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The tsunami waves which struck the Tamil Nadu coast on December 26, 2004 is believed to have claimed more than 5,000 lives. The giant tidal waves took Indians by surprise and the term itself was strange to people in the country. It is the first time people in India understood the meaning of the word devastation.

Things have changed a lot as the nation, nay the world, observed on Saturday the 11th anniversary of this century's worst natural disaster which claimed 2.28 lakh lives in 14 countries stretching from Indonesia in the east to Kenya in the African coast. The last decade saw scientists of the Hyderabad based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, a research institute under the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, mastering the science and art of tsunami forecast.

Next time the giant tidal waves hit the Indian coast, chances are that it would return empty handed. "We have mastered the science of forecasting whether there is any possibility of any tsunami waves arising out of earthquakes which occur in Bay of Bengal or Indian Ocean. It is possible for us to determine the possibility of tsunami waves at least two hours in advance," T Srinivasa Kumar, director, National Tsunami Warning System at INCOIS Hyderabad, told The Pioneer.

The major achievement made by the scientists of INCOIS is that they stand guards for the countries along the Indian Ocean rim. "All these countries are dependent on the National Tsunami Warning Centre at Hyderabad for tsunami alerts. Our monitoring stations have a 24X7 control room which scans all the oceans and seas in the world. We can issue tsunami warnings within ten minutes of any earthquakes happening in any of these oceans," said Dr Kumar.

The 2004 tsunami waves took Indians by surprise and the term itself was strange to people in the country. Certain areas were left untouched by the powerful tidal waves. Research proved that those regions were saved because of the thick growth of mangroves. Now, one can see scientists from Asian and African countries making a beeline to Cuddalore based Centre for Advanced Studies in Marine Biology to get expertise in rearing mangroves along coast and estuaries.

The year 2015 saw the Government of Tamil Nadu launching a programme to familiarise residents along the coastal belt about tsunami waves. "The Panchayath Union officials are visiting coastal villages and tell us about tsunami waves which may strike at any time. We have been told to get ready for evacuation once the tsunami warning is issued by the authorities," said Vinayakam, a fisherman of Karikattukuppam, who had a miraculous escape from the 2004 tsunami waves.

But Jaya Payalan, a marine engineer-turned-fisherman activist who is the president of South Indian Fisherman Federation said a lot has to be done in creating an awareness among the fishermen and community members. "There is no means to call back the fishers out in the deep sea in the event of tsunami waves. The civil administration has to function with military discipline to save lives and properties. The recent flood is proof that the disaster managers are yet to mature to that standard," said Palayan.