and think that they are asking them if they have lost money. At the end of the video, it becomes clear that the Bangladeshis wanted to make donations to the victims of the earthquake and asked the pilgrims to deliver these donations to Türkiye.

Another piece of news frequently shared on Bangladeshi social media was that Rohingya Muslims living in refugee camps in Bangladesh donated 700 blankets and 200 jackets to earthquake victims in Türkiye despite their limited means. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people, who have been subjected to ethnic and religious discrimination in Myanmar for years, have sought refuge in other countries in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Most of those fleeing persecution at home live in Bangladesh, where there are two officially registered refugee camps. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), more than 723,000 Rohingya people have sought refuge in Bangladesh since August 25, 2017. According to the Guardian, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have sent money, blankets, and clothes to earthquake victims in Türkiye and Syria, despite their limited means to survive. Images of destroyed houses and grieving families deeply affected Rohingya refugees. Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh start-

ed to form online organizations and collect donations by going around the refugee camps in Bangladesh. In the first phase, they bought 700 blankets and 200 jackets and delivered them to TIKA. “When we saw families being rescued from the ruins—parents who had lost loved ones, little babies who had lost their parents, people struggling for food and shelter—we felt the same pain we felt for ourselves,” photographer and activist Sahat Zia Hero told the Guardian. Hero, who led the relief campaign, said many people remembered that Turkish charities were some of the first to help Rohingya flee the 2017 massacres.

2. India

Many people from the fields of art, politics, and bureaucracy in India have expressed solidarity with the earthquake victims in Türkiye. India’s rescue mission, known as Operation Dost, attracted great attention on social media. The harmonious work of the health and rescue teams in Türkiye with their colleagues from India was the subject of many social media posts.

Former Indian Ambassador to Türkiye Sanjay Bhattacharyya shared his feelings in a touching message to the media: «I feel personal pain and anguish. I have many friends in the region who have business and cultural links with India. At this terrible time, there is an urgent need to unite all efforts to bring relief to these people who are facing a human tragedy.»

India’s artistic community also responded to the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş. India’s world-renowned film artists posted messages of solidarity on their social media accounts and called on their people to help. Bollywood stars Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra, Rajkummar Rao, and Shilpa Shet were the leading names in this regard. Using social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, famous actors drew attention to the magnitude of the disaster. Award-winning actress Rupali Ganguly, who is also known in Türkiye for her television series, posted a message with a Turkish flag on social media, saying, «My thoughts and prayers are with the families of earthquake victims. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured.»

The efforts of rescue dogs, part of a search and rescue team from India, have also been widely covered in the press and social media. Search and rescue dogs from India worked day and night to provide help for those trapped in the wreckage. According to a report published in India Today on February 12, 2023, the four-dog K2 team consisted of specially trained labradors Julie, Romio, Honey, and Rambo. This special team traveled from one region to another despite the harsh winter conditions in Gaziantep and searched for earthquake victims trapped in the wreckage. Aditya Pratap Singh, the second-in-command of the search and rescue team, explained to the press the significant contribution of the search and rescue dogs: “These dogs are very well trained to track down victims. They are our main strength. When the search and rescue dogs start barking, we start looking for survivors based on their cue,” he said.

Six-year-old Labrador Julie, who was on the rescue team, was given a certificate of appreciation by Indian authorities for alerting rescue workers to find young Beren, who was trapped in the wreckage, Indiatv.com reported. Julie worked as an experienced member of the rescue team sent by India’s National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to help earthquake victims.

3. Nepal

Nepal’s solidarity with Türkiye has been widely covered by the Nepali media, and numerous messages of support have been shared on social media. Nepali social media users and media outlets such as the Kathmandu Post reminded us of how Türkiye enthusiastically rushed to relief during the Nepal earthquake in 2015. The posts and news articles featured statements recalling Türkiye’s support in 2015 and remarks on the two countries’ shared earthquake experiences.

As soon as the devastating news about the earthquake in Türkiye was heard in Nepal, their social media accounts started sending messages of solidarity. On February 6, an account that provides podcasts on Nepali podcasts posted: «Nepal government, please send rescue and relief

teams to Türkiye. Türkiye helped us during the 2015 earthquake. We will always remember this,» the account posted. In a statement released by the Rastriya Swatantra Party via social media, it was stated that Türkiye's support in 2015 was truly unforgettable. Nepali journalist Pradeep Raj Dahal posted the following on his social media account: «During the 2015 earthquake, an 82-member rescue team from Türkiye came to Nepal. The team reached Nepal within 24 hours after the earthquake. They stayed in Nepal until May 10th. One thousand tents and 2,400 food packages also arrived from Türkiye. Now it is our turn to help.»

4. Pakistan

In Pakistan, the relief operations and earthquake related news have been the subject of numerous reports in publications such as Dawn and Daily Jang. The news was mostly about the donation campaign that emerged under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Pakistani artists also called on the people of Pakistan to express solidarity by drawing attention to the devastating effects of the earthquake through both press releases and social media platforms. “My heart is with the people of Türkiye, Syria and Lebanon,” actor Ali Rahman Khan said on social media. “It was very sad to see the extent of the damage and destruction caused by the earthquake. I pray for all those affected by this devastating earthquake. I pray for the safety of the survivors, ”he said. Actors Saba Ömer, Adnan Siddiki, Ahsen Khan, Fahri Alam, Ghana Ali, Sana Cavid, and Ayman Khan similarly made announcements of solidarity on their social media accounts.

The efforts of the Pakistani rescue team in Türkiye have been widely covered by the Pakistani press. Journalists such as Zohaib Saleem Butt accompanied the Pakistani team and observed the conditions in Türkiye. Journalist Zohaib Saleem Butt, who worked in the region for days, announced the magnitude of the disaster to the world with images that also appeared on social media. The UN-Certified Pakistan rescue team's rescue of three people trapped in Adıyaman 82 hours after the earthquake, after a challenging urban search and rescue operation that lasted more than 24 hours, had a huge impact on the press and social media.

5. Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan press and social media users also monitored the earthquake in Türkiye from the very first moments. In addition to messages of support and solidarity, Türkiye's aid to Sri Lanka after the tsunami disaster was brought to the agenda.

Sri Lankan opinion leaders gave messages of help and support for the Kahramanmaraş-based earthquake on their social media accounts. The head of a non-governmental organization said, "We send our sincere prayers to the victims and families of the tragic earthquake that hit Türkiye. Türkiye was one of the first countries to help Sri Lanka after the tsunami," he said. Ayusha Amarakone, chief coordinator of Medical Help Sri Lanka Global Project, thanked Sri Lanka Airlines for delivering the aid to Turkish Airlines while making a donation announcement on her social media account.

CONCLUSION

Developing humanitarian, political, economic, and commercial relations with South Asian countries is one of the priorities of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye's relations with South Asian countries are generally based on historical and cultural ties. In this context, an application was made to join the South Asia Regional Cooperation Organization (SAARC), which was established in 1985 in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, as an "observer member".

Developing humanitarian, political, economic, and trade relations with South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) is one of the priorities of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye's relations with South Asian countries are generally based on historical and cultural connections. In this context, Türkiye applied to join the South Asian Organization for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which was established in 1985 in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, as an "observer state".

The settlement of Turks in the Indian Subcontinent started with the Ghaznavids in 963 and ended with the Mughals in 1847. The Ghaznavids and Mughals left many historical monuments in South Asia. Thus, Turks became the original inhabitants of the region. If you conduct research on the history, culture, architecture, art, literature, and music of South Asia today, Turkish-Islamic civilization will appear everywhere

with all its glory and splendor. Even after the abolition of the caliphate, there was no change in the perspective of Indian Muslims toward the Ottoman Empire and Türkiye. The conversation, kneaded with a sense of longing, continues today.

The Khilafah Movement was founded in Mumbai (Bombay) in 1919 by Mevlana Şevket Ali, his brother Mevlana Muhammed Ali Cevher (Ali brothers), Mevlana Abu 'l-Kelam Azad, and Muhammed Ecmel Khan to oppose the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. One of the names who participated in the first congress was Mahatma Gandhi. A delegation headed by Mevlana Muhammed Ali Cevher, one of the leaders of the Khilafah Movement in the Indian subcontinent, who went to London and met with the then Prime Minister Lloyd George, stated that Indian Muslims would not remain indifferent to the injustices committed against the Ottomans.

Muhammad Iqbal, the well-known poet and great Islamic philosopher of the period, who was also from the Muslim Union of the Indian Subcontinent, gathered financial aid and volunteer mujahideen to support the Turks fighting in Çanakkale at the rally held in Lahore. After the enthusiastic address at the Badshahi Mosque, some of the 250 thousand South Asian Muslims took off their last money in their pockets, some earrings in their ears, and some bracelets on their arms and sent them to Türkiye.

Afghanistan is the second country to recognize the Turkish Grand National Assembly. After the victory of the War of Independence, King Emanullah Khan of Afghanistan, in his invitation at the Dilkusha Pavilion, said, "The joy of the Turks is our joy, and the grief is our grief." Undoubtedly, Ankara did not refrain from extending a helping hand to Kabul every time. Especially between 2002 and 2020, \$1.1 billion in aid was provided to Afghanistan. In addition to the assistance of organizations such as the Red Crescent and the Turkish Religious Foundation, project-based support was provided through TİKA. In addition, a significant amount of support has been provided in the field of education, and a significant contribution has been made to the Afghanistan Health Reform.

Türkiye and Pakistan have historical, cultural, and political ties and often act together in economic cooperation, military cooperation, and diplomatic support. After the flood disaster in 2022, Türkiye sent more

than 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid. In addition, tent cities where tens of thousands of disaster victims could stay were established, and medical aid was provided. Moreover, through TİKA, commercial supports for businesses were provided, hospitals were established and renovated, libraries were opened, educational infrastructure was assisted, and even the Bar Association hall within the Supreme Judiciary was renovated.

India and Türkiye are also developing historical, political, cultural, and economic ties. Türkiye considers India to be one of the largest economies in the region, which provides various economic and trade opportunities.

Relations with other countries in South Asia also generally develop in the form of culture, education, economy, technology exchange, and cooperation on multilateral platforms.

The Bangladesh-Türkiye Technical Institute, which will provide jobs for hundreds of people in Bangladesh, will be efficient in the establishment of many health centers and clinics, educational infrastructure support, training for fire and rescue personnel, and the establishment of the e-Trade Facilitation Center. There are also mosques, fountains, and parks built in Bangladesh through NGOs.

In the Turkish village established in Sri Lanka, there are educational and health facilities, playgrounds for children, a structure for worship, a 3D design and IT training center, equipment for farmers, school supplies for students, and housing assistance. In this country, there are also a number of support programs and projects carried out by NGOs.

In Nepal, educational infrastructure support was provided, and pediatric intensive care units were established. Equipment and material support were provided to women in the Nepal Muslim Women's Solidarity Association to help them acquire professions.

In the Maldives, educational infrastructure support, the establishment of laboratories in schools, and projects carried out with NGOs are reported.

On February 6, 2023, Türkiye was hit by one of the biggest disasters of the century in Kahramanmaraş, and significant humanitarian aid was provided from South Asian countries. The most meaningful and impressive of these is the contribution of Rodhingya Muslims, hundreds

of thousands of whom have been living under difficult conditions in refugee camps in Bangladesh. These people, who were subjected to oppression and torture, abandoned their homes and suffered great hardships. They delivered 700 blankets, 200 coats, and some money donated in the camps to the TIKA office in Dhaka. The remarks of Arakanese Sahat Zia Hero, who delivered the collected aid, are quite striking: “Türkiye has been one of our major sources of support since the beginning of the crisis we faced. How could we remain indifferent to this great disaster faced by our friends?” Zia Hero was right; while global organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union did nothing but hold meetings and disperse at a time when they were subjected to the world’s greatest persecution, Ankara organized visits to the region at the highest level and provided aid through both state institutions and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, while some foreign countries provided all kinds of military support to the junta that took over the government in Myanmar, Ankara sided with the oppressed.

Turkish foreign policy is built on the basis of “soft power”. Ankara has played an active role in relief efforts in South Asia, providing significant aid in a short period of time after natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis. For example, after the massive earthquake in Nepal in 2015, teams, equipment, and relief supplies were rushed to the region within 24 hours. In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, the response to the call for help from impacted countries was swift. According to the Global Humanitarian Aid Report, Türkiye maintained its position as “the world’s most generous country” in 2021, a position it has held since 2015. Thanks to the strong ties formed, it has become clear that Türkiye cannot be ignored in many regions of the world, including South Asia.

In our geography of hearts, the sense of fraternity brought about by civilized, historical, and cultural bonds makes us feel grief, sorrow, and joy in the same spirit. On February 6, 2023, what happened after the great disaster in Kahramanmaraş clearly demonstrated this spirit of fraternity. Türkiye will continue to move forward in its relations with South Asia decisively and on the same common ground.

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