

Together, towards a safer India

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World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Kobe (Japan) --- Focus on Tsunami Early Warning System for the Indian Ocean

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) was held at Kobe, Japan from 18th to 22nd January, 2005. It was an important event at the international level and its outcome is likely to have a significant impact and influence on determining the future strategies and action plan in the field of disaster management. A delegation headed by Secretary (Border Management), Ministry of Home Affairs was deputed to Kobe to present India's initiatives and achievements in handling all components of disaster management. The presentations on the scientific and comprehensive approach being adopted by India in the Opening Session in the Plenary, High-level Round Table Discussion as also in the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster and in the Drafting Committee meetings evoked considerable interest from other participants. Keeping in view the multi-hazard vulnerability of the country, population density and rapid industrial growth, the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional approach adopted by India for a comprehensive assault on country's vulnerabilities brought out in sharp focus India's concerns to address the problem of recurrent hazards and disasters in a holistic manner. The capacity building programme for disaster mitigation, preparedness and rapid professional response was recognized as a pioneering initiative. The manner in which India had handled the post-Tsunami rescue and relief, particularly in the inaccessible islands in Andaman & Nicobar, evoked positive response from almost all the participants.

In the Plenary, Secretary (Border Management) delivered the Statement enumerating the country's firm and unwavering commitment to put into place dynamic institutional and policy mechanisms for holistic disaster management as the distinctive characteristics of India's effort for disaster risk reduction. The approach mandates addressing the entire cycle of disaster management with focused attention on disaster prevention and mitigation, which has already been recognized as the panacea for comprehensive disaster management. India has proceeded to devise appropriate strategies and framework for integrating mitigation aspects into every facet of socio-economic activity. The planning process has begun to look at disasters from a development perspective and approaches are being formulated to pave the way for safer and sustainable development.

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Enumerating numerous initiatives being launched to reduce vulnerabilities of human and socio-economic infrastructure, Secretary stated that India has been able to develop its capacity in training and capacity building, the community based disaster risk management, specialist disaster response, building the requisite knowledge, attitude and skills for risk reduction, early warning systems, besides taking significant measures to facilitate speedier disaster response.

India also Chaired the High Level Round Table on “Emerging Risks: What Will Tomorrow Hold?” and the Panel Discussion thereon. In his opening remarks, Shri A.K. Rastogi, Secretary (Border Management) stated that the existing and the emerging risks have major adverse implications on the development of the economy and the society particularly due to increasing vulnerability of the built environment, as poorly planned development turns a natural phenomenon into a human and economic disaster. The rapidly changing risk profiles due to developmental process show that similar patterns of natural hazards can have varying impact and the development choices made by individuals, communities and nations can generate new risks.

Secretary stressed the need to integrate risk reduction measures into the overall development processes to make them disaster-resilient and to coalesce the poverty alleviation and vulnerability reduction efforts. In this context, decentralization of planning and development processes and local capacity enhancement assume critical importance. Similarly, bilateral, regional and international cooperation frameworks need to be established for sharing of information on present and future risks, adopting good practices and developing common strategies for dealing with risk clusters extending beyond the national boundaries.

One of the highlights of the WCDR was the Special Session on Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster. Detailing the devastating impact of the disaster on the Indian coastline including the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Secretary highlighted the swift response launched to provide succor to the affected in India as well as in the neighboring countries. India extended its support to the efforts of the United Nations in finding ways and means to address the gaps in the relief process. He announced that India has decided to work on setting-up a Tsunami Early Warning System covering the Indian Ocean-rim

countries. He hoped that regional and international initiatives in this regard would be dovetailed appropriately with national priorities, needs and initiatives and to make them sustainable and enduring, they would be led and owned by the countries concerned.

A presentation on “Mitigation of Oceanogenic Disasters: Tsunami and Storm Surge in Indian Ocean – The Indian Initiative” was also made by Dr. Radhakrishnan, Director, Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) briefly outlining the proposed system design and principle. He stated that India has evolved an end-to-end scientifically and technically sound system covering the two known tsunamigenic zones affecting the Indian Ocean region; a time-table for action has also been drawn; India would contribute to the entire Indian Ocean region and that Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observing System (IOGOOS) could be effectively used for dissemination of warning.

India's concerns and perspective also got duly reflected in the outcome statements pertaining to the Special Session on Indian Ocean Disaster as well as in the Hyogo Declaration.

In addition, the members of the Indian delegation actively participated in the different sessions held under five Thematic Segments and effectively highlighted the initiatives taken and achievements secured towards holistic disaster management. Quite a few presentations and interventions were made in the parallel sessions. Moreover, the Indian delegation distributed eleven booklets and eight pamphlets/leaflets highlighting the myriad facets of work done under the National Disaster Management Framework to the participating nations and international organizations. The material was well received and appreciated in the international arena.

On the sidelines, a meeting was also held with Mr. Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the specific request of Mr. Egeland. The main thrust of Mr. Egeland's remarks was that India can play an important role in international disaster relief efforts, particularly in the field of sharing and exchanging experiences. He requested India to assist the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) by sponsoring and hosting delegations from other countries to learn from India. Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs outlined India's disaster

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management capabilities and the scale of operations in the wake of the Tsunami disaster and observed that India was committed to the UN and looked forward to working with UN, including ISDR and other UN organizations.

National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project

In keeping with its policy of hazard risk mitigation being the key to sustainable development, the Ministry of Home Affairs have launched multi-faceted initiatives and projects aimed at mitigating hazard risks and enhancing capabilities at various levels to effectively respond to emergencies.

A National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project, supported by the World Bank, has been launched covering 13 cyclone prone coastal and island States/ UTs viz. Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Daman & Diu, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The World Bank team has also visited the States and held interaction with various stakeholders involved. The Project has been developed in a consultative manner based on the deliberations during a two-day Workshop held in February, 2003 at Kolkata.

The main components of the Project are

- A. Upgradation of Cyclone Forecasting, Tracking and Warning – envisaging upgrading/putting in place cyclone modeling, forecasting, tracking and warning system with longer lead time in warning potentially affected people on the coastline and to equip fishermen with communication devices.
- B. Cyclone Risk Mitigation Investments – including identification and implementation of high priority activities viz. construction of cyclone shelters, shelterbelt plantation, mangrove regeneration, embankments to check sea water inundation etc.
- C. Technical Assistance for Hazard Risk Management Capacity Building – includes strengthening national/regional training institutions, developing techno-legal regime for cyclone mitigation, studies on risk assessment, cost-benefit analysis of cyclone risk mitigation measures. National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) will be the nodal implementing agency for this component addressing capacity building of training institutions

and strengthening of NIDM and the Natural Disaster Management cells in Administrative Training Institutes (ATIs) will be undertaken.

- D. Project Management and Monitoring – a strong management/monitoring arrangement will be put in place to implement the project in 13 States/UTs.

The total outlay for the Project is Rs. 1350 crores (USD 300 million). The States would be assisted under the Project on a 75:25 basis with Central Government providing 75% of the resources as grant and 25% matching resources being provided by the States. This would ensure greater ownership by States/UTs and will ensure sustainability of the initiatives under the Project.

National Youth Policy reviewed to incorporate Disaster Management within its ambit

The National Youth Policy formulated by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and circulated to Ministries for obtaining their comments thereon has been reviewed to incorporate disaster management as one of the key sectors of youth concern. The Policy enumerates the specific areas requiring focused attention under the programmes and activities undertaken by the youth, especially their nodal organizations like the National Service Scheme (NSS) and the Nehru Yuvak Kendra Sangathan (NYKS).

Under the Key Sectors for Youth Concern in the Policy, it has been proposed to add a sub-section on disaster management listing the gamut of activities proposed to be undertaken by NSS and NYKS recognizing the critical role the youth can play in enhancing the resilience of communities in order to cope with and minimize the adverse effects of recurring disaster incidents on lives, livelihoods, property and the environment.

This is in accordance with the Action Plan developed during the course of the National Seminar inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports on "Mainstreaming Disaster Management into Volunteerism – The Role of National Service Scheme (NSS)" held in Pune in November, 2004. Once approved, activities in consonance therewith would be initiated.

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An Earthquake Preparedness Guide for Home Dwellers and a Colouring Book for Children to generate awareness on earthquake safety

An "Earthquake Preparedness Guide – A Ready Reckoner for Home Dwellers" has been developed in a bilingual format for dissemination to common people containing pertinent information on how to construct a disaster-resistant structure and on how to make the existing residential structures safer against natural hazards. The Booklet has been prepared under the Urban Earthquake Vulnerability Reduction Project (UEVRP) and is being disseminated to State Governments, Administrative Training Institutes and other stakeholders.

Similarly, a Colouring Activity Book for Disaster Preparedness has been developed under the UEVRP in Dehradun for generating awareness among the school going children about earthquake safety measures through an interesting medium. The children are required to colour different scenarios depicted on each page and thereby learn the tips on earthquake safety. The Colouring Book has been widely appreciated and circulated to the schools. Both the books have been uploaded on the Ministry of Home Affairs website www.ndmindia.nic.in and can be downloaded for printing and dissemination.

Disaster Management Jhaanki wins prize in Republic Day Parade in Bhavnagar, Gujarat



On the occasion of Republic Day, 2005, Disaster Management Jhaanki won special award in Bhavnagar district. Various stake holders of Disaster Risk Management Programme and volunteers participated in the Jhaanki. This is the second time that the DM Jhaanki has won the special award.

Retrofitting/reconstruction of Hospitals in California to make them EQ-resistant

During the Northridge Earthquake in Los Angeles in 1994, a number of hospitals and health facilities suffered extensive damage and a number of them had to suspend services. One of the bigger hospitals, St. John's Health Center was forced to close down for nine months. The hospital has recently commissioned a new building, designed with an EQ resistant technology to withstand twice the force of the Northridge EQ which had a magnitude of 6.7.

In the aftermath of the Northridge EQ, the California State enforced new seismic safety building codes since the officials found that nearly 40% of State's hospitals were in danger of collapsing in a major EQ and that 75% of them did not have adequate bracing to keep the mechanical and other systems operating. The seismic legislation required that all risky health facilities be retrofitted, rebuilt or closed by 2008 and that by 2030 all hospitals in the State must not only be structurally sound but also be fully functional after a disaster.

It has been found that the hospitals have been spending USD 4.6 billion to meet the seismic requirements on structural as well as non-structural elements.

Establishment of a Disaster Management Unit in Maharashtra

A major initiative in state of Maharashtra has been launched with the commissioning of a Disaster Management Unit (DMU) under the aegis of the Relief and Rehabilitation Department. The Unit is intended to provide requisite information to the common people and organizations in different facets of disaster management.

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