

INCOIS fully prepared to handle tsunamis

INCOIS is known for the Tsunami warning system, but it also does a lot of work for the fishing community. Could you tell us about the process and the benefits accrued?

The Potential Fishing Zone (PFZ) is one of the pioneering services that are being provided by INCOIS to the fishing community. The organisation, on a daily basis, impacts and empowers the lives of millions of fisherman by issuing credible advisories which help them locate potential fishing zones in the sea.

Together with the PFZ advisories, we also make sure that information on how safe it is to venture out at sea on that day or next 5 days is provided. This is done through the operational forecasts of ocean waves, currents, etc. We use several modes of communication, like Mobile/Telephone/Fax, Electronic Display Boards (EDB) specially installed at fishing centres along the coast. We also reach out to the community through E-mail, Web services, SMS, local Radio and TV channels, local newspapers, information kiosks set up by NGOs working with fishermen, etc., to disseminate the information to fishermen and other users.

A study carried out by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi, reported that 90 per cent of fishermen are aware and using the PFZ advisories in Tamil Nadu and 60 per cent of them in Odhisa and West Bengal. The study also concluded that the total net economic benefit due to the usage of PFZ advisories and ocean forecasts by fishermen lies in the range of Rs 34,000 to Rs 50,000 crore. The report also assesses that if PFZs are used under variant scenarios, traditional fishermen and those who use mechanised boats. The domestic product can go up between 1.47 per cent to 2.04 per cent of the national GDP.

INCOIS recently re-enacted the 2004 Tsunami. Why was it done and what lessons were learnt?

The recent mock drill 'Exercise IOWave 11' was successfully organised by INCOIS on 12th October, 2011. India along with the 23 Indian Ocean nations participated in the major ocean-wide mock drill that enacted the tsunami event of 26th December, 2004. The major objective of the exercise was to test the communications channels and to help the disaster management authorities to test their procedures and responses during such an event. In effect, we should build resilience against natural catastrophes by adopting a proactive, preventive approach to reduce the vulnerability and enhance preparedness levels. The outcome of the mock drill was quite positive with the enthused participation from National Disaster Management



INTERVIEW OF THE WEEK

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has been silently but emphatically going about its business of providing the much needed information of an impending danger to the Indian coast as well as to the countries in the Indian Ocean on Tsunamis and storms. Our correspondent T P Venu speaks to Dr Satheesh C Shenoi, Director of the centre, to learn more of the activities and future plans

Authority (NDMA), MHA, Disaster Management offices of all coastal states/UTs, National Disaster Response Force (NDRT), Indian Coast Guard, Indian Navy and critical coastal installations (ports, power plants, etc.).

Another major achievement was that beginning with 'Exercise IOWave11', India (the tsunami early warning centre at INCOIS) was

designated as Regional Tsunami Service Provider (RTSP) for the entire Indian Ocean region together with the warning centres of Indonesia and Australia.

Are we prepared to tackle an eventuality of Tsunami of the scale of 2004?

We are fully prepared to handle the worst-

case-scenario of Tsunami by early detection and warning. One of our key areas that we have worked on is to have enhanced networks that can detect potentially tsunamigenic earthquakes in Indian Ocean. Our operational efficiency has reached a stage that we can issue the tsunami bulletins within 10 minutes or even in less time as soon as any earthquake in the Indian Ocean is triggered.

Having said that, I will also like to draw attention that even some of the coastal states are well adapted to receive the tsunami warnings and mitigate the challenges by their safeguard mechanism. This was amply demonstrated by our recent mock drill.

We understand that the countries in the Indian Ocean rim will be benefitted by the Tsunami Warning Centre from Hyderabad. Please explain how?

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission has handed over the responsibility for Indian Ocean tsunami advisories to the Regional Tsunami Advisory Service Providers (RTSPs) of the region (India, Australia and Indonesia).

The RTSPs can now monitor, detect as well as issue the tsunami warning bulletins to the countries in the Indian Ocean rim. By adopting a coherent strategy, we can detect, monitor any formidable tsunami and avoid any catastrophic event. This can alert the coastal areas which can then adopt proactive response and pre-emptive measures to avert natural disaster. For the same, Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC) plans to play a pivotal role.

What are the future plans of INCOIS?

I foresee a great future for the nation and of course for INCOIS in the domain of ocean information and advisory services to the society, industry, government and scientific community. Our future plans encompass making our ocean models more accurate with higher resolution. In regard to PFZ, INCOIS plans to generate species specific advisories. In conformity with our tsunami forecasts, we aim to build coastal inundation modelling.

We have been trying to leverage the best of the technology and follow a better roadmap to bring ocean related services at a broader and better level. INCOIS has been constantly strategising and implementing its plans. We also have been handholding the fisher community by holding massive awareness campaigns and training programs. In future also, the organisation is committed to play a pivotal role in the nation's development and enter the next level of growth. ■