

Business Line 27.07.2009

Kerala House panel calls for package to tackle disasters

Our Bureau

Thiruvananthapuram, July 26 The Assembly Subject Committee on Land Revenue, Forest and Fisheries has called for a comprehensive disaster mitigation package for the coastal areas of the State.

In its report on the draft Disaster Mitigation and Management Policy of Kerala-2006 tabled in the Assembly, the committee said the State should ideally set up a coastal security force.

This can be achieved by giving specialised training to the youth in the coastal hamlets under the joint initiative of the revenue, ports and fisheries departments and the Coast Guard and Navy, it said.

The State must also put in place an insurance scheme to provide cover to fishermen who meet with accidents while at outer seas.

The Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) should be leveraged to extend assistance to those who lose boats, nets and homes to sea erosion, said the panel.

The main obstacle to disaster mitigation efforts in the State was paucity

of funds, it said, and the funds being received from the CRF were insufficient.

Inclusion of all forms of disasters in the State policy comes in the way of extending assistance after major disasters strike with increasing regularity.

The State Government must take steps to prioritise disasters so that sufficient funds would be available for major disaster mitigation activities, said the report.

One of the major reasons for the failure in rehabilitating the affected due to sea erosion was the delay in land acquisition.

The Government must effect appropriate changes in the relevant laws and rules to speed up land acquisition, the committee suggested.

Given the high accident rates in the outer seas, the panel advised that global positioning systems and safety kits must be onboard fishing vessels.

The committee also called for a standard operating procedure applicable to all departments such as Revenue, Fisheries, Local Self-Government, Police, Fire Force, Forest, Public Works, Information, Electricity and Harbour Engineering, which are normally involved in disaster mitigation efforts.

Absence of coordination between these departments can undermine the best disaster mitigation efforts.

Failure of related agencies in responding to different types of disasters was proving costly, it said.

Steps must be taken to install disaster warning signs at quarries and river banks besides weather warning signals at public places, including hotels, trains and fishing harbours.

The report also asked the State to submit to the Centre proposals for securing helicopter services for search and rescue operations, and strengthen the oil pipeline mapping system in cities such as Kochi.

According to the report, steps must also be taken for forming safety clubs in schools to create awareness among the younger generation about disasters and mitigation efforts.

In order to check road accidents, the Government must limit issue of heavy vehicle driving licences to those aged between 25 and 55 and seek to create an ambulance service network with modern equipment and paramedical staff, the Assembly Committee said.

Temporary sheds may be set up adjunct to schools for being used as a shelter during disaster. Shelters should be repaired and permanent shelters built in places prone to disasters such as the coastal hamlets. The Government must also expedite efforts to secure Central assistance for the proposed 105 cyclone shelters in the coastal villages, the panel report added.