

Outlook

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Indian-Americans help in rescue operations during 'Harvey'



By Seema Hakhu Kachru

Houston, Aug 30 In a heart warming gesture, many Indian-Americans living in safer Texas neighbourhoods are helping many Houstonians still stuck by Hurricane Harvey by opening their homes and distributing fresh food, medical and essential needs.

The entire neighbourhoods of the fourth-largest city in the US and the most populous in Texas have been flooded leaving residents homeless and hapless. While government agencies were working round-the-clock in relief efforts, the Indian community also rallied together to pitch in with whatever help they could in terms of food, shelter and rescue operations.

"I have organised 1500 meals from the Dawoodi Bohra Masjid to be delivered to the needy and dispatched 100 volunteers," Abeezer Tyebji, a resident said.

Indo-American Chamber of Greater Houston and local restaurant Madras Pavilion have been sending over 500 meals to the convention centre where the evacuees are housed.

Heart-warming stories poured in from all quarters highlighting the efforts made by the community and over 100 volunteers working to help those in distress.

Preeti Kankikarla, a young professional, was living with her 65-year-old mother in a ground floor apartment. As the water level rose dangerously, she called the SEWA International Houston hotline and volunteers reached her home and helped them move to a first floor apartment.

Many Indian business organisations and places of worship have also opened their doors to shelter those who have been displaced. Indian restaurants and families have been providing packets of fresh Indian food.

Achalesh Amar, an active member of the community, described Houston as a ghost town, where many volunteers are working till 3 AM, monitoring requests, assessing the situation and coordinating assistance.

Other Indian organisations like Hindus of Greater Houston, India House, India Culture Centre, the Indo-American Charity Foundation, Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater

Houston and the Indo-American Political Action Committee have decided to coordinate the relief efforts of the Indian community through SEWA International.

"A system for pre-registration for volunteers has been set up for clean-up work after the water levels subside," SEWA International Houston Chapter's President Gitesh Desai said.

Volunteers of BAPS Charities also prepared and distributed food to around 120 students of the University of Houston and also to local people. According to them, they will be preparing food in coming days also. They are working with local state officials in Houston, Sugar Land, Missouri City and League City for any essential needs.

The rescue operations are also initiated by Indian students studying in various institutions in the area.

According to Partha Sarathi Chatterji, a student of IIT in Houston, all students helped each other in the rescue operations during the floods.

Emergency contacts and other information on availability of boats to reach safe places were shared on social media, he said.

Various Indian restaurant chains also offered free food during the difficult times. Many doctors and nurses also used social media to reach out a helping hand.

Dinesh Purohit, owner of Cafe India & Bollywood Chowpaty Chaat, Sugarland provided dry baby food, milk, water, cooked meals.

Many Indian-origin doctors including, Minni Malhotraare, Bhavana Rao, Sunil GopalKrishna are offering free consultation in the area.