

3-day workshop on disaster risk reduction begins at KU

Experts, academics call for greater awareness to create a disaster-conscious society



Srinagar, Mar 15: Vice-Chancellor of University of Kashmir Prof Talat Ahmad Monday said that creating a disaster-conscious student community can go a long way in promoting disaster prevention consciousness at the grassroots.

He was addressing as chief guest the inaugural session of a three-day workshop on disaster risk reduction, organised by the Department of Geography and Disaster Management (DGDM), for college teachers.

Prof Talat said that academic institutions have to take a lead in spreading the message of disaster management in the society.

“I think students can be the best communicators of this message. J&K UT, which falls in the Himalayan region, is very vulnerable to disasters and everyone has to understand this fact. At the official level, our planning and our development have to be carried out in a manner where it doesn’t disturb nature in any manner,” he said, urging the DGDM to hold such capacity-building programmes at the college-level too.

In his keynote address, Dean of Research Prof Shakil A Romshoo said J&K needs to go back to the culture of disaster preparedness that it once propagated and adhered to.

“Today we may not be a disaster-conscious society but the fact is that our ancestors were very conscious and much wiser vis-à-vis disaster management. Our modern and unplanned construction practices have turned the society from disaster-conscious to disaster-unconscious,” he said.

Prof Romshoo said nearly 90% buildings in Srinagar, including some public buildings, are unsafe as per the vulnerability assessment.

Cautioning that people can’t outsource their safety to the government agencies alone, Prof Romshoo said “as individuals we will have to be more responsible to ensure safety of our families

by adopting old construction practices and abandoning all types of constructions in and along the flood basins.”

“It’s important to carry out multi-hazard vulnerability assessment across the J&K UT, where most places are vulnerable to various types of disasters including floods, quakes, landslides and avalanches. Our public buildings have to be disaster-resistant,” he said.

He said unplanned urbanization has led to loss of 22 wetlands in Srinagar alone over the years.

“We need to create a culture of discussing disasters in our homes and our workplaces rather than seeing such discussions as some kind of a bad omen. That way we will be able to create a disaster-conscious citizenry,” he said.

KU Registrar Dr Nisar Ahmad Mir, who was a guest of honour, reiterated the university’s commitment to organise such capacity-building programmes at the college and university levels regularly.

“We want our educational institutions to become main centres of development of disaster mitigation strategies as well as main hubs for raising societal awareness about disasters,” he said.

Head DGDM Prof Shamim A Shah underlined the aims and objectives of the workshop, including making the society disaster-resilient and equipping people with disaster risk reduction techniques and practices.

At the inaugural session, the DGDM felicitated Prof Shakil A Romshoo on being elected as a fellow of the prestigious Indian Academy of Sciences, recently. VC Prof Talat presented a shawl and a memento to Prof Romshoo.

Dr Javaid Ahmad Rather conducted proceedings of the inaugural session while Dr Mohammad Shafi presented a vote of thanks.