

POLITICAL IMPLICATION ON HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL HEALTH

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“ Disaster risk reduction is to serious an issue to be left in the hands of politicians alone”

Humanitarian emergencies bring out the best and worst of human behaviours and there is truth in the assertion that humanitarian goals must differ from political deals and positioning of countries to safeguard image. Civilians look inward for support and assistance during disasters and the success on which life and livelihood gets saved depends on the measures and efforts put in place to build risk reduction processes.

Most governments around the world maintain a universal set of systems that can meet and address the challenges posed by natural and man-made disasters and also intentional hazards. Approach to humanitarian emergencies requires coordinated effort by law enforcement agencies, fire departments, civil defence personnel, trained community health physicians, military and disaster volunteers and above all, the district administration.

All these stakeholders, knowingly and unknowingly become humanitarian diplomats because crisis situation calls for a balanced, on ground perspective and not hyper regulation from governmental

agencies and certainly not exaggeration as seen by the free press.

What happens in most disaster situations is, the popular government tends to become defensive in the manner in which it handles any crisis and also large scale insecurity looms large when other countries try to aid in the relief process. Traditional patterns of diplomacy continue to be guided by the Vienna Convention of 1949 which labels acceptable and unacceptable attitude on country level co-ordinations and protocols.

But responding to disaster situation which mandates international help is not framed by a well-crafted regime and political outfits are deeply incompetent to handle the framework in the desired manner. To be certain, human rights, international humanitarian and refugee laws provide governments with a rubric of obligations which have been agreed upon.

Global policy frameworks and arrived upon consensus through the Sendai framework for action, the New Delhi declaration, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Hyogo Framework, SDGs, Bangkok Principles all add to the advocacy and commitment building bit by bit.

The Asia-Pacific region broadly has either a single agency which deals with it or has a specialized authority generally chaired by the head of government or sometimes has a high level inter-ministerial co-ordination. In the canon of Foreign Service handbooks and diplomatic corps, the manner in which a nation's civilians are to be treated and handled remains the sole discretion of the relevant state authorities.

Global health as a discipline and industry cannot be cut out of the diplomat mandate of political manifestation in their superficial approach to handling humanitarian emergencies. Health is the first among everything that gets a beating, and what is life without a decent bargain for health and security?

Delays to obtain visas, denial to clear relief medicines and essential life saving drugs through customs, on time are two potent examples through which political outfits try to frustrate altruistic natures.

It must be understood by politicians for all the ages that humanitarian diplomacy must receive top most priority and sharp skills are necessary to stir the boat during the rough seas when people die.

The work done by humanitarian relief workers under pressure, often in hostile environments faced with grief, sadness, diseases and deaths is nothing short of doing God's work on earth.

Embracing the challenges of humanitarian diplomacy, engaging diplomats and stakeholders through on-going capacity building exercises in disaster risk reduction efforts will be a necessary first step to strengthen and safeguarding the regional boundaries.

In 2008, after Cyclone Nargis, the Government of Burma was accused of preventing the entry of international aid and NGOs due to which over 1,35,000 people lost their lives and many more went missing, thanks to the then ruling military junta. It took the government a full one week to open the doors after it realized it would be overwhelmed otherwise. Participating in humanitarian assistance is extremely risky and often unpredictable.

But diplomatic friendship can be learnt from the 2011 earthquake when China assisted Japan

following an earthquake of 9.0 magnitude on Richter scale which was followed by a Tsunami. The long standing rivalry was bridged by using the diplomatic tool of human altruism and solidarity in the light of a disaster. It may also be recalled that the Nepal earthquake of 2015 saw India emerge as a big brother to aid relief operations in Nepal when the Indian Air Force and the NDRF reached Nepal within hours.

In conclusion, protection of state sovereignty, bilateral governmental assistance, ideological compatibility and human solidarity must be factored into while addressing humanitarian diplomacy and the political class must be seriously trained and educated at all levels of governments to take the matter of disaster risk reduction more seriously than it already is.

Learning and growing through country case studies and past disasters may be a wise way to begin.

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