News_ARTC_2003-25.pdf



Daily mirror 3rd, July, 2003

# Engineers recommend disaster mitigation, not management

By Kelum Bandara

The Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka has explored means of mitigating the impact of catastrophes like landslides, earthquakes, cyclones and lightning through pre- and post-disaster management measures.

Vice Chairman of the University Grants Commission and President of the Institute, Prof.L.L.Ratnayake said at a panel discussion held at the auditorium of Institution of Engineers that if precautionary measures were adopted damage resulting from destructive natural phenomena could be contained to a considerable extent.

"As the first step, the existing National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) should be reactivated and restructured as a Disaster Mitigation and Management Authority (DIMMA) since the former was not geared to execute such measures effectively," he said.

The existing mechanism of NDMA should be activated and energized to enlist active participation of the relevant organizations and the authorities at national, provincial, district and local level, he said.

"It is important to seek the involvement of the Irrigation Department, National Building Research Organization, Road Development Authority and others in the pre-disaster mitigation works. The role of the proposed DIMMA would be implementing, coordinating and monitoring activities related to integration of natural disaster mitigation in the long term," he said.

Addressing the audience, Dr.Athula Kulathilaka, Senior Lecturer in Geotechnical Engineering at the Moratuwa University said that a project was carried out until 1995 under the patronage of the United Nations to identify the high-risk areas in the upcountry which are prone to landslides.

"The project was conducted in Badulla and Nuwara Eliya districts. Thereafter, a landslide hazard zonation map was created to highlight the vulnerable areas. If the precautionary measures were adopted, the death toll could have been minimized to a great extent in the recent landslides," he said.

He said a project was being carried out in Kegalle and Ratnapura and vulnerable areas are named as high, low and medium risk areas.

"People should be evacuated from the high risk areas and reforestation schemes should be implemented there if they are open or barren lands.

Medium risk areas must be kept under observation for a possible landslide. The low risk areas are the most suitable areas for human settlements," he said.

He said an authorized structure to implement decisions must be set up since they must be taken regarding evacuation of people though the results of researches carried out. "We are helpless since we cannot implement the result of researches. Even at that time when the UN project was carried out, the same problem was encountered," he said.

He said that engineering measures like building some constructions to consolidate the land and drilling holes could be adopted to minimize the damage to the environment while saving human lives.

"The people living in the risk areas should be made aware of the signals of an impending danger. This should be done soon since those who carry out research cannot always be there," he said.

He said that areas should be identified for human inhabitation and the government should duly make funding contributions for that purpose.

"If the required measures are taken, human lives can be save easily as done in countries like India," he said.