

Rotary Surat Riverside

Club No. 31734 Charter Date : 26/06/1996 R. I. Dist. 3060



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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

MOTIVATION

Struggling to get back to feet after the disastrous flood that hit our town last fortnight, Rotary Clubs of Surat Riverside and Surat Roundtown gathered in Dilip Paresh Hall, Nanpura on Tuesday the 29th of August for a speaker meet. The speaker was Mr. R.D. Desai, a retired S.M.C. official in the Town Planning Dept.

Rtn. Nilesh Jariwala (Pres. Roundtown) welcomed all present and invited the guest speaker to share his views with us. He began his speech with the recent torrents and its repercussions that have threatened to push the economy of Surat by 5-10 years. The veteran engineer who was also appointed by the corporation in the disaster management squad in 1998 was tongue lashing the administration for being incompetent. He showed reason to the public as to how the vast concrete expansion has played a vital role in reducing the sponge land which could absorb water under it.. The constant release of 8-10 lac cusec of water from Ukai flooded our town with water levels rising to almost 2 floors in certain areas. This could have been avoided or at least the effect could have dampened had there been more green fields on both sides of the river.

Mr. Desai who has been one of the very few fortunate town planners to have conceived and executed plans in his lifetime narrated how blessed he felt to watch the town benefit in other areas due to his effective planning of road alignments.

The curious house wanted more technical information on how to avoid similar precarious situations in the future. The learned speaker, on this, vehemently pointed out the unnecessary expenditures of SMC and urged the audience to pursue the administration towards completing the proposed plans of building concrete walls on the banks of Tapi. The silting of the river can help increase its carrying capacity from the current 70000 cusec to 3 lac cusec. Strengthening the Ukai Dam to store water upto its full reservoir capacity of 351 feet rather than its danger level of 345 feet can also help avoid such a situation. Lastly, he blamed the citizens who corrupt the officials and do not follow the guidelines like compulsory pillared structures in lower areas.

Rtn. Nilesh offered a token of memento to the guest and the crowd dispersed after the national anthem.

The recent cascade left us all in a state of trauma that could demoralise the most courageous of all. But even during such a mammoth of crisis and later on, the spirit of our citizens has remained intact. The Surtis, now popular for fighting each calamity with valour and rising like phoenix everytime with even more gust, were busy boosting each other's moral over cell phones. Following are a few S M S s aired during and immediately after the floods:

*Bahut door hai hamare ghar se
tumhara ghar ka kinara...
Par hum hawaa ke har jhonke se
puchh lete hai kya haal hai tumhara...*

*Barbad-e-saher ko fir basayenge...
Sundar SURAT, Salaam SURAT,
Fir Aawaz lagayenge...
Dar na tu dastan-e-surat ko dekh kar,
Ek nai dulhan ki tarha
Fir usko hum sajayenge*

*Chalo fari pachha hasta thai jaiye...
Tapi ne kinare vasta thai jaiye...
Khaman ne locho khata thai jaiye...
Ane ekbijane pachha malta thai jaiye*

*Amdavad na kanjus,
Rajkot na rakhdu
Junagadh na juna,
Mumbai na mamu
Vapi na papi,
Delhi na dukhi
Pani ma dubi ne pan Surti Lala sukhi*



FLOOD FURY 2006



The Surtis had everything going for them. A booming economy, of what is considered the fastest growing city in the world, was enough to spawn an army of millionaires who loved to flaunt their wealth. But these lofty dreams got a cold shower from a marauding Tapi. Think Surat and all you have now are images of hemorrhagic pneumonia, plague, leptospirosis and what not. As the vast expanse of water slowly went down, hapless Surtis are left wondering now what? Surat is on the brink of another epidemic. Flood water that invaded every inch of the city is threatening to unleash a wave of water-borne disease like diarrhoea, cholera, viral hepatitis, leptospirosis, malaria and dengue.

A miscalculation about the accumulating waters in the Ukai dam and heavy rains in the dam's catchment areas in Maharashtra led to one of the worst deluge that south Gujarat, especially Surat, had seen in almost 200 years. The (Central Water Commission) CWC's rainfall figures were inaccurate. The weather forecast also just said heavy rains, though actually the area recorded very heavy rains. This led to a point where the irrigation department could not assess the situation properly. A 'grave danger' to the Ukai dam which had already crossed the danger level of 345 feet resulted in a situation where the complete input of water from the upstream Hathnur dam in Maharashtra had to be released to save the earthen structure, because the fall-out of a dam burst could be 'catastrophic'.



On Monday 7th August, by early morning news spread like fire about the possible inundation and people were seen scampering to procure groceries in case of isolation as the administration started stopping bridges for vehicles one by one. The constant increase in the water discharge from Ukai during different hours in the day time brought unprecedented floods to areas surrounding the Tapi river like Rander, Adajan, Umra, Katargam, Amroli, Ved Road, Parle Point, Piplod and other places, prompting the government to evacuate over 1.5 lakh people. The water started entering city since Monday morning, forcing people to either leave their houses or take shelter either on roof tops or houses of relatives living in high-rise buildings. The release of over 8 lakh cusecs of water late in the evening and the high tide in the sea on Wednesday which prevented quick drainage of water from the river and the city compounded the woes of the citizens who were caught unawares in the darkness of midnight. State and private electricity companies had to shut down power supply to preclude any mishaps with most of their substations submerged. All mobile and landline phones jammed due to congestion initially, and then, the unprecedented rush of Tapi waters and the subsequent power failure sealed the fate of all networks of communication. Even newspapers could not be circulated for 3-4 days crippling all means of information. Everybody relied on the updates given on F.M. radio which warned public to take shelter above 20 feet. Even the radio service succumbed on Thursday with water flooding its relay station as more than 90% of town cascaded due to the constant release of around 8-9 lakh cusec water.



No electricity, drinking/sanitation water, food or milk. Hunger in the belly and hot in the head. That is how majority Surtis spent most of the week, fighting pangs of hunger and bouts of fear alternating with a seething rage against the rulers. It had been a close brush with death, with the child crying out of hunger and an old mother running out of her medicines. And you don't know what to do. The more fortunate ones were with family, friends and neighbours. Others in Adajan Patia had been living with bodies of their dead relatives for four days, stuck in their flooded homes. Many were stuck miles away from home, unable to take one step in 10-15 feet of water which had made even sports utility vehicles and first floors of houses



disappear. People watched the water level rising menacingly and even the jammed phone network did not prevent rumours from flying thick and fast about the gushing waters breaching Ukai dam. Even the flood control room had to be shifted three times in three days. The bad news came from Rander where a five-storied building - *Rabiya Manzil* collapsed right next to the river bank and as many as 18 people perished inside the rubble.

Five columns of Army that was called in on Monday, swung into action with 70 boats and life-jackets, evacuating and rescuing people trapped on rooftops of submerged houses in water-logged areas. The situation worsened as days passed to the extent that in all 26 columns of army had to be posted

in the city. Four IAF choppers of the biggest make available in India - MI17 with a capacity of 26 personnel or 20 tonnes supply, were also summoned which started air-dropping water pouches, food packets and rescuing people stranded on rooftops.

The simultaneous decrease in rainfall and inflow in Ukai helped improve situation on Friday. Water started receding quickly by Saturday morning with 30% of the town having to wait till Sunday evening to see dry land. The city, known for its rags to riches stories, now faced the backlash of this boom and even the wealthiest Surti was being forced to struggle like paupers for every drop of drinking water and morsel of bread. After four days of listening to their children crying for food, residents of a cluster of plush bungalows opp. my home (and that of my own apartment too), saw hope in some stray buffaloes walking past our flooded homes. They caught hold of the cattle, let them feed on the fresh green lawns of their homes and then milked them so that they could make some tea and also feed their children. Despite having all the resources at their disposal, the rich and powerful of the city have been as helpless as slum dwellers. This is but one example of how the diamond city of Surat went from riches to rags in one flood.

The miseries of Surtis did not end here. They were faced with an even more towering task - SURVIVAL & REHABILITATION. The receding waters left with them an unprecedented trail of decaying rotten dead animals, stinking garbage and mud/filth as thick as 6 inches. With either homes or work places (or both) of each and every citizen being badly affected, they started disposing and dumping all damaged goods on the roadsides to clean up their places. The mammoth of the aftermath disillusioned the administration which was already impaired by the shortage of staff owing to the water flooding their own homes. A vehicle curfew had to be imposed in certain areas to be able to provide succour and remove all the mire & sludge. Adding to the agony was the problem immobility. With 80% of two & four wheelers being redundant people were stuck with the issue of commuting.



Tales of suffering during flood and subsequent non co-operation of major insurance companies to compensate for the losses remained the talk of the town for days. Schools and colleges had to be kept closed for the rest of the month for fear of an epidemic following reports of around 170 deaths (till this report is drafted on 31-8-06) due to unknown diseases. The diamond and textile industry witnessed a major exodus with most of the people from Rander, Adajan, Katargam and Navapura, who were fleeing, did not want to be caught in the 1994 situation following the outbreak of a plague, when Surtis were unwelcome in other cities.

But there is a silver lining to every dark cloud. In this calamity, witnessed one in generations, the most notable thing that has surfaced is HUMANITY. There were numerous epics of individuals and groups risking their lives to save stranded people. Stories of sisters being helped to send rakhis to marooned brothers, pregnant women being safeguarded to maternity homes and patients being escorted to hospitals were common. Moreover fleets of volunteers from communities as far from Ahmedabad to Ahmednagar and from Bhavnagar to Bombay swarmed the city with food packets, milk and drinking water as soon as water receded.

Most of the Riversiders being bad to very badly hit were crippled of resources and could not put their act together. But neighbouring clubs in the district wasted no time in embarking upon relief work in harmonization with local authorities. DG Bipin Vadhar formed a disaster relief committee comprising of the coordinators IPP Major Sharma (Udhna) and IPP Joy Shah (Surat) with the advisor PDG Devendra Shastri (West).



DGE Ashok Panjwani with the help of Shammi Patel (Uptown President) and Yogesh Naik (Gandevi) arranged 3 JCBs and 9 tractors/dumpers to assist the corporation. Hand gloves, foot gloves masks and kits were also received from Rotary clubs of Ankleshwar, Bharuch and Rotary club of Bhavnagar which were distributed on 16th August and 27th August in Rander/Adajan/Pal areas. Rotary club of Sarigam has also sent medicines which are being used by 6 Free OPDs being run by Indian medical Association.

All in all Surti Lalas are banking on the indomitable Gujarati entrepreneurial spirit to help Surat bounce back from this crisis. Let's pray to GOD that the deluge has acted as a speed breaker for a city on the fast track and that this definitely is NOT THE END OF THE ROAD!!!



Clockwise from Top Left: 1. Aerial view of flooded parts of Surat. 2. Potholes & disrupted roads testimony to the might of flood waters. 3. Rich & the poor yearning for relief. 4. Volunteers from different places distributed water, milk & food packets.



MEMORIES OF THE MEETING THAT WENT BY

On Sunday the 6th of August, club had its second lunch meeting at Honest Restaurant. The hosts for the Housie Game Ann Ulka and Rtn. Amit had tried to bring innovation in the otherwise lackluster game by announcing to buy two tickets and considering them as one. Instead of the usual *jaldi five* and three rows, players had to finish numbers in the first, middle and the last columns from both the tickets. Moreover they had to claim their achievements by announcing “*I’m pregnant*”, “*It’s a miscarriage*” and “*I’ve delivered*” for those three columns respectively. The crowd took a liking to the new concept and we had a second round after the lunch to include the latecomers.

Everyone dispersed joyfully, late in the afternoon, not aware of the catastrophic disaster that was to hit the town the next day.



OBITUARY



Grandmother of PP Rtn. Vishal Sinha passed away on Wednesday 16-8-06. All fellow Rotarians stand by the deprived family and pray to GOD to bless them with the strength to bear the loss. May the departed soul rest in peace.



NEXT MEETING



FELLOWSHIP

Date : 5th September, Tuesday

Time : 8:30 p.m.

Venue : Dr. Bhacca Rotary Hall, Jeevanbharti.