

FURTHER THREATS OF EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMIS

A report in *Nature* (20th Jan. 2005) warns of possibilities of further earthquakes both to the north and south of the event that occurred on 26th Dec. 2004, perhaps within a decade and that they might even be powerful enough to cause another tsunami.

Investigation of historical record of the earthquakes in the area by looking at the corals which retain a record of the low tide mark — and can only live under water, so it dies off if the low tide mark recedes, or grows if the low tide mark rises. This data has been used to estimate changes in elevation to within a couple of centimetres over the past 50 to 100 years and look for larger rises associated with past earthquakes.

Such a study is warranted along the west coast of Gujarat, transected by a number of active faults. Blocks between the faults have shown a tendency for moving up and down. This is an ideal site for undertaking earthquake studies.

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WAVES OF UNAWARENESS

..... Awareness is the key component that initiates action – actions of preparedness and mitigation. However, this is not a new proposition. The importance of a culture of preparedness is well established and accepted by experts in this domain for long. We cannot predict. But surely we can be prepared.

However, even if we are aware, does it work? I doubt!

Take the example of Delhi, a region falling under Seismic Zone IV and expecting a quake any time. Most people in Delhi are aware of this. But what are we doing about it? Are we prepared? Do we talk about it at home (... to start with)? Where are the checklists? Leave aside the 'aware society or government', are our 'individually aware minds' prepared?

The last few weeks have seen immense good (relief) work by the civil societies and the State, in the affected regions. But steps to put disaster management as a mandated accountable responsibility with someone still evades us....and even if there is a mandate, who asks what those people are doing for the next twelve months?

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WILL WE LEARN?

An unthinkable disaster for ages, humans have been living on the slopes of active volcanoes, the floodplains of major rivers and the shores of oceans. The past two centuries of advancements in science and technology have changed nothing. Major cities are still growing right on top of earthquake fault zones. Millions live on ocean shores a couple of feet above sea level, within sight of safer, higher, more stable ground. Over the past century millions have died in volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. The Indian Ocean tsunami is just one example of the price we pay for our lack of respect for Mother Earth. Once again we will bury the dead, fight disease, feed the hungry and rebuild. We will survive. But will we learn from the experience? The "unthinkable" was in fact a predictable natural disaster.

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