'Work together for managing disasters'

"No one can hold back the power of nature. But globally we have developed the science and technology to understand these phenomena to effectively plan and mitigate. And I am convinced that only by working together can we face natural disasters effectively and minimize the losses," exhorted Irwin Itzkovitch, Assistant Deputy Minister, Earth Sciences Sector, Natural Resources Canada.

Presenting the keynote address after inaugurating the Second International Symposium on Geospatial Information for Disaster Management (Gi4DM) held in Goa, India during 25-26 September, Itzkovitch detailed the technological expertise Canada possesses in effectively tackling the disasters – be it prevention of floods, seismic monitoring, tsunami monitoring and warning systems or storm surges management – and said that Canada is ready to share its expertise with the world. There is a big difference between the developed and developing world when it comes to the effects of natural disasters. While there is an enormous loss of property with little loss to life in the developed world, in developing countries there is a tremendous loss to life, Itzkovitch said.

Earlier, Dr Shailesh Nayak, in his opening remarks, said India is witnessing strange phenomena like floods in totally unexpected places like Rajasthan and cyclones on the Arabian coast. It is necessary to understand this changing weather pattern. Satellites, both weather and remote sensing, have sophisticated equipment to monitor disasters and develop predictive models for managing disasters.

Briefing about the activities of ISPRS TC-4, Working Group 8, Sisi Zlatanova, Chair, WG IV/8 said her group is working with various international organizations like FIG, OGC, ICA, ICT for Environment and AGILE of Europe and added that it is essential to have 100% cooperation and integration of different technologies during emergencies.

AS Rajawat, organizing secretary, Gi4DM proposed the vote of thanks.

Dr Shailesh Nayak, Director, Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), made a presentation on the Early Warning System for Tsunami and Storm Surge of India, which is being set up at INCOIS, Hyderabad. He said the system includes an exhaustive network of tidal stations, bottom pressure recorders, broadband sensors across the country and is coupled with a strong communication network. Once this is operational, the system would be able to give out a tsunami alert within half-an-hour of the occurrence of earthquake in the region. The system is expected to get operational by September, 2007, he said.

Geospatial Databases for Sustainable Development

"Create synergy between the science and application of geospatial databases," exhorted PS Goel, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences. Delivering the keynote address after inaugurating the four-day International Symposium on Geospatial Databases for Sustainable Development held in Goa during September 27-30, Dr Goel, who has done commendable work as a space scientist until recently, said that his first observation after coming from space to earth is that when people talk about sustainable development, it is imperative they talk about issues relating to earth. India is looking for a database for development. But the issue is not just about the creation of databases but to make them available to the right person at the right time. Goel said it is equally important to develop common standards to make different systems interoperable to facilitate the exchange of data and to have some agency that can take the responsibility of maintaining the databases, like the NSDI. Apart from these ingredients, Goel said space is the basic enabler of spatial data, in which India has made significant capacity.

Earlier, R Navalgund, Director, Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad, welcomed the guests and the delegates and made his opening remarks. Briefing on the activities of SAC, Navalgund said SAC is a place where a host of space scientists, physicists, geologists, anthropologists, biologists and even social scientists work hand-in-hand for the benefit of society vis-à-vis space. The organization is helping in capacity building, which is a vital requirement in a developing country like India, he added.

Detailing the activities of ISPRS TC-IV, Dr Shailesh Nayak, its president, said that data is being generated manifold, but the issue of concern is updating the same. Briefing the delegates over the activities of ISRS, Dr Radhakrishnan, Director, NRSA said the members are doing extremely good work in promoting remote sensing among the student and scientific community of their respective regions. Industry too is working for the broader application of remote sensing beyond the government arena.