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NEWSLINE ANCHOR

6 CITIES, 13 DISTRICTS TO IMPLEMENT CITIZEN-GOVT DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Checking Aftershocks

Sreejiraj Eluvangal

Lucknow, April 30: IT is a project that is designed to change the way you react to natural calamities. Carried out under a bigger national disaster management programme, a unique project basing itself on citizen-government partnership for dealing with disasters took its first stumbling steps this week in the Yahiyaganj and Raja Bazar wards of the city.

The two wards have become the first in the State to set up their own disaster management committees under the Urban Earthquake Vulnerability Reduction (UEVR) project implemented by the government with the help of United Nations Development Project (UNDP).

“The idea is to raise the awareness levels of the common people so that they can help themselves and others in times of disasters like an earthquake,” explained Rajnish Kumar Gupta, councillor for Raja Bazar. “We don’t want the citizens to wait for the relief teams to arrive from outside if anything happens.”

To be implemented in six cities and 13 high-risk districts of the State, the programme proposes a unique blend of citizen-government partnership. For this, ward-level committees, like the ones that were formed in the city on Thursday, will be set up in all the areas.

“The first meeting was between the citizens and the local officials from the police department, civil defence etc. Later on, we will form citizens’ teams with specialisation in disaster-relief activities like search-and-rescue, first-aid, relief and rehabilitation team etc,” said officials.

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Leading up to the ward-level activities have been a series of meetings and conferences starting nearly one-and-a-half years ago. Conceived by the UNDP in association with the Ministry of Home Affairs last year, with the purpose of streamlining the line of command during disaster relief operations, the programme also focuses on improving the readiness on the part of the general population to deal with them.

“Lucknow is a city which has much to fear from earthquakes,” said Ashish Narayan, Project Officer for the Disaster Risk Management Programme, which is carrying out the scheme with the help of the state government.

Though Lucknow lies in the medium-risk zone (zone III) for earthquakes, experts working in this field emphasise the need to be on guard at all times.

“The city has the Faizabad Ridge (FR) running next to it all the way to the Himalayas and unlike most other cities in this zone, the proximity to the Himalayas makes it a very probable candidate for an earthquake,” added Narain.

Experts have also long warned of inculcating anti-earthquake habits in the engineers and designers of the city. “For a city of its size, hardly any of its buildings are quake-proof, pointing towards a lack of awareness among the administrators, professionals and communities,” said Narain, adding that programmes to “sensitise” the designers and architects would also be carried out under the UEVR.

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