

We remembered how scared we had been that morning and started raising money at school. Everyone brought what they could. My father went to everybody he knew, asking for donations of food, clothing and money, and I helped my mother collect blankets. My father raised money from the Swat Association of Private Schools and the Global Peace Council to add to what we had collected at school. The total came to more than one million rupees. A publishing company in Lahore which supplied our schoolbooks sent five trucks of food and other essentials.

We were terribly worried about our family in Shangla, jammed between those narrow mountains. Finally we got news from a cousin. In my father's small village eight people had been killed and many homes destroyed. One of them was the house of the local cleric, Maulana Khadim, which fell down crushing his four beautiful daughters. I wanted to go to Shangla with my father and the trucks but he told me it would be too dangerous.

When he returned a few days later he was ashen. He told us that the last part of the journey had been very difficult. Much of the road had collapsed into the river and large boulders had fallen and blocked the way. Our family and friends said they had thought it was the end of the world. They described the roar of rocks sliding down hills and everyone running out of their houses reciting the Quran, the screams as roofs crashed down and the howls of the buffaloes and goats. As the tremors continued they had spent the entire day outdoors and then the night too, huddling together for warmth, even though it was bitterly cold in the mountains.

To start with the only rescue workers who came were a few from a locally based foreign aid agency and volunteers from the Tehrike-Nifaz-e-Sharia-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) or Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law, the group founded by Sufi Mohammad that had sent men to fight in Afghanistan. Sufi Mohammad had been in jail since 2002 when Musharraf arrested a number of militant leaders after American pressure, but his organisation still continued and was being run by his son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah. It was hard for the authorities to reach places like Shangla because most of the roads and bridges had gone and local government had been wiped out throughout the region. We saw an official from the United Nations say on television that it was the 'worst logistical nightmare that the UN had ever faced'.

General Musharraf called it a 'test of the nation' and announced that the army had set up Operation Lifeline – our army likes giving their operations names. There were lots of pictures on the news of army helicopters laden with supplies and tents, but in many of the small valleys the helicopters could not land and the aid packages they dropped often rolled down slopes into rivers. In some places, when the helicopters flew in the locals all rushed underneath them, which meant they could not drop supplies safely.

But some aid did get in. The Americans were quick as they had thousands of troops and hundreds of helicopters in Afghanistan so could easily fly in supplies and show they were helping us in our hour of need, though some crews covered the American markings on their helicopters, fearing attack. For many in the remote areas it was the first time they had seen a foreigner.

Most of the volunteers came from Islamic charities or organisations but some of these were fronts for militant groups. The most visible of all was Jamaat-ul-Dawa (JuD), the welfare wing of Lashkare-Taiba. LeT had close links to the ISI and was set up to liberate Kashmir, which we believe should be part of Pakistan not India as its population is mostly Muslim. The leader of LeT is a fiery professor from Lahore called Hafiz Saeed, who is often on television calling on people to attack India. When the earthquake happened and our government did little to help, JuD set up relief camps patrolled by