

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SEMINAR ON NATURAL DISASTERS: THREAT PERCEPTION – MYTH AND REALITY

Department of Geology, D.B.S. College, Dehra Dun organized a national seminar on 'Natural Disasters: Threat Perception – Myth and Reality' during 23-24 February 2002. The main object of the seminar was to provide a common platform to the entire cross section of the society, where scientists, technocrats, administrators, doctors, legal professionals, public service providers, politicians, media personnel and the common people may interact so that the various distortions and misgivings about the threat of the natural disasters and their mitigation may be discussed and clarified. The seminar included ten invited lectures and twenty three technical papers dealing with wide ranging aspects of natural disasters like their genesis, impact, frequency, terrain vulnerability, preparedness, mitigation efforts, management problems, financial constraints, media response, rehabilitation and rescue operations, unnecessary and unfounded predictions generating avoidable fear psychosis and so on.

The seminar was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister of Uttaranchal, Shri Bhagat Singh Koshyari. Shri Surjit Singh Barnala, Governor of Uttaranchal addressed a special session of the seminar.

The seminar was sponsored by Department of Science and Technology, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. and Tehri Hydro Development Corporation.

Following invited lectures were delivered at the seminar:

1. Initiatives of the Department of Science and Technology in disaster study and natural disasters in Uttaranchal and their mitigation: Are we prepared? – Dr. N.S. Viridi, Director, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology.
2. Role of NGOs in hazard management and mining related problems – Prof. O.P. Varma, Executive President, Indian Geological Congress.
3. Role of police in disaster management – A.B. Lal, I.G. Police, Uttaranchal.
4. A model for disaster management in Uttaranchal – Dr. P.K. Goswami and Dr. R. Sharma, Disaster Management and Mitigation Centre, Govt. of Uttaranchal.
5. Central Government's initiative in disaster management plan – Shri J.C. Pant, Chairman, Central Government's High Powered Committee on Disaster Management.
6. Safety measures in the construction of high dams in Himalaya – Dr. P.C. Nawani, Director, Geological Survey of India.
7. Safety of Tehri Dam – Shri G.M. Prasad, Deputy General

Manager, Tehri Hydro Development Corporation.

8. Medical rescue team: Bhuj experience – Dr. A.K. Goyal and Dr. S. Gandhe, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd.

9. Legal positions in case of natural disasters – Shri R. Gupta, Advocate.

Technical papers discussed evaluation of seismic risk in the Himalaya, changing concepts of seismicity from mythological times to present day, earthquake precursors, urban seismicity risk, causes and management of landslides in Uttaranchal, relationship between geoenvironmental hazard and tectonics, watershed management in disaster affected areas, disaster associated epidemics, biophysical aspects of watershed management, nuclear disasters and public safety and awareness, legal position in relief distribution, disaster management and resource mobilization during disasters. It was emphasized in one presentation that earthquake risk in the Himalaya is overestimated in comparison to adjoining areas. Similarly, unrealistic nature of the earthquake predictions and their causes both by scientists and by astrologers were critically analysed.

During the seminar an exhibition was organized by the Geological Survey of India showing its activities in the Himalayan region.

The concluding function of the seminar was chaired by Prof. A.N. Purohit, Vice-Chancellor, H.N.B. Garhwal University and Prof. O.P. Varma and Dr. P.C. Nawani were the guests of honour. The seminar recommended that proper media campaign should be launched to generate awareness in masses, adoption of social geology in school and college level curriculum so that students should be trained in preparedness aspects, reasonable check on predictions of natural disasters, adoption of reasonable safety measures in domestic and public constructions, area specific studies pertaining to natural disasters, a clear cut policy on relief and rehabilitation for disaster affected victims, well coordinated role of governmental and voluntary organizations, due appreciation of agencies and individual workers who volunteer at the time of calamities in adverse circumstances, launch of disaster relief bonds to generate the finances and village level training of motivated persons to work at the time of calamities.

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