

3-day workshop on disaster risk reduction concludes at KU

Experts urge rethink on modern construction practices in J&K



Srinagar, Mar 17: Vice-Chancellor of University of Kashmir Prof Talat Ahmad Wednesday urged a rethink on the modern construction practices in Jammu and Kashmir in view of its seismicity and vulnerability to natural disasters.

Addressing as chief guest the valedictory session of a three-day workshop on disaster risk reduction, organised by the Department of Geography and Disaster Management (DGDM), Prof Talat said: “J&K is very vulnerable to disasters, including floods, avalanches, landslides and earthquakes and this vulnerability calls for a rethink on the ongoing modern construction practices in vogue where very heavy marbles are being used in construction of big houses and other structures. In case of a high magnitude quake, it’s the collapse of this concrete material which may, God forbid, lead to loss of more lives and greater damage to infrastructure than the intensity of the quake itself.”

“It is not that a heavy quake is knocking on our doors, but since J&K falls in the seismic zone V, we have to be always prepared to minimise the consequences of a big quake hitting the region by taking all the precautions,” he said in his presidential address.

Prof Talat, an internationally-acclaimed scientist, urged the workshop participants from different colleges and higher secondary institutions to pass on their learning to their students to create a pool of disaster-conscious students and widen the net of awareness.

Mr Khursheed A Ganai, former IAS officer and former advisor to J&K Governor, said disaster prevention starts with understanding the cause(s) of disasters and creating a multi-level institutional framework on disaster mitigation and prevention.

He said construction of heavy concrete houses has to be done away with to minimise the impact of disasters, especially earthquakes. “The encroachment of flood basins, water bodies and wetlands will have to stop. Alongside, de-siltation of rivers must be carried out to increase their carrying capacity,” he said in his valedictory address. He also shared his experiences in handling various disasters while he served J&K in various capacities.

Dean of Academic Affairs Prof Shabir A Bhat called for a community-level engagement of the workshop participants to spread the message of importance of disaster management.

“We all need to seriously introspect and see where we stand in terms of disaster preparedness and what frameworks/strategies are available with us. We will be able to make a great difference with more awareness at grassroots,” he said.

Dr Amir Ali Khan, senior faculty at NIDM New Delhi, called for sustained capacity-building of all stakeholders to facilitate disaster preparedness at all levels.

“We need to learn lessons from disasters that have struck in recent times and prepare ourselves accordingly. Floods, quakes and fire incidents have to be our prime focus vis-à-vis preparedness,” he said.

Head DGDM Prof Shamim A Shah gave a brief about the hands-on training given to the participants during the technical sessions, while enumerating capacity-building initiatives being undertaken by his department.

Dr Javed Ahmad conducted proceedings of the valedictory session while Dr Parvez Ahmad presented a vote of thanks.