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291 hectares of forest land set to be diverted for Kondhane dam

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MUMBAI: Just over 291 hectares of forest land (equal to 32 Oval Maidans) in Raigad and Pune districts are likely to be diverted for the controversial Kondhane Dam project which is proposed to be built across the Ulhas River and will provide 245MLD (millions of litre per day) of water a day to emerging localities in the southern end of Navi Mumbai.

The City Industrial Development Corporation (Cidco), which is executing the project, applied for stage-1 forest clearance on October 16, official documents show. The project's total land requirement (including non-forested area), is 400 hectares. At a per capita water requirement of 135 litres per day, the dam is expected to benefit a population of 1,850,000 people. Construction work is estimated to take five years, though it is yet unclear when construction will resume.

Ganesh Phadke, executive engineer (Kondhane-Balganga), Cidco, did not respond to calls seeking comment on Saturday. However, a senior official in Cidco's environment office said, "The project is very much on the cards, but it is starting with a clean slate. The earlier contractor has been blacklisted, and even the detailed project report was prepared afresh by Cidco. Some portion of the water will be used for irrigation, but the



The Kondhane Dam project is proposed to be built across the Ulhas River.

majority will go to the Navi Mumbai Airport Influence Notified Area (Naina) region and also Pushpak Nagar, which are expected to see a big boom once the Navi Mumbai International Airport is constructed."

The Kondhane dam was the first of several irrigation projects sanctioned during the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) regime and had come under the scanner for alleged corruption and cost escalations during the Maharashtra irrigation scam. The Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation (KIDC) was to initially build the dam at a height of 39 metres at a cost of ₹56.16 crore.

The state water resources department had tried to push the project twice earlier with a much higher cost of ₹443.94 crore and a height of about 71 metres, but could not pass the scrutiny of government agencies. Within

months of the KIDC taking up the project, its scope was widened and the cost escalated. Construction began in 2011, and by 2012 the project cost climbed to ₹614 crore from ₹56.16 crore, as per an investigation by the anti-corruption bureau. The cost of the revived project, Cidco submitted to the forest department, now stands at ₹155,000 lacs (₹1,550 crore).

The subsequent Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2017 revived the project and handed it over to Cidco, this time as a drinking water project for the 644 sq km Naina, which is located 35kms away from the proposed dam. In 2017, Cidco paid ₹99 crore to water resources department to acquire the project.

Presently, rest of Navi Mumbai draws water from the Hetawane Water Supply Scheme MJP's Patalganga Project, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation's Morbe Dam and MIDC's Barvi Dam. "The ultimate saturated water demand of present Cidco and Naina area in 2034 is likely to be 1275MLD," Cidco said in a project brief submitted to the forest department. As per current specifications, the Kondhane Dam project "envisages construction of 80m high dam across River Ulhas at Kondhane Village with a full reservoir level at EL (elevation). Around 140.0 metres and corresponding storage of 115.98 million cubic meters", project note clarifies.



UNREQUITED NATURAL CHAOS

1991	768 people were killed during Uttarakashi earthquake that had a magnitude of 6.8 in the Garhwal region
1998	238 people were killed in a landslide in the Malpa village
1999	103 people were killed in Chamoli earthquake
2012	31 people died while 40 were reported to be missing in Himalayan floods
2013	5,700 people were presumed dead in Kedarnath in Uttarakhand
2016	4,538 hectares of forest was engulfed and seven people were killed
2020	71 hectares of forest cover was engulfed and two people had died
2021	72 lives were lost in the aftermath of glacial outburst in Rishi Ganga River in Chamoli district in February
	54 people have died this month in the Kumaon region, as per the latest reports

Extreme weather events in India's topographies have been building up, leading to a need for an urgent overhaul of our administrative and conscientious approach to solve the issue

ARIF MOHAMMAD &
SURAJ KUMAR

It is a veritable cascade of tragedy that continues to defy. Day after day, we watch our wits and sensibilities to battle disasters that have manifested themselves across our country over the past few years, and astounded us over the last few days. The latest is the misery that we witness in Uttarakhand and Kerala over the last week, the freshest wounds that have ripped apart our collective feeling of peace and again pushed us to into dread and temerity. It is a travesty that we brace ourselves for repeated catastrophes almost each day now. And, as is worst, natural processes are getting off-track and turning into disasters, killing some of our own and causing large-scale mayhem. The saddest part is that we are now, as a people and a populace, becoming immune and used to such disasters — normalization if you will, and our sinking feelings be damned.

At the same time, the debate is dying, especially when the recent IPCC report established a link between the recurring natural disasters and Climate Change, brutally confronting us with the fact that it is we who are largely responsible for the catastrophe we find ourselves in. Let's focus only on two aspects here today — the sudden upsurge in natural disasters, particularly in the Himalayas region and on what steps are being taken to prevent and mit-

impact of the same.

Let's take a deep breath too — for Uttarakhand is today bearing a severe brunt of the overall misery and the reasons need to be unfolded, peeled apart like an avocado if you will.

Intimidating timelines

The Himalayan region is no stranger to natural disasters. Natural disasters in the region are a simple extrapolation of natural processes that characterize the region. The landscape of the region maintains a rather thin balance between frictional and gravitational forces that hold and tend to drift the components of the landmass, sadly. Truth be told, the past decade has been disastrous for Uttarakhand at large. We all know the past. Year 2013 and the cloudburst that happened have in our inwards an element of permanence, one that cannot be wiped off from our collective memory anytime soon.

Yes, nature's brutal onslaught pierced our hearts, as it does today, but it appears that there is very little that we have learnt as an entity. The effects and after-effects of these disasters are still being only scarcely mitigated, even as we are slammed incessantly and repeatedly by nature's wrath. The number of casualties in the recent floods in Uttarakhand and adjoining areas in Nepal and towards the south, in Kerala, has crossed the 180-mark — with 88 casualties in Nepal, at least 55 in Uttarakhand and 42 in Kerala alone.

Earlier this year, the state suffered the loss of more than 72 lives in the aftermath of a glacial outburst in the Rishi Ganga River

worst memories from the 1990s decade, which started with the notorious Uttarakashi earthquake of 6.8 magnitude on the Richter scale in the Garhwal region — killing 768 people and causing widespread destruction. Then we had the Malpa landslide in 1998 and the Chamoli earthquake in 1999, this killing 238 and 103 people, respectively.

Several things need to be noted. First, Uttarakhand is just one among the several states in the Himalayan region. There are other states — Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and the hilly districts of West Bengal, which are all prone to similar disasters. Second, human casualties are the most profound losses in a catastrophe, but the destruction of public and private properties are factors that make the life of those that survive very tough.

A resident of Bhimtal, Kunwar Manoj Rana, pointed out while speaking to the Millennium Post that while severely affected regions have gained spotlight and Government aid, other comparatively less-affected regions continue to reel under prolonged power shortages, disrupted food and water supplies and the closure of schools and other facilities and faculties. "It was only at 6 pm on Friday when electricity was restored — after five long days. We had run out of candles on the second day," sighed a disheartened Rana.

Factors behind natural disasters

Topographical factors: Himalayas, as we know, are the only living mountains on the Earth, which have evolved, and are in fact evolving, due to the movement of tectonic plates. These geologically young and structurally fold mountains, appear to be a stable mass of high-altitude land, but hold within their belly turbulent currents. What seems static is highly dynamic. It should be noted that the Hindu Kush Himalayan system extends for about 3,500 km from Afghanistan in the west to China in the east. It runs along through Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan. So,

Sadly, it's a fact that human ineptitude and greed are largely responsible for the many new natural disasters that have beset us over the last few years



Submerged cars are seen at a flooded hotel resort as extreme rainfall caused the Kosi River overflow at the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand

the anthropogenic factors of all these countries only add to the vulnerability of the region.

Anthropogenic factors: It appears that the term 'natural disaster' is only partially justified in the world we are living in. The fact that human activities are significantly responsible for propelling 'natural disasters' calls for figuring out a new noun for this purpose, which will be less misleading. Somewhere the term 'natural disaster' pushes us into complacency and dissociates us from the causes of disasters.

First of all, the link between natural disasters and climate change has been largely established — with the latest IPCC report mentioning it in the clearest terms. So, all big and small human actions that contribute to climate change — be it an excessive use of air conditioners or clearing green cover in favour of so-called 'modernity' — are gradually (and even steeply) throwing us into a dangerous future. Is it not shocking that human beings, towards their reckless advance towards urbanization, have put their world in peril?

Unplanned urbanization, under normal circumstances, would take some time to show its negative effects. But in the case of ecologically sensitive areas like hills, they give a very little grace period. The World Water Council, in its 2020 Water Policy report, distinguished between two types of urbanization — encroachment of hills by large cities, and amenity migration. Quoting Tiwari & Joshi (2014), the report stated: "Mountain urban centres grow and prosper as a result of different physical and socio-economic drivers, e.g., large cities having grown by encroaching upon nearby hills, like Nainital in Uttara-

khand State of India, which began expansion towards its hillside in the 1970s."

On the other hand, we have amenity migration wherein smaller cities expand themselves for providing livelihood and other opportunities. Both approaches of urbanization appear to be flawed and have their own set of negative repercussions. In the first case, particularly in hilly areas, the burden on regional ecology has increased manifold with the expansion of tourism. It is very disheartening to imagine how the hill cities like Mussoorie and Nainital bustle with huge crowds on weekends; particularly given their proximity with cities like Delhi, these become affordable weekend destinations. What could justify the fact that these ecologically fragile areas are allowed to be taken over by the market forces of tourism? These cities bear the burden multiple times their capacity every weekend.

According to Manoj Rana, the advent of outsiders to vulnerable areas is one of the reasons responsible for widespread damage caused by natural disasters. People, particularly from the states of Delhi, Haryana and Punjab, are willing to take plots in even the most vulnerable regions, known as 'Gadera' (through which water runs down during heavy rains).

To be very clear, the tourism sector is no saint; it has its own set of drawbacks. The unilateral positive perception of tourism promoting the regional heritage and providing employment opportunities can be adopted at only one cost — let the environment degrade and wreak havoc upon locals, and many times on tourists as well. A balance has to be made on this front, and the approach towards tourism has to be reworked.

Socio-economic factors: Every natural disaster has a socio-economic aspect to it. Every catastro-

phe caused by natural disasters, to a certain extent, is partially an outcome of poverty and hunger. Be it small villages or large towns, the most unsafe localities are reserved by the poorest of families. We assess the magnitude of disasters by counting the corpses and taking stock of the lost property. A major share in the corpses and debris belongs to this socio-economically class. But the problem is even more complex. Socio-economic factors not only determine the outcomes of the disasters but also have a role in shaping them. Poor people sell their lands to affluent outsiders to satiate their narcotic addiction, and often end up working as servants and labourers to the same outsiders!

This hints towards a burgeoning narcotic market operating in the hilly terrains that is hollowing up the socio-economic conditions of the local people, which would only contribute to the ravages caused by the natural disasters.

Mitigating the impact

Collective conscience: The first step towards mitigating the negative effects of natural disasters is to come to terms with the fact that natural disasters with enhanced intensity and frequency have become a part of the world we are living in. Such recognition is important to re-align our lifestyle to the growing threat. Every small and big human action — from using air conditioners in our bedrooms to buying a plot of land for building a house — should come after factoring in the prospects of natural disasters.

The adversary is unidentifiable in any particular form. It pervades us all around. The biggest crises in human history have been solved through collective action — not only of governments and states but of people coming together against a common enemy. Again, in the face of this recurring crisis, we need to

come together to fight against an enemy that resides inside us, preventing us from using less of motor vehicles, refrigerators, tin cans or any other things that add to the carbon burden of the planet. An awakening of sorts is required: the sooner it comes, the better it is. Certainly, this will not directly put an end to the humongous crisis. Nevertheless, it will be a first step forward that would influence politics, commerce, businesses — the factors that determine large-scale action/inaction towards climate change, and thus, natural disaster prevention. This awakening would come through new-age leaders. Many such leaders are in the making but the process needs to be facilitated further for creating awareness at all levels — from various layers of governments to family systems. New-age communication tools can be leveraged skillfully to create a collective conscience to save the planet, save ourselves.

Administrative overhaul: As discussed earlier, a blindsided and unidirectional approach towards urbanization and development is acting as a fuel to power the dreadful engines of natural disasters. The growth of cities and the increase in urban population are inevitable consequences of development. The governance of these cities is where things go wrong. Urban local bodies are failing miserably on this front. They are failing not just in building mitigation and adaptation structures but also in ensuring basic aspects like safety.

The recent spate of disasters only indicates that these urban centres, particularly in the hilly regions are very loosely governed by the invisible market forces. Money can drive profit but not safety. For ensuring safety, effective governance, equipped with appropriate finances, will have to come into the picture.

Central and state governments also have their role to play. Apart from strengthening, financing and monitoring local governments, the Central and state governments should come with specific roadmaps of development of urban areas with different geographical features. Environmental experts have raised their apprehension around the deployment of a uniform development plan across all cities. Clearly, what is suitable for Delhi, may be detrimental for Nainital and Mussoorie.

Apart from that, governance failure on larger socio-economic issues like providing good standard education and health facilities uniformly across the country has forced people to take risk of building homes at the fringes of lucrative cities, making them vulnerable to natural disasters.

To sum up, bold steps will have to be taken by both the government and the people. There is no easy way out.

Views expressed are personal



The Statesman- 24- October-2021

Kerala rain havoc

The monsoon pattern in Kerala has changed since 2018 when the State faced the mega flood which claimed nearly 500 lives, left lakhs homeless and caused property loss of Rs. 30,000. Since then, every year there has been excessive rain-fall causing floods and mudslides taking a heavy toll in human lives. This year the death toll has already crossed 50 with a few people reported missing. The rise in surface temperature in the Arabian Sea due to climate change has led to a 52 per cent rise in the frequency of cyclonic storms, leading to sudden spells of heavy rain. Correspondingly, there has been an eight per cent decrease of the same over the Bay of Bengal. Kerala has a vast stretch of the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats. Professor Madhav Gadgil in his report on the Western Ghats had warned about the consequences of extractive economic activities in the region. Successive governments in Thiruvananthapuram have failed to end mining and deforestation of the ghats. In 2017 alone more than 7,160 hectares in the central districts of the State were leased for quarrying. It was in this sector most of the mudslides occurred in 2018 and the subsequent years. Climate change is beyond the control of the Kerala government, but it can regulate and control developmental activities in the ecologically fragile areas in the high ranges. The State also needs a modern weather forecast system that can make more accurate predictions so that the people can prepare themselves for any eventuality. Caught unawares, the government had to open 435 relief camps to accommodate about 30,000 people this year.

According to a research scientist at the Advanced Centre for Atmospheric Radar Research, convective clouds have started climbing to a height of 15 to 16 km over Kerala at times with the top temperature of clouds attaining minus 62 to 82 degrees Celsius, resulting in cloudbursts becoming a part of the monsoon season in the State. It has become imperative the State gives greater importance to environment impact assessment before it takes up any development project as cloudbursts and extreme rainfall leading to flash floods would become normal in the future. The Idukki Dam built across the Periyar, one of the tallest arch dams in Asia, had to be opened this week to allay fears of the people. There was a possibility it would breach the upper limit of 2,399 feet and the district administration issued a red alert. Released water from Idukki would flow through Aluva, the commercial hub of Ernakulam. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has asked the people living on the banks of the flooded rivers to be cautious and take necessary precautions and directed the relief camps to have adequate facilities and food. In view of the worsening weather condition and forecasts by IMD, pilgrimage to the Ayyappa Temple at Sabarimala has been cancelled for Thula masam (15 October to 14 November).

The Tribune- 24- October-2021

Landslides block Jammu-Srinagar highway

Mughal Road closed after season's first snowfall | Three die in mudslide in Pulwama district

BANIHAI/JAMMU, OCTOBER 23

The traffic on the 270-km Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and Mughal Road was suspended on Saturday after heavy rain lashed several parts of Jammu with higher reaches experiencing first moderate snowfall, union territory officials said.

The Jammu-Srinagar highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, was blocked by a massive landslide triggered by heavy rain at Cafeteria Morh, near Ramban town, forcing suspension of traffic, Senior Superintendent of Police (National Highway) Shabir Malik said.

He said falling of stones from hillock overlooking the highway were also reported from several places between the the Ramban-Banihal sector, including Kela Morh and Moumpassi.

"The incessant rain is hampering the restoration work on the highway...It will take at least five hours to clear the landslide in Cafeteria Morh area after the rain stops," Malik said, adding the concerned agencies had kept their men and machines ready to carry out road-clearing operation.



Officially said the traffic on Mughal Road, an alternate

link connecting the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri in the Jammu region with



A WOMAN CROSSES A STREET AMID HEAVY RAIN IN JAMMU. PTI

RAINFALL		
BANIHAI	KATRA	JAMMU
47.8 MM	33.8 MM	12.8 MM

APPLE ORCHARDS SUFFER EXTENSIVE DAMAGE

Srinagar: The snowfall has caused extensive damage to apple orchards in some areas of the Valley, especially in Shopian and Kulgam districts in south Kashmir

where most of the horticulture produce was yet to be harvested. CPM leader MY Tarigami has expressed concern over the losses to orchardists. PTI

<< Cops rescue members of a nomadic community stuck in snowfall at Nagbal Yousmarg in Budgam on Saturday. PTI

Peer Ki Gali and adjoining areas overnight.

Besides Peer Ki Gali along Mughal Road, reports of first moderate snowfall were also received from higher reaches of Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Poonch, Rajouri and Reasi districts, the officials said.

A weather office spokesperson said moderate rainfall over plains and light to moderate snow was observed over middle and upper reaches in the last 12 hours.

The weatherman has forecast wet weather in the twin union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh for the next 24 hours and said there would be a significant improvement from October 24 afternoon.

Meanwhile, three nomads, including two women, died, while another person was critically injured in a mudslide triggered by incessant rains in Pulwama district, officials said. A tent of the nomads, belonging to Reasi district, was buried under the mudslide in the Noorpora area of Tral due to heavy rainfall since last night, they said. —PTI

south Kashmir's Shopian district, was also suspended due to moderate snowfall at