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NEWSLETTER

November 2018

Recent Floods in Kerala: Various Aspects of Disaster Management

By Shri Sunil Kumar Sinha, MC Member, FRNV

According to the UN's disaster-monitoring system, between 1995 and 2015, the greatest number of natural disasters occurred in America, China and India. In India, many of them related to the climate, causing massive losses of life and property. Droughts, flash floods, cyclones, avalanches, landslides brought on by torrential rains, and snowstorms pose the greatest threats. The most recent and catastrophic was the floods in Kerala.

Seldom have human beings the ability to control such calamities. Expeditious relief could minimize the effect of such calamities by a holistic, proactive, and technology-driven strategy. The Government created the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) in order to quickly deliver to the needs of the disturbed region. This is a specialist force which is gradually emerging as the most visible and vibrant multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled, high-tech force of the NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority). At present, NDRF is made up of battalions from the BSF, CRPF, CISF and ITBP. One NDRF team consists of about 45 personnel.

Recently, Kerala experienced the largest disaster of flood and land slide after 1924. Kerala recorded more than 37% excess rainfall in just two-and-a-half months, while in the past that has happened throughout the monsoon season which usually lasts about four months. The torrential rain since August first week accumulated huge rain water in several dams.

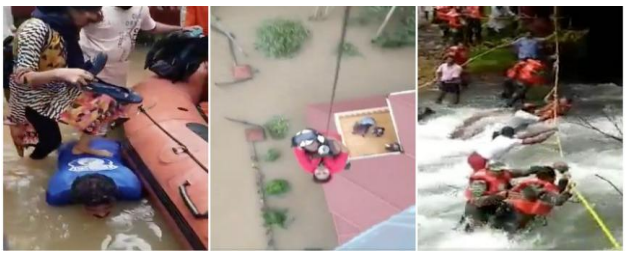
Finally on 10th August 2018, 22 dams were opened by the Kerala government. The State government informed the people through electronic media, print media and public address system regarding release water from 22 dams. The river basin areas and houses were submerged with released water from the dams. Due to continuous rains, mountain soil got lose and created devastating landslides. Many houses were fully damaged and irreparable loss of life was caused to quite a few persons. Even agricultural lands were severely damaged due to landslides.

NDRF swung into action in no time. Near about 60 NDRF teams were sent to assist the local administration in the relief-and-rescue operations for those affected by the incessant rains. During the rescue and relief operations, NDRF, true to their motto "AAPDA SEVA SADAIV," demonstrated their prowess and professionalism and left no stone unturned to provide immediate relief to the victims. NDRF is reported to have rescued 535 lives and evacuated 24,616 marooned people and 119 livestock to safer places. NDRF medical teams established medical camps in affected districts and provided pre- hospital treatment to the 4908 people. The force also assisted the state authorities in distributing the relief material. Many NGOs and common citizens also played a big role in relief operations and also came forward to lend their support to ensuring supply of packaged meals and other relief items to the worst affected areas of Kerala.

The Navy, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard all were involved in the rescue and relief operations along with the civil administration, NDRF. A total of 10 columns and 12 Engineer Task Forces of the army carried out continuous rescue and relief operations. Army helped in restoring connectivity by constructing temporary foot bridges, alternate routes through which relief material could reach to the distantly. Approximately

26 temporary bridges constructed and repaired and approximately 50 roads cleared for the general public.

This was the largest disaster relief exercise the Air Force had ever conducted. Air force deployed 29 helicopters, 3,107 support service personnel and dropped a total of 2.47 lakh kg of relief material with their powerful aircrafts facing lot of difficulties including the state's topography which allows aircrafts to land to only in a few places. For the first time, the Air Force also deployed two mobile hospitals built on boats where patients could come on boats, get treated and return.



"*Operation Madad"* was launched on by Indian Navy to assist the Kerala state administration to undertake disaster relief operations. Nearly 17,000 people were rescued by Navy from flood-ravaged Kerala, of which 1,173 were airlifted while 15,670 were rescued by teams using Gemini boats. No deaths by drowning were reported in any area where Naval teams systematically organized their rescue efforts.

The Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund (CMDRF) accumulated Rs 713.92 crore in just a fortnight. Many Government and non-Government sector employees contributed a part from their salaries. IT companies sent their people to work on relief and rescue operations. The common people created software programmes to coordinate the efforts and many individuals contributed their might to the disaster relief effort.

Around 600 fishermen immediately turned up with their mechanised boats to help rescue those marooned in various parts of the state. They travelled across the state with their boats, spending their own money to reach remote areas, rescuing people from their inundated homes and saving lakhs of lives. Thousands of people, including women, children and college students worked tediously at various centres across the state, free of cost, to gather essential materials, including food, medicines, cloths to send to relief camps. Around 350 inmates lodged in prisons across the State, cooked and packed food to be airdropped or sent to relief camps and prepared food for the officials of the Army, Navy, NDRF and Coast Guard who were engaged in relief and rescue operations. Many doctors across Kerala reached relief camps to offer free medical services without power, consultation rooms or even medicines. Two children broke off their piggy banks and gave the money to other children to buy books and bags. A journalist in Kerala cancelled his daughter's engagement function and instead donated the money to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund. A person decided to turn his wedding venue into a relief camp which was managed by both the groom and the bride's families. Efficient response and relief with a caring approach to the affected with immediate support to the core was provided by numerous means. Overall, it has been a saga of indomitable human spirit!

Some nagging questions, however, still persist. For instance, could the tragedy have been avoided, or curtailed, if the authorities concerned with management of dams had taken timely action to release water from the dams when they were filling up rapidly, and there was prospect of further heavy rains, instead of releasing waters from all 22 dams at one go, when it became inevitable? Most houses, which were damaged, were in low lying areas near the rivers, and many of them were reported to be illegal colonies. As in Tamil Nadu floods in the recent past, illegal constructions in low lying areas suffered maximum damage to life and property. Should not authorities wake up in time to prevent such illegal constructions? Again, should State Governments allow so many agencies, especially with religious or political agendas, to participate directly in disaster relief or get them to contribute their might to Government effort? Questions have also been raised about the use of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. It is hoped that the judicial enquiry ordered by the State Government would come up with their findings on the above issues.

An Overview of Disaster Management in India

By Dr. Seema Pawar, Project Director-VBE, FRNV

The Indian subcontinent is among the world's most disaster prone areas. It is vulnerable to wind storms produced in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, earthquakes caused by active crustal movement in the Himalayan mountains, floods brought by monsoons, and droughts in the country's arid and semi-arid areas.

Almost 57% of the land is vulnerable to earthquake (high seismic zones lll-V), 68% to drought, 8% to cyclones and 12% to floods. India has also become highly vulnerable to tsunamis since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Floods are recurrent phenomena in India. Due to the increase in population and development activity, there has been a propensity to occupy the floodplains, which has resulted in damage of a more serious nature over the years. As a result of the varying rainfall distribution, areas which are not traditionally prone to floods also experience severe flood. Ignoring all the safety guidelines, dwellings, factories and infrastructure facilities have been constructed in areas that are potentially vulnerable to natural hazards like floods.

As per 2014 World Development Report, Maharashtra's largest and most cosmopolitan city, Mumbai, remains highly vulnerable to the heavy rains that occur almost annually, despite well-identified solutions to reduce the risks. Following a heavy monsoon in 2005 that killed over 400 people and caused huge damage to infrastructure and buildings, a committee recommended overhauling the drainage system, but implementation of the plan has lagged, the report said.

Although all of India's states have departments of disaster management or relief and rehabilitation, they are still poorly prepared to lend support in times of disasters, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which has been working with the central government and several states over the past decade to prepare disaster management plans, set up emergency operations centres, assess risks and train search and rescue teams.

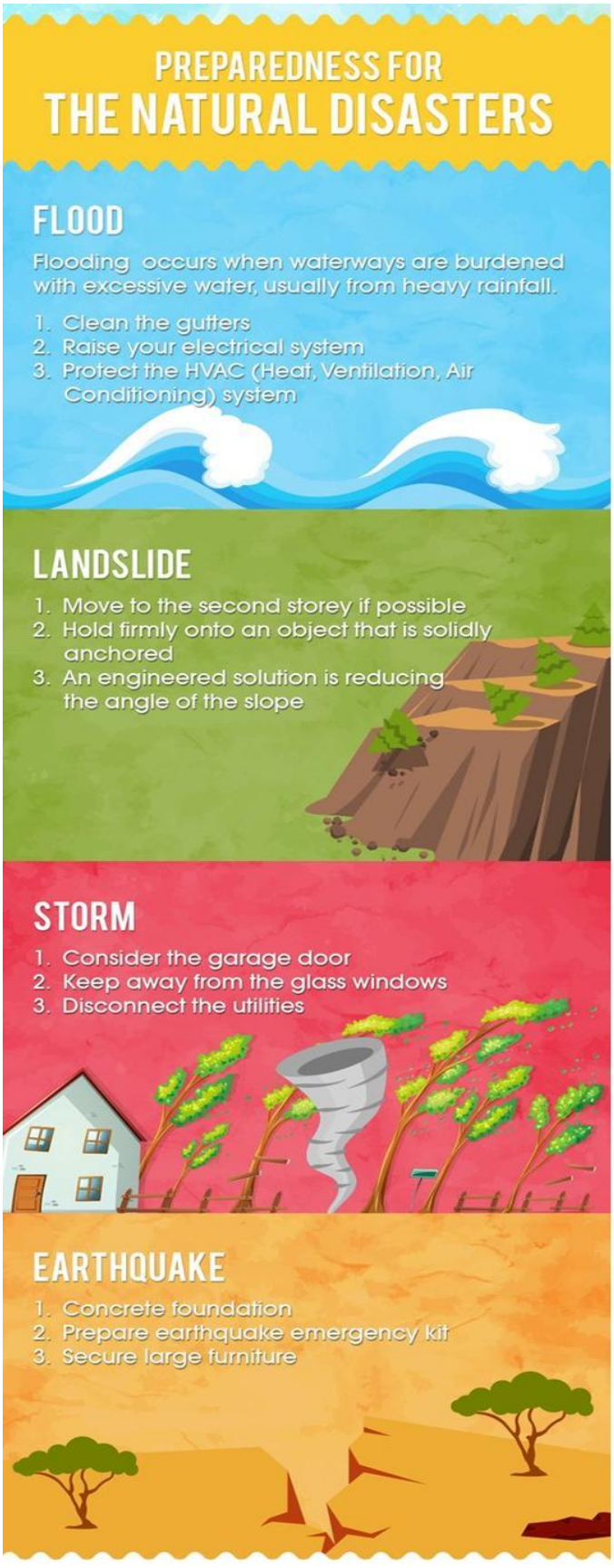
This year, Kerala received unusually high rainfall than the usual rainfall, forcing the authorities to open the gates of all major dams (35 of its 54 dams), resulting in the worst flooding in 100 years, with 86% of the territory (12 out of 14 districts) affected.

After every disaster, its aftermath and adverse effects raise a number of questions about the status of disaster preparedness. It is imperative to acknowledge that we are still not completely ready. This is because disaster management agencies continue to be reactive in their actions. Following the Uttarakhand floods in 2013 and Kashmir floods in 2014, it was only after a lot of questions were raised and criticism directed at preparedness practices that flood forecast stations were set-up in these two states. After Kerala experience, it is high time that flood forecast stations be set up in all the flood prone states.

The non-structural measures for flood forecasting — provide early warning in flood prone areas — have proved to be successful for flood management. However, for the early warning systems to be effective, continuous and collaborative efforts are required, rather than a one-time action. For instance, high-tech warning systems on the ground will not be useful until the authorities, key stakeholders and communities are trained to act upon the information obtained from these facilities. On 26 December 2004, tsunami caused extreme devastation over huge areas and the accompanying grief and anxiety exceeded the imaginable and reached such drastic dimensions, mainly due to the lack of a warning facility and a disaster management plan. But it seems that we did not learn from our mistakes. People affected by the recent Kerala floods reported that they had heard a faint announcement on the loudspeakers, but the message could not be heard clearly, so they were uncertain about what it meant till the water entered their houses.

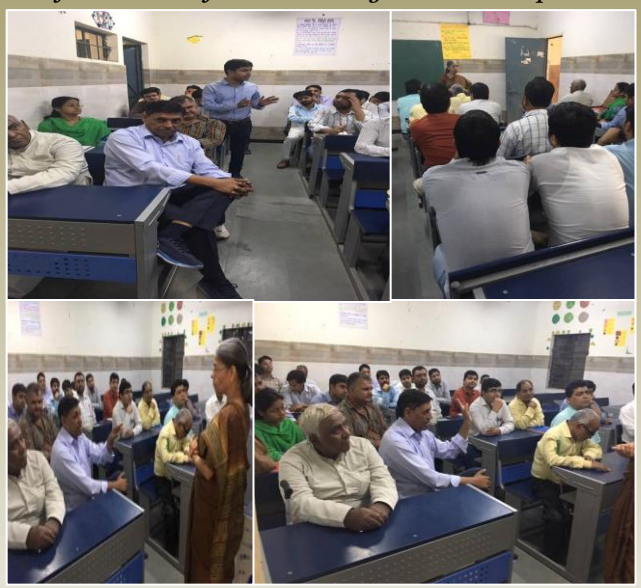
Natural hazards are result of climatic imbalance and cannot be prevented but we need to be observant and cautious. The structured and preplanned preparedness and the healthy response to the disaster will help save the lives.

Source:
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTNWDR2013/Resources/8258024-1352909193861/8936935-1356011448215/8986901-1380046989056/WDR-2014_Complete_Report.pdf

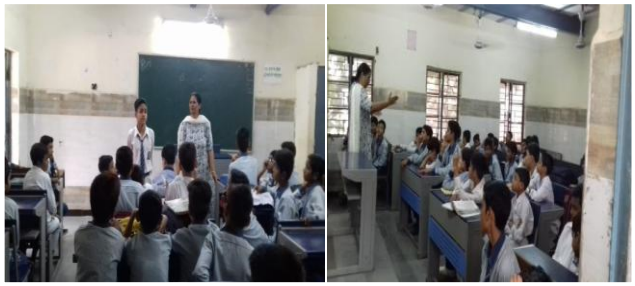


NEWS & EVENTS

❑ *On October 31, 2018, a teachers workshop was conducted at GBSSS, New Ashok Nagar. Prof. Daya Pant took the sessions on Constitutional Values. Four values namely; Equality, Fraternity, Freedom and justice were focused during the workshop.*



❑ *A children's activity was conducted by Dr. Seema Pawar with the students of class VI, at GBSSS, New Ashok Nagar, on October 31, 2018. The activity was started by asking the students to use their mind to imagine a peaceful world. They were instructed to be very still. Then, they were asked to picture in their mind to imagine going into the future, to a better world. They were asked to share their visualization. The class was divided into small groups of students and were asked to share their thoughts about a peaceful world.*



Dear Readers,

FRNV invites stories from its readers on deep-rooted values that have helped us in our everyday lives. Some of these stories will be featured in the next issue of our newsletter. So put your thinking caps on, recall the values integral to your life which you cherish and write to us at shilpi@valuefoundation.in.