

Stand by the Tsunami victims in their Battle for Life and Reconstruction

Thursday 29 September 2005, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2005).

The havoc wrought by the killer tsunami waves of 26 December has once again demonstrated the utter vulnerability of human life in the face of nature's fury. A week after the tragedy, the world is yet to assess the full scale of devastation in terms of human lives and material losses. In Indonesia alone, the death toll is now estimated to be around 100,000. Sri Lanka too is feared to have suffered an unprecedented loss of more than 40,000 lives. Compared to these two countries, India has probably escaped with relatively limited losses. But the official projections of human loss are widely acknowledged to be a gross underestimate. With more than 20,000 feared dead in Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Andhra Pradesh, the tsunami tragedy remains the worst disaster suffered by the southern region of the country in living memory.

It is now well known that as many as three hours had elapsed between the recording of the earthquake in Indonesia and the tsunami onslaught on India shores. The bureaucratic and scientific establishment in the country could make no use of this precious time. The government was blissfully unaware of the destructive potential of a tsunami onslaught. So much for India's claims of being a 'science-and-technology superpower'! It now turns out that the institutes that received the first alarms about the quake in Indonesia forwarded the message to Murli Manohar Joshi, the former BJP minister for human resource development. Probably they were even unaware of the change of guards of in Delhi after the last Lok Sabha elections!

The same callousness continued even after those deadly seven minutes when the tsunami waves played havoc along the long southern coastline. In spite of a mammoth naval establishment in the coastal region, no effective rescue operation was undertaken in Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, or Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Helicopters were pressed into service more for the purpose of ferrying ministers than saving lives. Relief campaign too suffered from a visible lack of coordination among various wings and agencies of the statements about the severity of the disaster. For all its tall claims about disaster management policies and arrangements, the government did not even consider it necessary to declare the tsunami tragedy a national calamity.

Fisher folks and other toiling sections living closest to the sea have borne the brunt of the tsunami disaster. But the rescue and relief operation of the government is guided almost entirely either by strategic considerations or by the perceived needs of tourism promotion and publicity. The toiling people who remain marginalised in life have been treated with humiliation and indignity in death as well. But field reports received from the worst affected places are replete with any number of instances of real human bravery, courage and sacrifice displayed by these toiling people who have the most intimate knowledge of the seas. It has also been proved that trees have proved to be a great saviour of lives in many areas. The intensity of the tragedy has been rendered many times higher by the mindless damage and destruction caused to the sea environment and the natural surroundings in coastal areas by the tourism industry.

As life rebuilds itself and people re-emerge from the debris of disaster, we must exert every effort to hasten the pace of reconstruction. Every possible assistance must be organised and rendered on a war footing to alleviate the miseries of the suffering people. While paying our tributes to the

countless humans who have been devoured by the seas, we can never forget how the misery of the people has been aggravated by the anti-people anti-nature policies of capitalist plunder and callousness of bourgeois governments. While natural disasters may be unavoidable, the human crimes that increase the intensity of destruction must not go unpunished.

An Appeal

The CPI(ML) shares the concern and agony with the nation on the Tidal tragedy and expresses heartfelt condolences to the families of thousands of people in India and neighbouring South and South-East Asian countries who lost their lives on Dec 26 in a sudden eruption of the violent tsunami waves triggered by an earthquake and asks the government of India to declare this devastation as national calamity. The party called upon the government to take appropriate measures for rescue, rehabilitation and relief on a war footing to the millions of people fallen victim to the tragedy. The Party also advised the govt. to extend every possible help to the affected people in neighbouring countries in this hour of need.

This immense devastation has not only claimed lives of thousands and caused innumerable casualties but also rendered millions of people homeless with every belonging of them swept away by the flooding waters. CPI(ML) calls upon all its units, members, supporters, sympathisers and all citizens to share the griefs of those who have to bear the direct impact of this calamity with every possible help. CPI(ML) units in the affected states, including Andamans, Kerala, AP, Tamil Nadu and Orissa, have rushed to the most affected areas for conducting relief operations, shoulder-to-shoulder with various benevolent organisations, groups and individuals.

We appeal to you all to come forward with every possible help and support to our brethren facing this calamity. We also appeal to you to send monetary help, in cash or in kind, to conduct the relief operations. You can send your local cheques/ Bank Drafts/ Money Orders in favour of 'CPI(ML)'. Please mention in your covering letter "Contribution for Relief Fund" and send your valuable contribution to our Central Office at U-90, Shakarpur, Delhi - 110092.

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