

Indian Express

26 Aug 2001
(26)

Experts for disaster policy; Home Minister takes cue

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, Aug 25: Taking cue from scientists and humanitarian activists calling for a comprehensive disaster policy, Home Minister Mallikarjuna Kharge said it was time for the Government to expand the scope of its Drought Monitoring Cell to cover other disasters.

While fighting the worst drought of 30 years, the State is planning a network for emergency relief, insurance and loans to offset the impact of disasters, the minister said. Kharge was inaugurating the National Seminar on Organisation and Infrastructure for Management of Disasters, organised by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) and the Alumni Association of Jadavpur University, Bangalore Chapter here.

The drought has affected 146 of the 175 talukas of the State incurring losses of Rs 3200 crore. Later speaking at

the seminar Agriculture Commissioner S Subramanya said sowing could be done only in half the fields and one-third of the sown crop had dried up.

Delivering the keynote address at the seminar Member of Parliament (MP) and former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Raja Ramanna stressed the need to put in place safety systems for early warning of disasters and their mitigation.

In his introductory remarks, NIAS director and aerospace scientist Roddam Narasimha said the need of the hour was a disaster management system with trained personnel. "We do get funds to deal with disaster situations, but a co-ordinated approach is lacking," he said.

Talking of sustainable disaster management mechanisms, S Parasuraman, Policy Advocacy Director of international donor agency Action Aid criticised the pressure to

"import solutions" and to buy "the latest innovation", undermining time-tested, locally available options.

Capt AVS Reddy, Principal Secretary, Revenue, Andhra Pradesh (AP) criticised leaders for misinforming people about disasters and placing obstacles before personnel involved in disaster response. Reddy, who was a district collector during the 1977 AP cyclone, later played a lead role in developing a disaster policy and a response mechanism there.

"There is need for institutions straight from schools to take up disaster management in their training programmes," said Dr Unnikrishnan P V of Oxfam India.

At the concluding session, experts urged the Government to ensure adequate capacity building to cope with disasters.

The policies should hit at the root of poverty and address vulnerability factors of people.