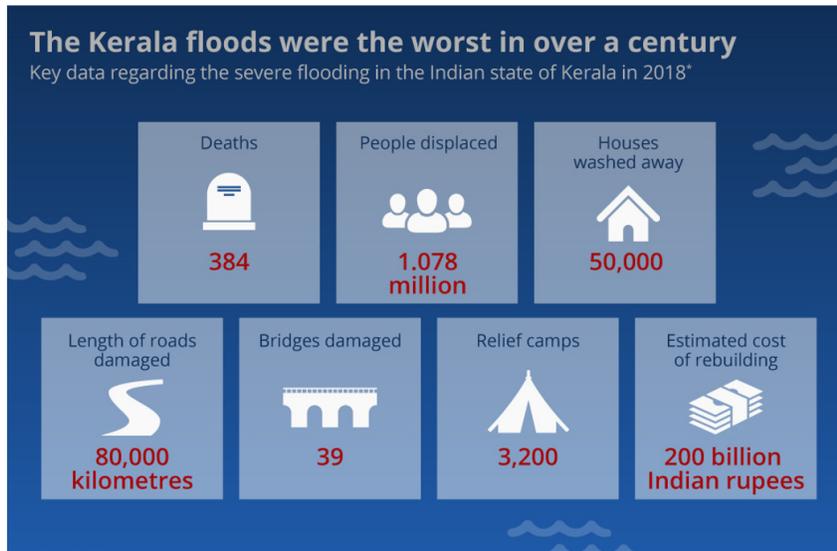


The diaspora and disasters



Importance of Diaspora to India:

The **Indian Diaspora** is a generic term to describe the people who **migrated from territories** that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India. It also refers to their descendants.

The Diaspora is currently estimated to number **over twenty million**, composed of “**NRIs**” (Indian citizens not residing in India) and “**PIOs**” (Persons of Indian Origin who have acquired the citizenship of some other country).

The Diaspora covers practically every part of the world. It numbers **more than a million each in eleven countries**, while as many as twenty-two countries have concentrations of at least a hundred thousand ethnic Indians.

Indian Diaspora played a crucial role in rehabilitation of Kerala Floods:

There is **Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs**, headed by the Chief Minister.

Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs looks at the welfare of the **3.4 million migrants globally**, in addition to nearly 2 million internal migrants within India. Malayalis, who moved from Kerala permanently with their family and live within the country or abroad number **around 2 to 3 million**, since the formation of the State in 1956.

Kerala floods displaced **over a million people**. It directly affected over a **sixth of the state’s total population**.

The losses are calculated to be **more than the state’s annual plan**. In 2017-18, Kerala’s annual plan outlay was Rs. 26,500 Cr. The contributions to Chief Minister’s Distress Relief Fund **crossed more than Rs. 1,680 Cr.**

Remittances received in Kerala accounted for approximately Rs. 85,000 Cr in one single year.

Union Minister KJ Alphons has announced that **Indian diaspora residing in China's Shanghai** has contributed Rs. 32.13 lakh to the **Chief Minister's distress relief fund for Kerala floods**.

Kerala Migrants data:

According to the **KMS (Kerala Migration Survey) 2018**, there are over 2.1 million Malayali emigrants globally and 1.3 million return migrants.

The Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs, headed by the Chief Minister of Kerala, looks after the welfare of the **3.4 million migrants globally**, in addition to the nearly **2 million internal migrants within India**.

These are Keralites who have direct connections to their households — fathers, mothers, spouses, and, in some cases, elderly children.

Role played by the Diaspora at the time of Disaster Response:

In a globalised world, the international dimensions of disaster response and recovery, and the **significant policy role** played by the diaspora can be critical.

For example, after the **earthquake in 2010 in Haiti**, the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. served as a conduit for doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, advisers and reconstruction planners.

Haitian-Americans continue to be **vital in long-term recovery** — as supplies, remittances, sharing human and financial resources, lobbying governments, international organisations and corporations for **disaster relief and redevelopment funding**, and in facilitating **eased travel restrictions**.

In **Nepal, after the 2015 earthquake**, the Non-Resident Nepali Association collected \$2.69 million, mobilised over 300 volunteers including doctors and nurses, and pledged to rebuild 1,000 disaster resilient houses.

In the **Tsunami in South Asia (2004) and the Pakistan earthquake (2005)**, diaspora and migrant remittances flowed generously, demonstrating the counter cyclical nature of remittances.

In Kerala, the **migrant community and diaspora** moved swiftly to organise an **Internet-driven response**.

Conclusion:

Diaspora can play an important role in **India's quest to be a knowledge power and a developed country**.

By **sharing and re-sharing vital information** on affected regions and people, supplies, and precautionary measures (on social media platforms), Diaspora were instrumental in **expanding the flow of information** that would later be used by politicians, private and military rescue operations, and relief workers.

India must follow a **robust and flexible policy** in order to leverage the **strengths of Diaspora** and minimize the possibilities of any negative fallout.

Way Forward:

As the diaspora is one of the **greatest assets of Kerala**, communities should **improve relations with diaspora groups**. Return migrants should also act as **liaison agents**.

Diaspora communities will also inevitably **shape political and economic responses to a disaster.**

The **linking of social capital** between diaspora, civil society organisations, advocacy groups and government institutions, although necessary during rehabilitation, is bound to lead to **unanticipated and undesirable outcomes.**

At least temporarily, the State may witness **higher rates of emigration** among the common people as they try to mitigate losses caused by the floods.

For example, the KMS shows that **migrants use over 40% of their remittances** in purchasing land, construction and repayment of mortgage debt.

Finally, there is a need to investigate the **relationship between rehabilitation and migration further.**

To conclude, the **communication and transportation revolution** and the global reach of media are creating a major change in the **nature of relationship** between the Diasporas and their country of origin.