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India, due to its geography and climatic conditions, is highly prone to various natural disasters. The major disasters in India are drought, floods, cyclones and earthquakes; though landslides, avalanches, snowstorms, hailstorms, and fires also frequently occur. About 68% of the country is vulnerable to drought, 40 million hectares is liable to floods, over 56% of the country is exposed to seismic activities, and about 8,000 km of coastline is vulnerable to cyclones. In light of the frequency of natural disasters in the country, an integrated and well organized disaster management system has evolved over the years. While the Union Government plays a leading role in coordinating efforts at the national and international levels, responsibilities are determined and allocated throughout the administrative hierarchy at the Union, State, and district levels. In addition, a large number of secondary institutions supplement efforts by assisting in forecasting, providing relief and rescue resources, and supporting preparedness and mitigation efforts.



In recent past, the country has experienced two major disasters: a Super Cyclone in Orissa in October, 1999, and a severe earthquake in Bhuj, Gujarat in January, 2001, which took over 22,000 precious human lives and caused very extensive damage to public and private property. Based on the experience of managing these disasters, many initiatives have been taken to further strengthen our disaster management system. Special emphasis is being given to developing human resources, educating the public, increasing community participation, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and improving communication systems.

Like other parts of the World, India is now giving more emphasis to preparedness and mitigation measures. As disasters do not recognize political boundaries, the importance of regional and international cooperation has been recognized everywhere. There is a need to learn from the experiences of other countries by way of sharing information and adopting effective practices. With this background, I joined ADRC on the 5th of October, 2002 as a Visiting Researcher. I have been associated with the Nodal Ministry for Management of Natural Disasters in India for more than two decades. I would like to visit leading institutions in this field in Japan and have detailed discussions with concerned officers of the government of Japan about their disaster management strategies, particularly in the areas of preparedness in the context of floods, typhoons, and earthquakes. I understand that since 1960, when the government began taking various preparedness measures following a severe typhoon in 1959, the number of human lives lost to floods and typhoons in Japan has come down to an average of about 100 persons per year, compared with a previous average of annual death of about 1,000 persons. In my tenure as Visiting Researcher, I will benefit from an exchange of experience and information on the disaster management system and network in Japan, which will be of immense use and a very constructive contribution to the disaster reduction related efforts in my country.