

KU gets Centre of Excellence For Glacial Studies

Secretary DST e-inaugurates Rs 8-cr project; VC Prof Talat vows to fulfill CoE mandate

Srinagar, Dec 4: In a move which could give a huge fillip to research promotion and development at the University of Kashmir, the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, has awarded the varsity with an ambitious Centre of Excellence for Glacial Studies (CoEGS) in the Western Himalaya.

DST Secretary Prof Ashutosh Sharma Friday e-inaugurated the ambitious CoE, budgeted at approximately Rs 8-crore, to boost the glaciological research activities in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

The CoEGS at KU is among three Centers of Excellence awarded by the DST as part of its National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE). Two other CoEs have been set up at Sikkim and Tezpur universities.

The CoEGS aims to quantify the past, present and future climate changes in the western Himalayan region, reconstruct the past glaciation in the western Himalaya, conduct climate change impact studies on glaciers and water in the western Himalaya, and, study the linkages and impacts of the depleting snow and glaciers on springs and lakes to suggest long-term strategies for sustainable development of springs and lakes in the region.

In his inaugural remarks, Prof Ashutosh said: "I am glad to see this level of interest and commitment because climate change is one of the greatest socio-economic challenges of the century, rather for all centuries, and for the entire future of mankind on planet Earth."

"The fragile and diverse Himalayan ecosystem is highly susceptible to natural hazards that trigger concerns about current and potential climate change impacts, including abnormal floods, droughts, landslides, loss of biodiversity, threat to food, water and energy security," he said.

In recent times, the receding glaciers due to climate change have led to global concerns, he said, adding that any slight change in the Himalayan ecosystem can drastically impact and alter millions of lives and impact them in substantial and adverse ways.

"So with these CoEs, we have to ensure generation and exchange of knowledge, wisdom and information that they bring, and share the best practices amongst institutions, and document the same to add value to the NMSHE," he said.

In his special remarks on the occasion, KU Vice-Chancellor Prof Talat Ahmad thanked the DST for recognising the varsity's strenuous efforts to become a part of the country's research and development initiatives on matters of great societal and scientific importance.

"Having such important Centers of Excellence makes us not only develop greater research expertise in critical areas like climate change and glacial studies, but also open the doors of our university for collaborative research activities and exchange programmes at the national and international level," he said.

In his remarks, Prof S P Singh, Ex-VC, HNB University Garhwal and Chairman DST Climate Change Programme Committee appreciated the widely-acclaimed Glaciological and Climate Change research work and activities being done at the University of Kashmir and hoped that the knowledge outcome from the three CoEs would inform policy-making in the mountainous IHR.

Prof Shakeel A Romshoo, KU's Dean of Research said the CoEGS will focus on studying the past climate at century to millennia-time scale, reconstruct the past and future glaciations, and also assess the impacts of changing climate on glaciers and other water resources in the mountainous state.

“Such data regarding the past climatic changes is expected to help improve our future predictions of the climate change in the IHR,” he said.

Prof Romshoo is the Principal Investigator of the CoEGS, even as its multi-disciplinary research team comprises four more scientists, all faculty members at the University, and 16 scientific staff, including post-doctoral fellows, involved in conducting the proposed studies.

Pertinently, the University of Kashmir has established the National Ice-core Lab for Himalayan glaciers, first of its kind in the country in 2015 for reconstruction of the paleoclimate from Himalayan ice-cores archived therein. The proposed chronological studies would help in determining the past glacial dynamics especially the Last Glacial Maximum in the western Himalayas.

The CoEGS inaugural session was attended by top DST officials, including Dr Akhilesh Gupta, Head SPLICE-Climate Change Programme DST (in online mode), Dean Academic Affairs KU Prof Akbar Masood and Dean College Development Council Prof GM Sangmi, Registrar Dr Nisar A Mir and various other participants from JKUT and north-eastern universities/institutes (in online/offline modes).