

AFTER UAE, PAKISTAN OFFERS HELP TO FLOOD-HIT KERALA

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Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday offered to help flood-hit Kerala. The Pakistani leader's comments came in the backdrop of growing criticism of the Indian government's decision to decline foreign aid for flood relief and rehabilitation in the State.

"On behalf of the people of Pakistan, we send our prayers and best wishes to those who have been devastated by the floods in Kerala, India. We stand ready to provide any humanitarian assistance that may be needed," the newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan said in a social media post that drew widespread appreciation among his social media followers in Pakistan and Gulf countries.

'Domestic resources'

Islamabad's statement came a day after India said it would depend on "domestic resources" for providing short and long term help in Kerala. "In line with the existing policy, the government is committed to meeting the requirements for relief and rehabilitation through domestic efforts," the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson said on Wednesday.

It was understood that by 'existing policy', the MEA was indicating at the decision taken in 2004 to avoid foreign support in the context of the deadly tsunami that affected a large number of countries in the Indian Ocean region.

'More considerate'

However, India's decision to decline aid from abroad drew criticism from veteran diplomats and officials who said that the Central government should have been more considerate regarding the offer of support from the Gulf countries, especially from the United Arab Emirates that has offered Rs. 700 crore.

"...as country we can give rather than take assistance, but 80% Indians in the Gulf are Malayalis. Offer of flood relief assistance from region must be treated with sensitivity. Saying no is simple, but for Kerala-in-crisis, it's not so simple," said former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao.

Former Foreign Secretary and National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon made a distinction between foreign support for immediate relief and long term rehabilitation. "...the 2004 decision was not to accept foreign participation in relief but accept it for long term rehabilitation case by case," said Mr. Menon, elaborating that rescue teams in Kerala required no foreign help, but such help could be utilised for "rebuilding houses, bridges, roads etc."

Some diplomats have however maintained that the issue of aid for Kerala should be resolved through internal consultation at the earliest to avoid any long term fallout. "It appears that the offer from UAE came without prior consultation with India," said former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal.

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