

The Tsunami Disaster and After

According to the dictionary, the word tsunami stands for an extremely large wave in the sea, caused by an earthquake. Such mighty waves caused by earthquakes are not very common but these have been seen in different oceans at different periods. Whenever such a wave appears, it causes an all-round havoc in all the areas that come across the path of these high waves moving at a terrific speed. At such times, water which is generally called the elixir of life becomes a real danger destroying life and property on a large scale. In December 2004, the tsunami wave hit the South-east Asia and caused a big havoc unknown in this part of the world.

Like the historic and legendary deluge that submerged the city of Dwarika or the Biblical deluge, the tsunami waves took all those we living in the islands of South-east Asia and the Indian mainland by of different intensities. Panic, massive loss of life and property and vast devastation were the only results. Amongst the Indian areas to be hit were the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry and Kerala along with Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Death, the great leveller, did not spare anybody, the tribal or the non-tribal, the poor fishermen who lived by boating as well as the affluent tourists who had come to the sea-side resorts to make merry.

In Andaman and Nicobar 5000 feet of the Air Force runway was washed away while dozens of IAF personnel were dead. More than 2 lakh people died in the deluge in several islands' countries. The casualties in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Pondicherry and Andhra Pradesh ran into hundreds.

Immediate relief operations with the help of money, materials, and manpower from all over the world were launched but the tragedy was too great to be managed. The Union Cabinet approved a sum of Rs 2731 crore for relief and rehabilitation. People all over the country rose up as one man to provide whatever help and relief they could. While the process of relief and rehabilitations is likely to continue for several years, there is an all- round demand for setting up some advance warning system that could warn the people well in advance to move to safer places.

Many countries are now involved in the process of setting up an advance warning system. In the meantime, coming out of the initial shocks of the December 2005 Tsunami disaster, the Govt. of India has decided to set up a National Disaster Management Authority to meet any such emergency that may

happen to arise in the future. A regular bill has been introduced in the Parliament to give this MDMA a statutory status. As a result of the suggestion coming from an all-party meeting, the government has also decided to set up an early warning system for any tsunami type big disturbances in the ocean in the future.

A tsunami warning system is being set up for South East Asian countries at a cost of Rs. 125 crores. One such early warning system that was installed in the regions around the Pacific Ocean after the Tsunami disasters in Japan and North America in 1950, is already working very well. This system consists of a series of seismic stations that can detect earthquakes that are a precursor to the tsunami waves. It also includes coastal tidal gauges that detect local changes in the sea level. The system now being set up in South Asia is an improvement upon the existing system. Let us pray that such disasters don not take place again!