

'ICS must be in place to prevent disasters'

FOOLPROOF SAARC discusses single standardised emergency management system

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PATNA: What happens when a natural or a man-made disaster, or an emergency arising out of an armed conflict strikes a country, especially one located in South Asia? Chaos reigns supreme, posing unprecedented challenges in front of agencies authorized to tackle them, which in turn usually fail to deliver.

But managing the aftermath could be a lot easier if an Incident Command System (ICS), originally developed by the United States Forest Service in the 1970s, and now applied in several countries as a global best practice, is in place.

That is the issue in a five-day regional training programme on ICS, which got off to a start in the state capital on Monday for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries. Representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India are among the participants.

New Delhi-based SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) is organising it in collaboration with the Bihar Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (BIPARD).

Inaugurating the event, state industries and disaster management minister Renu Kumari



Participants at regional training programme of SAARC countries, in Patna on Monday.

SANTOSH KUMAR/HT PHOTO

Kushwaha said, "Lack of trained teams pose difficulties in proper disaster response. The training programme will help remove it and lead to better disaster management."

ICS works as a single standardized emergency management system, allowing users to work together using common operating procedures for personnel, facilities, equipment and communication. It is a flexible system, which could operate with ease in multi-jurisdictional environment.

Speaking on the occasion, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) member, JK Sinha highlighted the need for community participation in the eventuality of disasters. He said, just like there is a 'blue book' with instructions for prepara-

tions for Prime Minister's visit, small booklets containing necessary steps should be provided to incident commanders.

The NDMA member also emphasised, that ICS has to be in sync with the administrative structure of the places where it is being implemented.

Bihar State Disaster Management Authority (BSDMA) vice-chairman Anil Kumar Sinha said, "SAARC region is the most disaster prone area in the world, with huge loss of lives due to floods, cyclones and earthquakes. During big disasters, several government and non-government agencies become involved in the relief work. Coordination becomes a big issue. ICS could be of great help in such a situation. Moreover, the SAARC countries themselves have much experience in this field and they

could learn from one another."

Welcoming the participants, ADG (Railways) PK Rai said, "Delayed response after a disaster wreaks havoc. Responding to any big eventuality within the golden hour, or even earlier within the platinum 15 minutes saves many lives. This could be done if the ICS is in place."

Rai, who is also the faculty head of the BIPARD Centre for Disaster Management, said that trained professional teams, sound planning and operation, resource management along with their tracking and optimal use, financial management, as well as, proper documentation of response are among the main features of ICS.

Rai also informed that India has adopted ICS in a suitable form. It is called Incident Response System (IRS). Now it wants other SAARC members also to adopt it, hence the five-day training workshop.

The foreign officials gave presentations on the response systems prevalent in their countries. They will be trained in the specifics of the ICS till October 19.

BIPARD director general ELSN Bala Prasad also spoke at the programme while SDMC specialist MB Rao proposed the vote of thanks. Deputy director Chandrashekhar Jha from BIPARD and Binay Kumar were present on the occasion.