

## ***India's Response to Disasters and Humanitarian Assistance in South Asia***

Shreya Upadhyay\*

Whether natural or manmade, disasters can strike any time. These can target any region or country - developed or underdeveloped - and lead to large scale damage to human life, property, natural resources and the ecology. When such disasters strike, relief is offered as well as graciously accepted, irrespective of diplomatic disagreements. On its part, real politics considers a disaster as an opportunity to help a suffering nation, and to showcase a combination of diplomatic, economic, military, legal, and cultural capabilities of the helping nation. Disaster assistance becomes an instrument for maintaining and fostering friendly relations with other countries. It is a way to earn the goodwill of foreign governments and the local people by promoting a positive image of the helping nation.

Notably, the number of countries being part of disaster relief operations is increasing. In 1990, 16 governments pledged humanitarian support for the Bosnian crisis. In 2004, as many as 92 countries pledged humanitarian support to affected nations in the wake of the Indian Ocean Tsunami<sup>1</sup>. India has emerged from being an aid recipient country after Independence to becoming a donor state, and is now part of the non-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries that account for up to 12 percent of the total humanitarian assistance rendered.

This essay takes stock of India's disaster relief efforts in South Asia. India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations have grown manifold in the last few years. India is bolstering interoperability and capacity building to participate in these operations. India has itself been vulnerable to disasters, experiencing floods, earthquakes, famines, industrial accidents, etc. This has given India the wherewithal to deal with disasters at home along with rendering services in the neighbourhood. This essay assesses

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\***The Author**, Dr. Shreya Upadhyay is a Bengaluru based independent consultant. A former Nehru-Fulbright pre-doctoral scholar with American University, Washington DC, she was also a researcher with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

India's contribution to humanitarian assistance within the neighbourhood as well as other parts of the world. It examines the following questions: Has humanitarian activism bolstered India's smart power? Has disaster diplomacy worked in fostering better relations with other countries? What are the challenges facing India in this regard? In what areas can India improve its disaster relief capabilities?

### **India's Disaster Relief Ethos**

The ethos for India's humanitarian assistance can be traced to its cultural and spiritual values. All the major religions - Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam - espouse solidarity with the suffering. The Hindi term *daan* talks about 'charity without motive'. Several natural calamities over the decades have prepared India to strengthen its disaster management structures at home. The Disaster Management Act was passed by the Indian Parliament in December 2005 and followed by the Disaster Management Policy outlined by the Central government in 2009. It marked a shift in dealing with disasters through a 'holistic, multi-dimensional, and multi-disciplinary approach' involving prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, relief, and rehabilitation. While civilian authorities are the main responders for disaster management, in practice the armed forces are called in at the very beginning of a crisis and are usually the last ones to leave<sup>2</sup>.

Expansion in the Indian economy, the availability of greater financial resources, the presence of a large Indian Diaspora in different parts of the world and its remittances, and a growing sense of international responsibilities has bolstered India's position as an aid giver in the last few years. According to the Asia Foundation, India's development assistance has grown sevenfold between 2000 and 2015. Along with this, India has been at the receiving end of frequent disasters. Therefore, it has earned the requisite experience and expertise to help other nations to deal with similar situations. The Indian government disaster relief activities are extended in cases of cyclones, droughts, earthquakes or floods and this policy is in contrast with the conception of Western donors which also include 'helping civilian population affected by armed conflicts'<sup>3</sup> Although India has extended help to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in post-conflict scenarios, it is not part of disaster relief policy. This was humanitarian assistance because of the importance of stability in the region.

Thus, India follows an apolitical, decentralised, and bilateral government-to-government approach. Gareth Price has listed down the ideas governing India's

attitude towards aid as follows<sup>4</sup>.

- Assistance is given for political or economic purposes, and can be a highly effective means of improving relations;
- The wrong type of assistance can be counter-productive; and
- Conditional or tied bilateral aid, in particular, can be degrading for the recipient.

For India, respecting sovereignty lies at the heart of providing HADR. This is in adherence to the 1994 Oslo Guidelines that states, 'Humanitarian Assistance must be provided with the core principles of Humanity, Impartiality and Neutrality (Paragraph 20) and must also fully respect the sovereignty of states (Paragraph 21)'<sup>5</sup>

### **India's Disaster Relief Assistance in South Asia**

The tsunami of 2004 that caused immense destruction and loss on the rim of the Indian Ocean, served as a game changer with regard to India's active entry into disaster relief efforts not only in South Asia but also in the wider global arena. India started to be recognised as a compassionate regional power that was quick to respond, and capable of providing international relief.

Despite India facing the brunt of the disaster, it rejected international assistance citing chaos and confusion during the multiple relief efforts following the 2001 Gujarat earthquake<sup>6</sup>. It did announce accepting longer-term rehabilitation assistance later on; but material assistance was rejected in a few areas. On its part, India launched relief operations for neighbouring countries: operation 'Rainbow' in Sri Lanka, Operation 'Casta' in Maldives, and Operation 'Gambhir' in Indonesia. As many as 20,000 troops were deployed, along with 40 ships and 32 aircraft, including helicopters. The Air Force lifted 500 tonnes of relief material, 1,750 personnel by air and the Navy delivered 735 tonnes of relief material, and conducted 1,063 sailings by sea.<sup>7</sup>. As many as 15,000 people benefited from the medical relief provided by the Indian armed forces. The Indian government provided US\$ 25 million in the form of assistance. In Indonesia, apart from emergency rations, medicines, and tents, two field hospitals were established in the worst hit area of Aceh. Similar assistance in 'kind' was offered to Thailand as well.

In 2007, in the aftermath of Cyclone Sidr that hit Bangladesh, Operation 'Sahayata' was launched. Around US\$ 750 million worth of relief material, including medical equipment, 20,000 packs of ready-to-eat food, 10,000

blankets, 400 tents, and 2400 kg medicines were dispatched in three batches. Additional relief material worth US\$ 22 million and 40,000 metric tons of rice, 10,000 metric tons of wheat, and 1000 metric tons of milk powder were also sent.<sup>8</sup> When Cyclone Mora struck Bangladesh in 2017, the *INS Sumitra* was dispatched for search and rescue operations. It rescued 33 people swept into the sea by the cyclone. The Eastern Naval Command also dispatched P-81 aircrafts for rescue operations<sup>9</sup>. The *INS Gharial* was also dispatched with HADR (Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief) stores that include food, clothing, medicines, and drinking water<sup>10</sup>. The same year, *INS Kirch* and a Dornier aircraft carried out a search and salvage operation off the Maldives, recovering a local landing craft lost in the waters between the Thulusdhoo and Gan islands.

Besides natural disasters, India's humanitarian impulse was also witnessed in Sri Lanka during the conflict in the northern part of the island nation in 2008. As a goodwill gesture, India sent humanitarian assistance to civilians and internally displaced persons. Apart from direct contributions to the Sri Lankan government during the civil war, India provided US\$ 2.5 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as US\$ 5 million in relief supplies to the International Committee of the Red Cross<sup>11</sup>. After the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, India offered US\$ 50 million in medicine and family relief packs containing food, clothing, and personal hygiene to internally displaced people, and also supported housing construction for them. The government also helped Sri Lanka to deal with a devastating cyclone and flood in 2017 by dispatching the *INS Kirch* again along with the *INS Jalasahwa* and *INS Shardul* which offloaded relief supplies, inflated Gemini boats with diving teams and mobile medical teams with supplies.<sup>12</sup>

India also offered help to Pakistan after the 2010 earthquake. Pakistan accepted the offer after ten days. India subsequently sent 25 tonnes of relief material to Pakistan, including food, blankets, and medicines across the land routes. Indian companies (such as Infosys) offered aid up to US\$ 226,000. Medicines, blankets, and tents were ferried by an Ilyushin-76 cargo plane to the disaster-hit area in Pakistan. A second consignment of relief material - containing 5,000 blankets, 370 tents, 5 tons of plastic sheets and 12 tons of medicine - was sent by train through the Wagah Border as Pakistan refused to allow another cargo flight. A third consignment of medicine and relief material to Pakistan was sent by train later. India also pledged another US\$ 25 million as aid to Pakistan along with US\$ 15 million in in-kind contributions from both governmental and private sources<sup>13</sup>. As the disaster unfolded, India

subsequently increased its flood assistance to US\$ 25 million in total. The Pakistani government preferred that the assistance be disbursed through multilateral organisations. Thus, India pledged US\$ 5 million to the World Food Programme and US\$ 20 million through the Flash Appeal to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This gesture even brought about a short-lived hope for improved political relations when the two countries agreed to open five border points in Kashmir to facilitate the transfer of relief goods<sup>14</sup>. Flood aid diplomacy was on display again during the 2014 floodwaters ravaging Kashmir on both sides (India and Pakistan) that killed more than 300 people. Both sides showed cooperative humanitarian gestures to come to the aid of the other<sup>15</sup>. Yet, it did little to manage the mistrust between the two.

When Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Myanmar in 2008, it caused the death of more than 146,000 people, and thousands were reported missing. India's meteorological services had warned the Burmese authorities of the cyclone at least 48 hours in advance. The Indian armed forces were among the first external agencies to reach the delta. Operation 'Sahayata' was launched, under which with two ships, *INS Rana* and *INS Kirpan*, carrying relief goods, and two Indian Air force aircraft (IAF) provided substantial assistance by supplying shelter materials, other relief goods, and medical personnel. Myanmar was not open to accepting western aid. The Junta rulers of Myanmar refused permission to the American warship *USS Essex* and a host of international aid agencies, along with French and British warships. However, India's traditional good relations with the country paid off. Myanmar initially denied Indian search and rescue teams as well as media access to the critical cyclone-hit areas. However, India later set up a hospital with a team of 50 medical personnel in Myanmar<sup>16</sup>. It provided the second largest contribution to the humanitarian response after China.

India offered help to Maldives in December 2014 when the only desalination plant which supplies drinking water to Maldivian citizens caught fire and became dysfunctional, affecting over 100,000 people. The quickest relief was airlifting drinking water and take it to Male. In a day, 200,000 bottles of a litre each were moved to the Delhi airport, to be flown to Male. The next day, another 150,000 bottles were similarly transported from the Palur plant to the Arakkonam air base of the Coast Guards. India dispatched the large fleet tanker *INS Deepak* with 900 tons of packed water, and provided the capability of producing 100 tons of water every day using on-board reverse osmosis equipment. It joined *INS Sukanya* which had already been rushed to

Male with 35 tons of packed water. Maldives issued distress calls to the USA, China, and Sri Lanka, but New Delhi responded promptly.

In China, an earthquake measuring 8.0 on Richter scale struck the Sichuan province in 2008. As per official figures, as many as 69,197 were confirmed dead, including 68,636 in Sichuan province, and 374,176 injured, with 18,222 listed as missing. The earthquake left about 4.8 million people homeless, though the number could be as high as 11 million. India extended help to China. The first plane-load of relief supplies was ferried to Chengdu in an Indian Air Force flight from Guwahati in north-eastern India. Subsequent IAF flights dispatched urgently needed items like tents, sleeping bags, blankets, ready to eat meals, and medicines, etc. The government also contributed US\$ 5 million in immediate assistance in cash. Notably, several Indian companies - such as Ranbaxy, the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT), the wind energy company Suzlon, Larsen & Toubro, the Tata Group, Berger Asian Paints and Dr Reddy's - contributed generously. The Indian community in Beijing held a fund-raising evening in June for the earthquake victims. The Indian Embassy School donated RMB 14,000 for children affected by the earthquake. The Indian community in Hong Kong made an initial donation of 700,000 HK dollars<sup>17</sup>.

In 2015, India's disaster relief efforts touched new heights when an earthquake of 7.9 on the Richter scale struck Kathmandu, Nepal. Within three hours, the Indian government was coordinating a response involving the armed forces, the National Disaster Response Force, medical teams, and volunteers. Indian Air Force planes - including a C-130J Super Hercules - were swift to carry blankets, a mobile 'field hospital', and search and rescue teams. The Indian aircraft ferried heavy earth moving equipment, relief material, food, water, and medical teams and equipment. Stranded Indian citizens were brought home on return flights. Helicopters deployed rescue teams, medical teams, and relief material in the interior areas, and evacuated casualties. A 45-bed hospital and three field hospitals with 18 medical teams, along with six ambulances for casualty evacuation, were functional in different areas to provide medical support to the affected population. The orbits of six Indian satellites were adjusted to give coverage of the affected areas<sup>18</sup>. The Indian team was working alongside relief workers from China, Bangladesh, Israel, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, and Thailand, etc. Interestingly, while the teams were mostly coordinated by Nepali officials, they also started communicating amongst themselves.

While the Indian response was greatly appreciated, the Indian media was highly criticised for sensationalising the relief efforts. #GoHomeIndianMedia hashtag trended on Twitter, revealing a bitter after taste among some sections

of the Nepalis with respect to the Indian media. Another controversy surrounding the relief effort was that it was seen as a 'proxy aid war' with China, with both the countries competing to leverage soft power in the wake of a disaster. India's relationship with Nepal already borders on unease, with India being blamed for its 'elder brother' attitude and alleged interference in Nepalese politics. However, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should conduct regular joint exercises on disaster relief and rescue that led to the creation of the South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise.

India's relationship with Afghanistan has enjoyed relatively greater bonhomie. India has played an active role in Afghanistan's reconstruction based on the understanding that social and economic development are the keys to ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. India has invested more than US\$ 1.5 billion in Afghanistan's reconstruction since 2001. Indian projects cover all of Afghanistan and in partnership with the Afghan government, with a focus on local ownership of assets. Humanitarian assistance involves a daily supply of 100 grams of fortified, high-protein biscuits to nearly 2 million children under a School Feeding Programme. Other things include 250,000 metric tonnes of wheat, announced in January 2009, to help Afghanistan tide over a food crisis; free medical consultation; and medicines through 5 Indian Medical Missions to over 30,000 Afghans monthly; the reconstruction of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul; 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for mass urban transportation; 105 utility vehicles for municipalities; 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army; and 10 ambulances for public hospitals in five cities. Several infrastructure projects, community based development projects as well as capacity development based schemes are currently in progress.

India's geographical proximity with these countries has facilitated the deployment of military assets for India's disaster relief and humanitarian activities. The geographical advantage is also coupled with material capabilities like naval warships and long range aircraft. With its active involvement in disaster relief efforts, India has earned the distinction of being a reliable power, capable of undertaking ventures beyond its borders.

### **Humanitarian Activism in Coordination**

After its post-Tsunami response, India was invited by the USA to join a four-nation 'Tsunami core group' along with the USA, Japan, and Australia, to facilitate a coordinated effort to deal with disaster. Later on, it was expanded

to include the United Nations, Canada and the European Union. India also developed policy guidance on disaster relief outside the country which was issued by the defence crisis management group. India's Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Indian Armed Forces, along with other relevant departments and agencies, were to be responsible for providing assistance.

The USA and India also signed a ten-year defence framework agreement that laid out the themes of bilateral cooperation, including their joint participation in peace keeping. The two countries also launched the 'Disaster Relief Initiative' to integrate their disaster preparedness and future relief operations partnering with other US, Indian, and UN agencies as well as international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other governments as appropriate (Ministry of External Affairs 2005). This involved the development and implementation of early warning system programs, joint and combined military exercises, and identifying military training needs, skills-development requirements, and other challenges to a speedy and effective disaster response on both the sides.

India also signed the 2009 Joint Action Plan for Security Cooperation with Japan, focusing on bilateral cooperation on disaster management. It involves information sharing, capacity building, and cooperation with other countries in disaster management. Apart from this, India has held defence engagements with China in the areas of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In 2017, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the two countries regarding the exchange of information, and collaboration on disaster risk and policies in the areas of prevention, response, recovery, and reconstruction to strengthen disaster risk reduction capacities on both sides, especially in the case of Tsunami and earthquake risk management. India is also member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which calls for mutual assistance in disaster response. India also has agreements signed with countries like Germany, Indonesia, Russia, Switzerland, and the SAARC nations for the exchange of information, along with scientific and technological expertise, training and capacity building, exchange of experts and human resources on disaster management, and the organization of joint conferences, seminars, workshops as well as exercises and training in the relevant field and participation therein (Disaster Management Division of India). In 2017, India also set up an interim unit of the SAARC disaster management centre in Gujarat to strengthen various dimensions of disaster management such as policy advice, technical support, the exchange of information cooperation among South Asian countries.



India also started coordinating with the United Nations in relief and reconstruction. India conducts humanitarian assistance largely through its armed forces. It contributes several thousand troops and personnel to UN peacekeeping forces. According to Price (2005), as many as 55,000 Indians have worked as peacekeepers in 35 UN operations. The operations in which Indian troops have been involved include Korea, the Middle East, Indochina, the Congo, and Yemen, the UN Iraq–Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) following the first Gulf War, Namibia, Mozambique, Somalia, Angola, and Sierra Leone. India has also hosted workshops and seminars on UN peacekeeping. India was invited by the ASEAN for the Jakarta donors’ meet in 2005 and the UN sponsored international donors’ conference in Geneva. India has also been participating in the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). New Delhi has been participating in simulation Disaster Relief Exercises (DiRex) under the ARF auspices since 2011.

In 2016, the government presented a guideline at the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to set up a standard operating procedure for coordinating human assistance and disaster relief efforts in the Indian Ocean Region. India is also part of the East Asian Summit (EAS) which provides a platform for members to work towards multinational cooperation in rapid response to disasters. It has been organising MILAN exercises to share experiences in dealing with disasters such as cyclones, Tsunamis, and earthquakes with the armed forces of countries across the Asia- Pacific, including nations such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Mauritius, Maldives, and Seychelles. The exercises focus on rapid deployment, co-ordination, logistics, and medical aid in the wake of disasters. India has also conducted table top exercises such as ‘Rahat’, ‘Jal Rahat’, Nabhas Rahat, etc. presenting participants with topical situations. India has hosted similar exercises with SAARC nations as well.

### **Humanitarian Assistance through States, NGOs and the Private Sector**

Although the Central government is constitutionally responsible for foreign relations, federal states also play a role in foreign policy implementation. Governments of some Indian states occasionally provide support to assistance efforts, particularly when they are geographically and ethnically connected with the suffering country and its people<sup>19</sup>. Any such foreign engagement, however, is subject to clearance from the MEA. In 2008 and 2009, Tamil Nadu provided in-kind humanitarian assistance to the International Committee

of the Red Cross for their operations in Sri Lanka. The two contributions - worth US\$ 2.7 and US\$ 3 million respectively - have been till now the only two instances which India supported.

Civil Society organisations have also been working in India for post disaster relief and the recovery process, although their reach in dealing with disasters outside India's borders has been limited until now. As a part of corporate responsibility programs, Indian multinationals operating in countries affected by natural disasters have begun to contribute relief materials and/or manpower. Indian pharmaceutical companies donated medicines worth US\$ 600,000 to fight an influenza outbreak in Ukraine (Meier 2011). Individual companies have organised collections for internal disasters - most recently for the 2010 floods in Leh. During the 2015 Nepal earthquake, SEEDS (Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society) provided humanitarian assistance to more than 1000 families in need of shelter. These non-governmental organisations have the potential to serve as the 'soft arm' of the MEA. Voluntary organisations, a soft arm of corporations such as Reliance, Tata, Bharti Airtel, Mittal etc, can also be set up for the purpose. A PPP model can also be set up the implementing mechanism.

### **India's Presence in Other Regions**

India's disaster relief is not only restricted to the immediate neighbourhood or the South Asian region but extends to other parts of the world as well. '*Vasudhaiva Kudumbkam*' - the Sanskrit phrase found in Hindu texts - translates into 'the world is one family'. The historical, cultural, and geopolitical linkages with several nations in the Southeast, Central, and West Asia as well as Africa are considered part of the extended neighbourhood.

West Asia especially has figured predominantly in India's disaster relief operations. The presence of a large Indian Diaspora (approximately 7 million) has resulted in India monitoring closely situations of disaster, armed conflicts, and the internal tussles for power resulting in the overthrow of governments or the impasse between different countries in the region - as in the 2017 case of the Qatar blockade. There are innumerable other examples such as the crisis situation in Lebanon in 2006, Libya in 2011, Iraq in 2003 and 2014, and the biggest one in 1990 when India evacuated approximately 170,000 people during the first Gulf War from Iraq and Kuwait, using nearly 500 flights operated by Air India and, later, even cruise ships. In order to help the Indian Diaspora in Qatar, the Indian government operated special flights between

Kerala and Doha to facilitate travel for those who wanted to return to India. Indian ships containing food and supplies also arrived at Qatar's Hamad port defying the blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, etc. on the country's usual land and maritime freight routes. This was not disaster relief per se - it was rather a glimpse of readiness for humanitarian assistance from India's side.

A more ostensible projection of India's relief operations was witnessed in Yemen in 2015 when it suffered internal turmoil. Operation 'Rahat', the name given to the evacuation process in Yemen, was orchestrated from the African nation of Djibouti. Djibouti houses foreign militaries taking part in anti-piracy operations off the African coast<sup>20</sup>. The Indian Navy ships *INS Mumbai*, *INS Tarkash* and *INS Sumitra* were the frontline platforms that helped in the evacuation, and escorted other ships reaching safe zones from Yemen. Not only 4,748 Indians but also 1,962 foreign nationals from 26 countries (including Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the USA, etc.) were also rescued. India's skills in performing in disaster stricken zones were lauded, with even the USA urging any remaining American citizen to approach Indian officials for safe evacuation. The mission reiterated India's humanitarian efforts which also won international acclamation.

In 2011, the Indian government evacuated around 15,000 Indians fleeing from the Libyan civil war. Operation 'Blossom' was carried out by three Indian Navy ships, two destroyers (the *INS Mysore* and *INS Aditya*), and India's largest amphibious vessel *INS Jalashwa*, along with major support from Air India, India's flag carrier airline, as well as major private players. Assisted by two contract ferries, Air India, the Indian Air Force, and the Indian Navy evacuated citizens from Libya. India also managed a successful evacuation operation 'Sukoon' during the Lebanon civil war in 2006. Four Indian Naval ships (*INS Mumbai*, *INS Brahmaputra*, *INS Betwa*, and *INS Shakti*) returning from a goodwill visit in the Mediterranean were asked to turn around and proceed to the coast of Lebanon. As many as 2,280 people (1,764 Indians, 112 Sri Lankans, 64 Nepalese, and seven Lebanese with Indian spouses) were evacuated to Cyprus from where they were flown to the Subcontinent by Air India.<sup>21</sup> New Delhi also helped with a direct cash contribution of US\$ 10 million to the Lebanese government for relief and reconstruction. In Operation 'Sankat Mochan' in 2016, India evacuated approximately 160 Indians stuck in South Sudan. These operations were driven by India's need to secure its own national interest. However, more than 300 did not want to be evacuated, putting

across the argument that for many people economics plays a more important role than their own lives, thus rendering sincere disaster relief efforts of nations weak and unsuccessful.

As a part of the US-India Disaster Relief Initiative, India contributed US\$ 5 million to the American Red Cross for areas affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. India offered large water purification systems for household and community level operations, and to donate essential medicines that could be required. Similarly, post the Fukushima disaster in Japan, India was ready to send search and rescue teams as well as relief material to help during rehabilitation and reconstruction. The navy was also on standby to send its ships to Japan. India sent a consignment of 25,000 blankets, 13,000 bottles of mineral water, and 10 tonnes of high-calorie biscuits for the survivors of the disaster. Besides, a 46-member National Disaster Management Authority Response Force was dispatched to assist relief efforts in the affected region.

The Indian navy has bolstered its disaster assistance capabilities by acquiring a Landing Platform Dock (LPD) from the USA in 2007. This helped India to reach the debris littered shores. The LPD, *INS Jalashwa*, is capable of carrying six helicopters and, along with its landing crafts, was able to land relief supplies and manpower faster.<sup>22</sup> The Navy is also replacing its medium Landing Ship Tanks with large LSTs, thus increasing its relief capabilities. The IAF has the C 17 Globemaster, the C 130 Super Hercules, and the IL-76s in its inventory, making its reach substantial. There are more than 150 Mi 17 V5s, and 15 Chinook heavy lift helicopters on order that are expected to take India's disaster relief potential to new standards. Additionally, larger Shardul-class variants to Magar-class tank landing ships in the mid-2000s have bolstered India's disaster relief capabilities in the maritime sphere.

### **Food, Medicines, and Cash Assistance**

India's total humanitarian assistance during 2001-10 has been estimated at around US\$ 315 million. A major portion, US\$ 240 million, was spent in South Asia. In 2010, India created a line of credit for Bangladesh of US\$ 1 billion, giving it valuable leeway for managing its external account. The same year, Nepal's aid was doubled from Rs 16 billion to Rs 32 billion. In 2011, India added US\$ 5 billion to the US\$ 5.4 billion line of credit it extended to African countries in 2008 to 'help them reach their development goals'.<sup>23</sup>

India contributed in kind to the WFP's school feeding programme between 2004 and 2007 as part of the Iraq-reconstruction programme. In 2016, India's contribution was approximately US\$ 2 million. India has increased its core contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees to US\$ 1.25 million as well as committed US\$ 4 million for Gaza reconstruction in 2014.<sup>24</sup> Till 2017, India has also been extending humanitarian assistance to North Korea by providing at least 2,000 tons of rice, soybeans, and wheat annually. In 2011, New Delhi provided food assistance worth US\$ 1 million through the World Food Programme. The assistance provided by India comprises consignments of blankets, rice, wheat, baby food, polythene sheets, etc. New Delhi also donated medicines for the victims of the Ryongchon train blast.<sup>25</sup>

India's humanitarian presence has been seen in Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Zambia, and South America as well. At the 2015 India-Africa summit, India pledged US\$ 10 billion line of credit towards development projects. The Indian government is co-financing two long term projects in Haiti through the India-Brazil-South Africa Initiative (IBSA) - one on solid waste collection and another on the construction of cisterns.<sup>26</sup> India also sent food aid to the Philippines after Hurricane Haiyan hit the Southeast Asian nation's eastern coast in November 2013, killing at least 10,000. The geographic location of the receiving country tends to influence Indian contributions. Countries easily reachable by sea and land get in-kind contributions, particularly medical care, shelter materials, and food aid. The further away the emergency, more cash contributions are provided. Assistance in the form of medicine and drugs - a priority for Indian humanitarian assistance - is an exception to this rule. Being the world's third largest producer of pharmaceuticals, India tries to promote its products abroad.

**India's Humanitarian Assistance to African and South American Nations from 2001–2010<sup>27</sup>**

Country	Year	Amount (US\$)	Aid
Algeria	2004	1 million	Medicines and construction, Earthquake
Niger	2009		Medicines
Burkina Faso	2010 2008	210,000	Cash, Flood Relief Medicines, Floods
Sudan	2008 2004	100,000	Cash, Floods 20,000 tons of wheat, Darfur
Chad	2006 2005		5000 tons of rice 160 tons of corn soya blend

Eritrea	2004 2001		4550 tons of wheat 200 tons sugar, 1500 tons wheat
Djibouti	2003	1 million	Wheat, Rice, medical, drought
Guinea	2005		1000 tons of rice
Ethiopia	2003		10,000 tons of wheat
Togo	2008	225,000	Medicines
Central African Republic	2005		48 tons of sugar
Uganda	2007	160,000	Floods
Democratic Republic of Congo	2009 2008	200,000 1 million	Medicines Cash
Mozambique	2009 2008 2001 2000	260,000	Cash, Flood 650 tons of maize medicines Mosquito nets, medicines
Malawi	2009 2008	1million 260,000	Cash, Earthquake Cash, Flood Relief
Madagascar	2005		1000 tons of maize
Mauritius	2003	1 million	Cash, Cyclone
Haiti	2010 2008 2007	5 million 16,000 50,000	Earthquake Hurricane Medicine, Storm
Mexico	2007		Medicine
Cuba	2008	2 million	Cash, Hurricane
Dominican Republic	2007 2006	50,000 50,000	Medicine Medicine
Jamaica	2005	Unknown	Hurricane
St Lucia		500,000	Hurricane
Belize	2008		Medical aid, Flood
El Salvador	2009	250,000	Cash, Hurricane
Guatemala	2009 2008 2007	250,000	Cash, Drought Hurricane Relief Medicine, Drought
Honduras	2001	10,000	Medicine
Ecuador	2009	500,000	Hurricane
Peru	2008	500,000	Cash, Earthquake
Chile	2010	5 million	Cash, Earthquake

### **Challenges and Constraints**

Given its quest for becoming a regional power and securing a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, India is increasingly eager to portray itself as a provider of development assistance. While India has performed well in terms of assistance, the timing of these relief efforts remains a grey area. Often relief efforts reach affected people long after disasters strike leading to destruction in life and property. Another area where India needs to take lessons is in projecting its achievements without sounding arrogant. For instance, despite being among the firsts to help cyclone-afflicted Bangladesh in 1997 that claimed 150,000 lives, India failed to project itself as an aid giver in the global media. Similarly, India's contribution to Sri Lanka and Indonesia hardly received any notice. On the other hand, the Nepal quake assistance received flak due to arrogant trumpeting by the Indian media.

India can learn from the Chinese experience in this regard. Chinese development assistance is estimated to be about seven times that of India. China's approach to humanitarian assistance has received mixed responses, especially due to Beijing's 'tied aid' favouring own enterprises and workforce.<sup>28</sup> Chinese projects create access to Africa's natural resources and local markets, business opportunities for Chinese companies, and employment for Chinese labour. However, Chinese projects get completed in record time, at low costs, and at world class standards. In Kenya, for instance, China has completed 1000 km of motorways and 500 km of regular roads in three years, thus helping the common man and the economy of that country<sup>29</sup>. The Chinese navy is increasingly contributing to disaster relief, along with Pakistan. Rather, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy's humanitarian efforts in the Indian Ocean has ruffled feathers in New Delhi. India saw with scepticism, the PLA navy's specialised vessels carrying searching for the remains of Malaysian airliner MH370 in the southern Indian Ocean (2014). It felt that China was trying to boost its security and diplomatic influence in South Asia. India currently lacks a dedicated platform for disaster relief missions. The USA and China have hospital ships, fully equipped for medical assistance. India still deploys regular warships and amphibious vessels converted for search, rescue and relief missions. These are not sufficient when it comes to leveraging humanitarian service for diplomatic gains.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from this, it has been observed that the Indian armed forces face challenges related to preparedness for disaster response and recovery. Currently, only CME at Pune is conducting structured courses to handle chemical, biological, radiation, and nuclear (CBRN) disasters. According to

Shivnanda and Gautam<sup>31</sup> the Indian armed forces handle disasters without any database of the resources, skills, and services essential for effective response at short notice. Emergency preparedness, drills, and the forecasting of possible disasters that can be anticipated over time and space are absent. It is important that special budgetary allocations be made for disaster management related expenditure<sup>32</sup>.

Apart from this, emerging forums like the Quad should be utilised for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. After all, Australia, Japan, India, and the USA played an anchor role in the 2004 Tsunami response after which the idea of Quad germinated. With Quad cooperation, there is potential for capacity building in HA/DR across the Indo-Pacific. This will also bolster India's image as a growing power, with capability in administering operations outside its borders. Starting with information and data sharing, it should gradually build an interoperable environment to coordinate complementary capabilities and share innovative HA/DR research.

### **Conclusion**

In the post-modern era, the armed forces have been involved in security missions such as anti-piracy, anti-trafficking, counter terrorism, etc. Humanitarian assistance in disasters is another such area. Disaster relief has been touted as a way of opening up opportunities for diplomacy, and catalysing cooperation between countries adverse to, or not accustomed to, working together. However, in cases where there are long standing disputes, entrenched positions, strong ethnic or religious barriers, and insecurity among regimes, disaster assistance might not be able to bring about a significant change.

This can be witnessed in cases of India's diplomatic wins with respect to Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. However, it has proved ineffective in the case of Pakistan that spurned Indian efforts, and possibly played out as proxy aid war between India and China in the case of the Nepal quake. On the other hand, coordination between the two countries was also witnessed throughout the search, rescue, and medical treatment of victims. Their expressed interest in continuing cooperation during Nepal's reconstruction has also served as a confidence building mechanism, presenting hope for the future.<sup>33</sup> Disaster Diplomacy is filled with possibilities for the future and India has the potential to become the region's Good Samaritan - a power that the extended neighbourhood looks to for help. It has started to announce the resoluteness of its political will to come to the aid



of the needy through the aid route. What it requires is increase in capacity - stockpile reserves, trained personnel and procedures - along with a coordinated effort with other countries and the United Nations to fulfil the tenets of *Vasudhaiva Kudumbkam*.

### **Notes :**

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