

Kerala crisis unites Construction Industry

It began with a call of conscience for Dr. PR Swarup, Director General of the Construction Industry Development Council. Kerala was drowning in its waters and the country and much of the world rose to the occasion with a helping hand. What emerged was a story of co-operation, collaboration, social responsibility and a joint command like never seen before.

As a first step CIDC teams and the Builders Association of India (BAI) and various others set up command operations in Thiruvananthapuram. A WhatsApp group was the medium to unite this entire rescue command together.

The first appeal by Dr Swarup set the tone.

“The worsening flood situation in Kerala brings lot of misery and hardship to our brethren stranded in flood waters. Immediate relief and supplies of essentials like food, drinking water, medicine, batteries, clothing etc. is required to reach the flood affected. In order to ensure quick relief, CIDC, BAI and other like-minded people and organizations are being called upon to pool together their resources and fight this crisis.

Requesting all in the group to garner your resources and get in touch with Mr. Raju John (Secretary, BAI) in Mumbai, Ms. Siji Philip (Manager Projects, CIDC) in Delhi as well as Ms. E. Jayashree Kurup (Head Content & Advice, Magicbricks Realty Service Limited) in Delhi who are coordinating the relief operations. People who own boats or are able to arrange one, are requested to contact immediately.

“Together we can & Together we will!”

This call spurred Mr. Cherian Varkey who functioned as the Patriarch of the BAI in Kerala, who assembled all others in the state. Mr Paul, Jayachandran and Suresh ably handled distribution and all center chairpersons of the BAI worked 24/7. A clarion call by Mr. Puhazhendi, All India President, BAI got other State Chapters of BAI involved which was ably coordinated by Mr. Raju John of BAI.



Distribution Materials - BAI Team

The first major help came from Mr Tomy who offered his boat to ferry the collections to the stranded people. His boatmen did much more than that. In fact, they have become the unsung heroes of the state.



Dr Shalini Nalwad's, ICATT Air Ambulance Service



Felicitation of boatmen Mr.Tomy Pulikkattil

Now the task was of figuring out who was stranded where. That's where media networking and social media helped. The first call was to family and friend's groups asking if they needed help. Keralite are a very proud race and it took a lot of cajoling and persuasion to get them to ask for help. Many had started moving away to friends and relatives on high ground and to upper floors of buildings. The first cry for help on the group came from a cousin in Kottayam who had received a location of Malabar hotel where a group of 150 people were stranded on the roof of the Malabar Hotel in Athani in Ernakulam. The first task was to drop food and water to the people and figure out how to rescue them. The next came from Chenganur which eventually turned out to be one of the worst affected districts.

We had coordinates on Google maps till then because people had working phones. Once the flood waters rose higher, with no electricity, charging phones was also an issue. Mr. Cherian Varkey, Mr. Biji and a host of volunteers started joining in while BAI worked on organising relief supplies.

The next big step forward was when Mr. Sanam Shivesh of the Indian Navy was added to the group and worked with rescue appeals on the CIDC group. From reaching food and water to the trapped residents to airlifting the trapped people from the rooftops to getting relief supplies transported to the right places, the rescue efforts moved to the next level.

Mr Sanjeev Jindal of the Airports Authority deserves a special mention for allowing relief materials to be allowed into airports for transport to Kerala. He also facilitated Dr Shalini's medical helicopter parking space in Thirivananthapuram. Mr. BVN Rao helped with airlifting material from IGIA, Delhi.

Dr Shalini Nalwad's ICATT medical helicopters helped reach the stranded people who needed help. From the widely reported woman who went into labour during the floods, to the transfer of patients in Chenganur to safer hospitals, to the rescue efforts of a small baby in distress and old parents of Irene who was searching for news from them, Dr Shalini and her team was on the rescue trail.

Supplementing their efforts and managing ground support was Dr Reas Ali Aryadan, Orthopaedic surgeon, MES Medical College. He and his team kept the medical advice going and also helped with coordinating medical supplies from wherever they were available to the sites where they were required. Volunteers like Prashant used donated cash to make medicines available from other cities like Bangalore. Dr. Jose P Augustine, MD Microbiology, Social worker, too kept medical lists going so that volunteers could look for relevant medicines.

Dramatic assistance makes headlines but the Vijay Nirman Foundation assistance with trucks to transport clothes, food and water to the impacted area is no less commendable. Dr. Vijay Kumar, Chairman, Vijay Nirman, Vizag and Mr. Ramna, President, Vijay Nirman Bengaluru, sent relief materials relentlessly. Similarly, the INS Mysore offered to carry relief material from Mumbai.



Consignment of materials sent by Sri Ramana and Sri Murali of Vijay Nirman Company,

The Navi Mumbai First collected vast quantities of material and sent them to the CIDC help Centre very early on. Within two days of an SOS they were on the job and had collected packed and dispatched the materials to Kerala. The All Kerala Caterers Association offered food to various relief camps. Pepsico supported with Aquafina water and Quaker oats.

A host of volunteers helped in the efforts to varying levels. The CIDC and BAI coordination of relief materials and medicines according to dynamic needs was remarkable. Dr Jayachandran needs a special mention for the tireless coordination of the relief centre in Thiruvananthapuram. Making the flood maps of Kerala available so that volunteer teams would be pre-armed with information was a very good move.



CIDC Team

So was the transmission of messages from the Navy team “Pls keep a listening watch for Helicopter sound. Prepare ad-hoc flags and wave it to gain attention. Use mirrors/ tins to reflect sun light on to help windshield. Smokes/ flares etc be used with caution.” Sensible advice distributed widely.

Night launches may not be feasible because of rains, poor air-ground visibility due to clouds, lack of adequate lighting and possibility of electric cables and high tension wires aloft.

“Boat teams are afloat 24x7. Be brave, be strong, someone will reach you”- Indian Navy

Ultimately a big job is an aggregation of small jobs well done in consonance with others. That’s where the CIDC-BAI effort stands out as an example of coordination, tireless rescue and relief efforts and an incessant will to adapt to the rapidly changing situation. Like Keralite united to come out of the disaster, the construction and real estate industry came together as a singular force, working tirelessly in providing help where it was needed most.

Now the teams are working on medical relief and cleaning. Pidilite’s donation of bleaching materials and the armies of trained masons, carpenters, plumbers and electricians will ensure that Kerala bounces back to its former health in the built environment.

E Jayashree Kurup
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