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{ HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE DELIBERATES }

LG chairs meet on Yamuna

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NEW DELHI: Lieutenant governor VK Saxena on Friday chaired the first meeting of a high-level committee for the rejuvenation of the Yamuna and finalised a time-bound action plan of eight parameters, with monthly targets till June.

The parameters include augmenting sewage treatment, increasing sewage treatment plants (STPs), tapping and cleaning drains, expanding sewage network in unauthorised colonies and JJ clusters, management of septage, and resto-

ration of floodplains.

The National Green Tribunal constituted the high-level committee on January 9 after it expressed its unhappiness over the progress made so far in the clean-up of the river. The committee has been asked to submit its first report by January 31.

On Twitter, Saxena said the meeting was attended by senior officer of stakeholder departments and agencies.

"...the meeting deliberated upon a concrete future plan of action... Describing the task at hand to be difficult due to legacy neglect, but yet achievable, exhorted officials to ensure

implementation of the decisions taken today in a mission mode, without extending committed time lines. Any shortcoming on part of officials will not be accepted," he posted.

Other members of the panel include Delhi chief secretary Naresh Kumar, secretaries of various Delhi government departments, the Delhi Jal Board CEO, DDA officials, top officials of the Union ministries of Agriculture, Jal Shakti and Environment, chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board and director general of National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).

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Heed Joshimath warning before it's too late



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THE tragedy befalling the township of Joshimath is a cumulative effect of the brazen apathy of the local government to heed the repeated warnings from environmentalists, geologists, experts and most importantly, local people.

Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a well-known environmentalist connected with the Chipko Movement, has lambasted successive governments for failing to act on warnings of the lurking dangers in Joshimath, submitted to the local government more than two decades ago. According to Bhatt, a study conducted by 12 scientific organisations, including the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), had reported that over 99 per cent of the mapped area of Joshimath was landslide-prone in various degrees.

Incidents of land sinking in Joshimath were noticed as early as the 1970s. One of the earliest reports highlighting the vulnerability of Joshimath dates back to 1976 when an 18-member committee chaired by MC Mishra warned that the town of Joshimath is 'geologically unstable' and suggested several restrictions and remedial measures.

The Mishra Committee was set up to probe the cause of landslides and the sinking of Joshimath town. The report suggested a ban on heavy construction around Joshimath. This

report revealed that Joshimath, located in an ancient landslide zone, was built on a loose, unconsolidated surface with the material beneath being soil and debris. As a result, this area does not have a high load-bearing capacity. This report cautioned against "unplanned development in this area" and identified its "natural vulnerabilities". It further mentioned that the dearth of adequate drainage facilities was also responsible for landslides in the region.

Ignoring this warning of the Mishra Committee, a number of hydropower projects have been sanctioned in this region since then. These include the Vishnugad project in Joshimath Tapovan region. Local people and activists in the region allege that a private agency which conducted the survey for this project failed to take cognisance of fragile geological conditions where tunnelling could disturb the local ecology in this mountainous region. In May 2010, two researchers from Garhwal University and the Disaster Mitigation Management Centre published a well-researched article in the journal *Current Science*, highlighting the following three risks facing Joshimath town: (1) The government should not have overburdened the town through the tunnel alignment which was part of the hydropower project.

(2) The tunnelling process punctures the water-bearing strata and causes harm in water gushing out and flooding the area.

(3) Inability to understand the ecology and geology of the area before implementing large-scale infrastructure projects such as hydropower projects and road construction are acts of negligence by the authorities.



Although work on highway and power projects sanctioned during the last decade is underway, there is an urgent need to review these projects to strike a judicious balance between development work and environmental concerns. This may dampen economic growth and job creation, but it has to be carefully weighed against the risks of an ecological disaster in the area.

VULNERABLE: The Joshimath disaster is a wake-up call for Uttarakhand and other states. ■■

Over the years, Joshimath has become a gateway for a large number of pilgrims visiting Badrinath and Hemkund Sahib, besides providing passage to tourists going to Auli. According to a report, experts believe that unplanned construction, overpopulation, hydropower projects and obstruction of the natural flow of water may have led to the present disaster in Joshimath.

Following the Kedarnath tragedy in 2013, a two-member Bench of the Supreme Court had taken cognisance of the ecological hazard caused by hydel projects in Uttarakhand. This led to the stay of 24 proposed plants on the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi river basins. An experts' panel chaired by environmentalist Ravi Chopra mentioned in its report in 2014 that there was a direct as well as indirect role of hydropower projects in the aggravation of the floods of 2013. The

Supreme Court directed the Union Government to outline a policy regarding hydropower projects, but it is yet to come. Divergent views among Union ministries — Environment and Power on one side and Water Resources on the other — appear to have delayed the response.

Ravi Chopra, who was also the Chairperson of the Supreme Court panel on the 'Char Dham' all-weather road project, stated during a press conference organised by Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti last week that a scientific paper 'Change in hydraulic properties of rock mass due to tunnelling', published in 2015, mentioned that repeated bursting and trapping of the tunnel boring machine for the construction of the 12.1-km tunnel from Helang to Tapovan in Uttarakhand had led to cracks in the area. This gives credence to

the assertion being made by the environmentalists and local people that what has happened in Joshimath is a result of the tunnelling exercise conducted by the NTPC. The project, which also envisages a concrete barrage 15 km upstream of Joshimath, has been drawing flak from the public for the crisis facing the town due to land subsidence.

Garhwal division is among India's most vulnerable regions. The Kedarnath floods of 2013 and the Chamoli disaster of 2021 killed about 200 people in Joshimath's vicinity and damaged two hydel projects in the area. They are also warning signs of the devastation the next Himalayan flood could wreak. Although work on several highway and power projects sanctioned during the last decade is underway, there is an urgent need to review these projects to strike a judicious bal-

ance between development work and environmental concerns. This may dampen economic growth and job creation, but it has to be carefully weighed against the risks of an ecological disaster in the area. For the administration in hill regions, these are tough but necessary calls to make.

Hyderabad-based National Remote Sensing Centre of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently released satellite images of Joshimath and a preliminary report on land subsidence which shows that the entire town may sink. Satellite images of Joshimath released by ISRO show that the Himalayan town sank at a rapid pace of 5.4 cm in just 12 days, triggered by a possible subsidence event on January 12. The images show that the Joshimath-Auli road is also going to collapse due to land subsidence. The finding in the preliminary report of ISRO is indeed frightening.

Following the alarm caused by the sinking of Joshimath town, the Uttarakhand Government has set up a seven-member panel comprising experts from IIT Roorkee, the Geological Survey of India, the National Institute of Hydrology and the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology to conduct a field survey in Joshimath. The expert panel's field assessment draft report after the initial survey on Joshimath has pointed out that sediment-laden water, gushing out of an unknown underground source, might have caused arcuate-shaped erosion and cracks as deep as 1 metre.

The Joshimath development should serve as a wake-up call not only for Uttarakhand but also for all other states in the ecologically sensitive region of seismically vulnerable states in north India.

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यमुना की सफाई पर एलजी ने ली बैठक, कई दिशा-निर्देश जारी

हरिभूमि न्यूज ► नई दिल्ली

यमुना नदी की सफाई को लेकर एनजीटी द्वारा गठित उच्च स्तरीय समिति की प्रथम बैठक की अध्यक्षता उपराज्यपाल विनय कुमार सक्सेना ने की।

शुक्रवार को हुई इस बैठक में यमुना सफाई अभियान से जुड़े विभिन्न विभागों के आला अधिकारी मौजूद थे। जानकारी अनुसार पहली ही बैठक में उपराज्यपाल ने यमुना सफाई को लेकर भविष्य की ठोस योजनाओं पर गहन विचार-विमर्श किया।



उपराज्यपाल ने सभी अधिकारियों को कहा कि गंदे नाले में बदल चुकी यमुना की सफाई करना और वह भी तय समय सीमा में हमारा लक्ष्य है।

8 मापदंडों पर फोकस

इसके लिए 8 मापदंडों पर समयबद्ध कार्य योजना पर कार्य करना होगा। इसमें एसटीपी के माध्यम से सीवेज उपचार में वृद्धि, नालियों की ट्रेपिंग और सफाई, यूए कॉलोनियों, जेजे क्लस्टर में सीवेज नेटवर्क, सेप्टेज और बाढ़ के मैदानों की बहाली, मासिक लक्ष्यों के साथ जून 2023 तक 6 महीने की कार्य योजना का

फैसला किया गया है। उपराज्यपाल ने कहा कि बेशक यह कार्य कठिन है लेकिन इस चुनौती को मिलकर स्वीकार करते हुए इस लक्ष्य को हासिल करना है।

उन्होंने मिलकर कार्य करने का गुर बताते हुए इस कार्य को प्रतिबद्ध समय सीमा में पूरा करने के लिए अधिकारियों को प्रेरित किया। साथ ही उपराज्यपाल ने साफ साफ शब्दों में अधिकारियों को चेता भी दिया कि इस कार्य में अधिकारी वर्ग की तरफ से किसी भी तरह की कमी और अनदेखी को स्वीकार नहीं किया जाएगा।