

ACCEPTING HELP: ON UAE'S AID TO KERALA

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

The clearest indication so far that [India would turn down offers of financial assistance from foreign governments](#) for relief and rehabilitation work in Kerala came on Wednesday. And yet, it only added to the confusion. The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson said that “in line with the existing policy”, the Central government would meet requirements in Kerala through “domestic efforts”. Various governments have made specific offers to Kerala, from about [700 crore from the UAE](#) to about [35 lakh from the Maldives](#). The spokesperson added that only PIOs, NRIs or international foundations could send money from overseas to the Prime Minister’s or Chief Minister’s relief fund. But as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan indicated, this clarity about existing policy is missing in the Central government’s National Disaster Management Plan. Put out in 2016, the Plan states that India will not appeal for foreign aid in the wake of a disaster. But it goes on to say: “... if the national government of another country voluntarily offers assistance as a goodwill gesture in solidarity with the disaster victims, the Central Government may accept the offer.” The condition applies that the Union Home Ministry would consult the MEA and assess the requirements “that the foreign teams can provide”. So, what exactly is government policy? Is it laid out in the [NDMP document](#) that has an opening message from Prime Minister Modi? Or is it based on the decision of the UPA government to refuse aid or assistance in the wake of the 2004 tsunami — a decision born out of a sense of false pride and a misplaced sense of shame — that became a sort of convention thereafter?

It is not only this mismatch between convention and written document that has created space for the current controversy. Irrespective of what was agreed upon in the past, democracies should be supple enough to respond to emergencies in ways that benefit the greater common good. It serves well no citizen of India for the government to stand on mere precedent or pride to turn down genuine offers of help, in terms of funds or expert teams — or to even ask for help. Offers of aid from foreign governments must naturally be scrutinised to see if they compromise national security and other interests. But to stand on notions of self-reliance in a multilateral world, to spurn a helping hand, is to be beholden to a strange pride. There is no shame in taking help, just as there should be no hesitation in offering it. India has a longstanding tradition of rushing help elsewhere. Leaving Centre-State politics, if any, aside, the government should not just gracefully accept the assistance for Kerala, it should junk the 2004 precedent.

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