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## Train local body representatives, says Vasan

Special Correspondent

*In disaster management*



**ROLE OF PANCHAYATS: G.K. Vasan, Union Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation, with G. Palanithurai, coordinator, Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, Gandhigram Rural University, at a workshop in Chennai on Saturday. T. Karunakaran, Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural University is also in the picture. — Photo: S. Thanthoni**

CHENNAI: Governments should give effective training to elected representatives of local bodies, especially panchayats, in disaster management, Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation G.K. Vasan said here on Saturday.

He said it was unfortunate that the country was unable to use productively, the potential of panchayats during disasters, when people would be in need of shelter, sanitation, water and food. Panchayats could play a significant role in arranging these facilities and mitigate the suffering, he said inaugurating a national workshop on 'Empowering panchayats for managing disasters.'

In disaster management, rehabilitation was important after relief. Infrastructure such as houses, drinking water, roads, community halls, and disaster shelters had to be constructed. These had to be created speedily to ensure early rehabilitation. For this, panchayats should

be helped to acquire the skills required.

Self-help groups, youth and farmers' clubs could also play a crucial role in disaster mitigation and management. A system must be developed to integrate these with the disaster management efforts of panchayats.

### Loss of "bio-shields"

Gandhigram Rural University Vice-Chancellor T. Karunakaran regretted that removal of "bio-shields" such as coral reefs, which had acted as buffer, led to disasters.

Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, S. Parasuraman, suggested creating a database pertaining to particular villages, which would be useful in planning development schemes as well as in disaster management.

G. Palanithurai, coordinator, Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayat Raj Studies, which organised the workshop in collaboration with the All-India Disaster Mitigation Institute, said panchayat leaders should be prepared to combat disasters, and Gandhigram University used to work in coordination with the local community in rehabilitation of those affected by disasters.