

## Hope floats beyond tsunami

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The tsunami tragedy struck more than one part of the country on December 26.

As scores of people awoke to the wrath of the worst tremor in 40 years, minds and hearts were mortified with a sense of loss that is paralleled only by a frustrating sense of impotence at not being there — back home in Tamil Nadu—in person.

Atlanta bemoans its loss, intensifying every passing moment as the tsunami death toll jumps mercilessly.

Images from the mass burial sites in Nagapattinam and Velankanni have impacted the Indian consciousness in more ways than one. Everywhere.

Amidst news bytes reeking with anger (at initial reports that the Indian govt spurned international aid), despair (at lack of fast and sure mobilization of administrative machinery), loss (at the wiping out of tribal groups in the Andamans) and utter anguish (at nature's fury manifesting itself more severely over children) — a prayer survives.

At this moment of tragedy, and in this simultaneous moment of truth the spirit of humanity and that of Indian-ness asserts itself more vehemently than it does when we are lulled into shadow homecoming, as we watch subtle inspirational movies or culpable cricket contests.

Atlanta's Indian consciousness grows in strength and character, as we learn of the noble endeavor of the Armed forces when they launch headlong into the military's largest peacetime operation, Operation Sea Wave.

As the three services come together to rescue, repair, rehabilitate and comfort those worst-hit by the quake, they unknowingly typify the passion of countless civilian counterparts, who wish at such a time for disciplinary regimen in their own vocations that would enable them to reach out to southern India as volunteer groups.

Corporate employees would be more than willing to go to Tamil Nadu and supplement the groundwork carried out by the govt, the Forces and volunteer agencies if given the chance or the choice.

A time of reckoning such as this calls for every iota of effort that each individual can muster.

Doctors must join hands with other doctors to dunk their fancy year-ender vacations to scenic serenity in order to be in India, scribes must dig deep into their own conscience to bring to light instances of both neglect and apathy and comfort and hope, so as to move public opinion.

We, the diaspora, as global citizens with an infinitely large responsibility of representing the nation abroad must appeal to public bodies responsible for disaster management to contribute towards rescue and rebuilding the best they can.

As India joins in with the US, Australia and Japan to contribute to the healing process, it is heartening to see Atlanta's Indians reach out whichever way they can.

Putting aside apprehensions of whether their contribution would reach those affected by the tsunami, Indian non-profit and developmental organizations in Atlanta along with the multitude that sustains these initiatives have put together avenues for people to donate and volunteer food, service and medicines for the victims of the tragedy.

**The Robin Raina Foundation has announced the launch of a special fundraising initiative that will donate all proceeds to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund in India. RRF also announced that it would contribute up to \$20,000 from its own funds, by matching an additional two dollars for every dollar donated to the foundation, towards these relief efforts.**

**This would mean that a dollar of donation from a donor would get converted to a \$3 donation, because of the additional donation from RRF.**

Similarly, the Association for India's Development, Inc (AID), a US-based voluntary non-profit development organization has appealed for charitable contributions for supporting relief and rehabilitation efforts in response to the devastation that has wrecked southern India.

AID has approved \$7,500 from its relief and rehabilitation fund toward immediate relief efforts, and has appealed to the community to contribute generously so that prompt relief and an enduring rehabilitation effort are made possible without delay.

AID-India in fact has volunteers and partner organizations that are active in some of the worst affected areas including Chennai, Nagapattinam and Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu.

Along with sister establishments, they anticipate immediate need for shelter, food, clothing and medicines for people who are rendered homeless or expected to be evacuated from affected areas.

Given the massive scale of the disaster, which has wiped out entire coastal villages, it is expected that long-term rehabilitation will require significant resources.

Another Indian organization, BAPS Care International has launched immediate relief efforts in the stricken zone. BAPS Care volunteers have set up food kitchens to cook and distribute hot food to victims in the towns of Pattikulaakupam, Fulerikadu, Katukupam, Lemelikupam, Terura, and New Kalpakam in the vicinity of Chennai.

With so many left homeless and destitute, there is also an urgent and pressing need for food packet distribution.

To address this, BAPS Care centers in Gujarat were also marshaled into action to prepare 10,000 food packets.

These food packets have also been flown in and local BAPS Care organizers are working to have the food packets delivered in an efficient and speedy fashion.

The National Federation of Indian American Associations, NFIA, will be sending donations collected by NFIA to International Red Cross to help the victims of this tragedy.

NFIA Board has already approved an amount of \$10,000 as NFIA's own contribution for the Earthquake Relief Fund.

Additionally, Atlanta's Hindu Temple has promised to match the first \$5,000 of donations received.

Indira Point has been washed out. The face of the world map has altered. Countless children, mothers and families have perished.

However, in the story of Wira, a five-year-old Indonesian boy who spent two days floating on a mattress to survive the tsunami that killed thousands and who was miraculously reunited with his family, lies hope and the resilience of the human spirit to battle and survive nature's ire.

Unfortunately, what is washed away cannot be restored: Life and dreams, future and fulfillment of those who no longer live.

Fortunately, what lives cannot be washed away — faith in the indomitable impulse to survive.