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Disaster management plan still frail

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Landslip, fire point to need for a concrete framework

Government departments are yet to set up a concrete disaster management framework for the district even as a landslip, accompanied by heavy rain, in the north-eastern part of the district snuffed out eight lives on Tuesday.

The district is situated in Earthquake Zone III on the seismic map of India, with probable earthquake intensity in the range of 5 to 6.5 on the Richter scale, officials say. Three taluks and 31 villages in the district are prone to floods, they add.

In the case of cyclones and windstorms, Kozhikode happens to be one of the most vulnerable districts in the State with 96.5 per cent of its areas experiencing high wind speeds. The coast is prone to tsunami threats, though it narrowly escaped the calamity in 2004.

The fire that broke out in the heart of the city early on Tuesday indicates that the district administration has not taken a serious view of the recurring incidents.

Proposals

Some of the proposals, prepared by a Kochi-based consultant group, EMB Planners and Designers, for a disaster management framework for the urban agglomerate more than two years ago remain on paper.

The agency has proposed a disaster management plan based on the recommendations made by multiple agencies. One of them is to prepare a document on previous disasters, their impact on society, methods used for combating the damage, response of organisations and shortfalls in rescue efforts.

Considering the effects of global warming, it has recommended a farsighted policy for the city which lies on the shores of the Arabian Sea and falls under the Coastal Regulation Zone. Initiatives should be taken for appropriate land use to prevent sea erosion and preserve ocean life.

Rapid urbanisation has resulted in the proliferation of high-rise structures, mixed land use, a high population density and bulk oil storage tanks. Ensuring safety, conducting compulsory fire drills and proper monitoring are necessary to prevent disasters associated with urban risks.

Suggestions include an emergency plan listing disaster-prone areas in the city. It will have provisions for building shelters for the victims and laying evacuation paths from vulnerable sites to the shelters. Rules to mitigate disasters have also been proposed.

Local bodies' role

Local bodies need to ensure that builders and property developers incorporate compulsorily earthquake- and fire-resistant technologies in buildings, especially tall structures, bridges, flyovers and dams.

The agency has proposed to train children to prepare for, and cope with, disasters such as earthquakes and cyclones. Units of a trained disaster response force will be stationed at

vulnerable localities.

The other proposals include identifying hospitals which can provide emergency treatment to the victims and envisaging projects in the area to streamline disaster mitigation. It has suggested that a high-powered committee identify types of disasters relating to water and climatic conditions, geological factors, chemical, industrial, nuclear and biological threats.