Statesman
The Times of India (N.D.)
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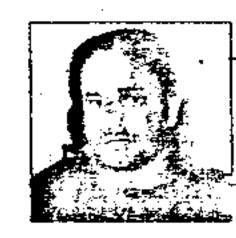
The Times of India (A)

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Unbuilding our cities

On the anniversary of the Chennai floods, we need to reckon with our cities' growth agendas. These are often at odds with the ability of cities to fortify themselves against natural shocks



Nityanand Jayaraman

The 2015 Chennai floods spotlighted how unwise land use made the city vulnerable to a regular visitor: the unruly, unpredictable Northeast monsoon. The jury is out on whether the downpour was a result of climate change. But one thing is certain: climate change will only worsen the vulnerabilities caused by bad land use conversions.

In the past year, considerable newsprint and airtime has been spent in questioning what the government is doing to flood-proof the city. The State government pointed out that it is building storm water drains, removing encroachments, de-silting waterbodies, bridges and culverts, and sprucing up its early warning and disaster response machinery. But even as one agency works to undo some of the damage caused by decades of bad decisions, numerous others are furiously building ill-designed bridges and roads, flattening dunes, and filling up salt pans and water bodies.

The state's response is inadequate given the magnitude of the crises. Laying stormwater drains to evacuate water from high-density residential areas built inside lakes and floodplains cannot but be inadequate.

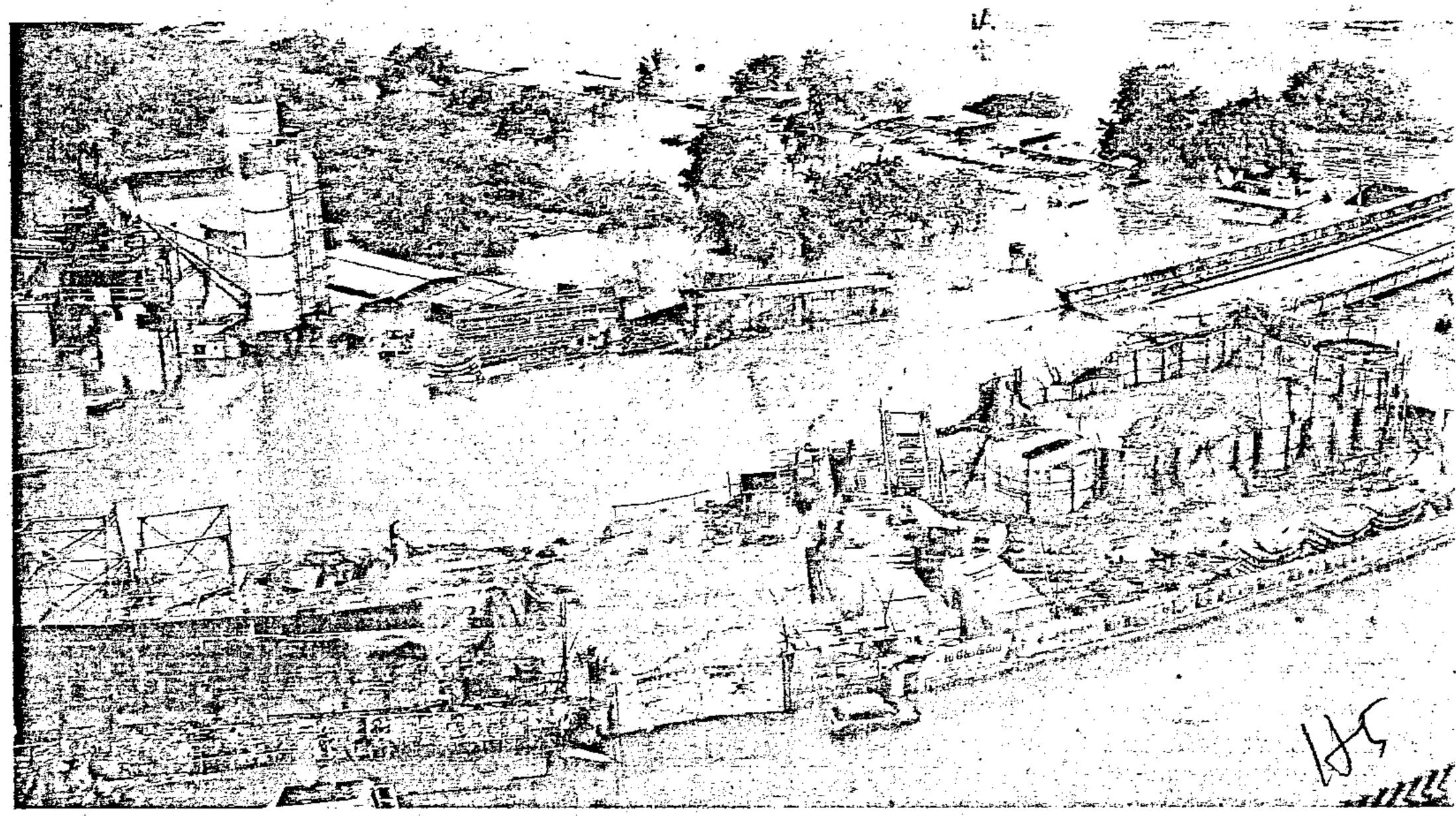
And what about other natural shocks? Other than heavy rains turning into floods, cyclonic storms, heat waves and water scarcity resulting from failed rains are the other regulars in Chennai. Evacuating rainwater to save the city from floods may increase vulnerability to water scarcity.

Shock absorbers

The absorbers for all these shocks are the same — nature's defences. In Chennai's case, dunes and sandy beaches offer some insurance against violent winds; by soaking up rainwater, they protect inland aquifers from salinity intrusion. Native vegetative cover, and a healthy network of waterbodies can regulate micro climates and enhance local water security, even while mitigating the flood potential of heavy rains.

The availability of open, unbuilt land and water is critical to the resilience of human settlements. But Chennai and other metropolises have growth agendas that are at odds with their ability to fortify themselves against natural shocks.

The 11th Five-Year Plan marked a



VULNERABLE SPOTS: "Chennai's wetlands have all been encroached upon not by squatter settlements but by licensed infrastructures of industry and urbanisation." Saidapet in Chennai during the floods last year. PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

The urban melting pot may offer the possibility of human advancement. Increasingly, though, the urban itself is vulnerable environmentally

policy shift from rural development to urban renewal. It celebrated urbanisation as "an indicator of economic development... [and] a positive factor for overall development." The push-pull force — push more than pull — exerted by this shift has accelerated distress outmigration to urban centres. The 2011 Census recorded that India's urban population grew more than rural India's for the first time since 1921.

A GIS assessment done by CareEarth revealed that between 1999 and 2006, the area under 'settlements' grew from 44 sq km to 83.5 sq km, even as water bodies shrunk from 33.55 sq km to 12.62 sq km.

Urbanisation results in increased built-up area which requires workers, usually migrants. With affordable housing for the working poor absent, informal settlements come up in vulnerable areas in floodplains and along the margins of seas and waterbodies to accommodate each new wave of migrants.

Less than two weeks ago, the Tamil
Nadu government told the Madras High
Court of more than 55,000 "encroach-

ments" on the banks of the Adyar and Cooum rivers and the Buckingham Canal. The court wants them evicted. The city's wetlands, be it the marshlands to the south or the sprawling creek and salt pans in the north, have all been encroached upon not by squatter settlements but by licensed infrastructures of industry and urbanisation. No court will order their eviction.

So far, 4,134 squatter families have reportedly been removed to a slum tenement, 40 km away from the city centre. But this will have little effect on Chennai's flood vulnerability. The poor quality of the kutcha squatter homes lack the structural integrity to divert flood waters. They are a threat to themselves. Ironically, the new multi-storey tenements for the ousted squatters are located within a flood-prone marsh. These licensed buildings and their elite counterparts, like the ELCOT IT SEZ also located in the marsh, are a threat to themselves and others around them.

The court is preoccupied with encroachments as defined by the laws of man. Floodwaters follow the laws of nature: here, encroachments are defined by location, not license.

The greater threat

Chennai's preoccupation with rainrelated flooding ignores a greater threat—the sea. Even if the inadequate national commitments for carbon cuts pledged in the Paris climate summit are honoured, the world is looking at a 2° Celsius hotter planet. A 4°C rise cannot be ruled out.

Climate Central, a U.S.-based NGO, has modelled the impacts of sea level rise on coastal cities worldwide. This model predicts a 4.9 metre rise along Chennai's coast for the 2°C scenario, and a 9.1 metre rise at 4° C. At 4.9 metres, Chennai's famed IT corridor will be under water; the East Coast Road will transform into a truly scenic roadway hemmed on either side by the sea and an unbroken expanse of backwaters.

The denser cities of Mumbai, Kochi and Kolkata are even worse off. In all these cities, river and creek openings to the sea will be the gateways for the sea's inexorable entry inland.

The urban melting pot may well offer the possibility of human advancement and escape from socio-cultural vulnerabilities. Increasingly, though, the urban itself is vulnerable environmentally. Going into the future, then, the need is for new urban imaginations that come without the concentration of built-up space.

In the past year, there has been much talk about building climate-resilient cities. You can't build climate-resilient cities. You unbuild them.

Nityanand Jayaraman is a Chennai-based writer and social activist.

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Environment Ministry postpones forest policy indefinitely

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The Environment Ministry has indefinitely postponed an ambitious plan to update India's forest policy.

It has also decided to abstain from committing to a timeframe by which it would have a third of India's land under forest or tree cover, a key promise of the forest

"...The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has not set up any timeframe for formulation of the new forest policy and, as of now, the draft version of the policy is not ready," Anil Madhav Dave, Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

"The national goal is to have a minimum of one-third of the total land area of the country under forest or tree cover. However, no time limit



This is the first time that the policy was being re-looked since 1988. — FILE PHOTO: SUDHAKARA JAIN

has been prescribed to achieve this target," the Minister wrote.

The MoEFCC had tasked the Bhopal-based Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), an affiliated organisation, with reviewing

and revising the existing forest policy.

This was the first time that the policy was being relooked since 1988 as it wanted to update the several changes in the forest laws and provide a forward-look-

ing policy that talked about increasing India's forest cover and tackling the effects of climate change.

The organisation had submitted its report and was available on the Environment Ministry's website, as a "Draft National Policy."

However, on June 22, the Ministry rejected the report and claimed it had "inadvertently" uploaded the draft policy and claimed it to be so, when it was only a "study" by the IIFM.

The draft policy, as The Hindu reported on June 22, made several suggestions including promoting the commercial use of wood, a greater role for industry in forest management and time-bound reviews of the progress being made in effectively managing forests. It, however, had not explicitly mentioned the role of tribals in forest management and the protections accorded by the Forest Rights Act.

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नदी जोड़ो परियोजना से मानसून चक्र पर असर पड़ सकता है



एचटी लीडरशिप सम्मेलन के आखिरी दिन विशेष सत्र में डेनियल सेंडलैक (बाएं) और जेफ्री सैक्स। 🗣 हिन्दुस्तान

नई दिल्ली हिटी न्य-12-16

विशेषज्ञों ने कहा है कि भारत में जल संकट दूर करने के लिए निदयों को जोड़ने का विचार व्यावहारिक नहीं है। शनिवार को एचटी लीडरिशप सिमट में शामिल हुए दो अमेरिकी प्रोफेसरों ने अंदेशा जताया कि इस परियोजना से भारत में मानसून चक्र पर असर पड़ सकता है।

कोलंबिया यूनिवर्सिटी के प्रोफेसर जेफ्री सैक्स ने कहा कि इसकी बजाय मूल्य आधारित व्यवस्था और स्मार्ट इंजीनियरिंग पानी की बर्बादी रोकने में सहायक हो सकता है। उन्होंने भारत में जल संकट सेनिपटने की दीर्घकालिक नीति न होने की आलोचना की। वहीं कैलीफोर्निया यूनिवर्सिटी के प्रोफेसर डेविड सेडलैंक ने कहा कि नदी जोड़ो परियोजना से उद्देशच हासिल नहीं होगा। इसके लिए प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के समुचित इस्तेमाल की जरूरत है। जैसे आवासीय सोसायटी के लिए शोधन संयंत्र अभी महंगा जरूर लग सकता है, लेकिन इसकी शुरुआत होने के साथ यह वहनीय लगने लगेगा। सैक्स ने कहा कि भारत कोयला आधारित परियोजनाओं की जगह स्वच्छ ऊर्जा के विकल्प अपनाकर जलवायु परिवर्तन से निपटने में अहम योगदान दे सकता है। हालांकि सैक्स ऊर्जा मंत्री पीयूष गोयल की इस बात से सहमत दिखे कि जलवायु परिवर्तन के लिए विकसित देश जिम्मेदार हैं और उन्हें इसके लिए ज्यादा जिम्मेदारी लेनी चाहिए। News item/letter/article/editorial published on

Hindustan Times Statesman The Times of India (N.D.) Indian Express Tribune Hindustan (Hindi)

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नैनीताल हाईकोर्ट ने स्वच्छता को लेकर दिए आदेश

गुना में कार्या अदि एक 180 उद्याचा का विद किर

नेनीताल विधि संवाददाता

गंगाकी स्वच्छता और संरक्षण को लेकर नैनीताल हाईकोर्ट ने बड़ा फैसला सुनाया है। गंगा में प्रदूषण पर दायर जनहित याचिका पर न्यायाधीश न्यायमूर्ति राजीव शर्मा और न्यायमूर्ति आलोक सिंह ने गंगा किनारे लगे 180 औद्योगिक संस्थानों को तुरंत बंद करने का आदेश दिया है।

शुक्रवार को हुई सुनवाई के दौरान खंडपीठ को बताया गया कि इन संस्थानों को कुछ समय पहले गंगा में कचरा, सीवर डालने पर नोटिस भी दिए गए थे, लेकिन कोई कार्रवाई नहीं हुई। इस पर कड़ी नाराजगी जताते हुए अदालत ने प्रदेश सरकार ने गंगा में गंदगी डाल रहे संस्थानों पर मुकदमा दर्ज कराने का आदेश दिया। इसके साथ ही उत्तराखंड प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड के खिलाफ भी आपराधिक मामला दर्ज करने को कहा है। अधिवक्ता ललित मिगलानी की याचिका पर सुनाए गए फैसले में खंडपीठ ने कहा कि हरिद्वार में अब गंगा में प्रदूषण

कंद्र सरकार बनाए अंतर्राज्यीय परिषद

इस मौके पर अदालत ने केंद्र सरकार को निर्देश दिया है कि वह गंगा के उद्गम से गंगासागर तक उत्तराखंड, उत्तर-प्रदेश, झारखंड, बिहार और पश्चिम बंगाल राज्यों की अंतर्राज्यीय परिषद का गठनं करे। यह परिषद तीन माह के भीतर गंगा को स्वच्छ रखने के लिए बनी नेशनल वाटर डेवलपमेंट एजेंसी, वाटर रिसोर्स डेवलपमेंट काउँसिल को सुझाव देगी।

दो किमी दायरे में मिलें लगाने पर रोक

हाईकोर्ट के संज्ञान में यह बात लाई कि गंगा के दोनों ओर कई चीनी मिलें, पेपर मिल हैं। इनसे निकलने वाली गंदगी गंगा में जाकर उसे प्रदूषित कर रही है। इस पर कोर्ट ने भविष्य में हरिद्वार-ाधिकेश में गंगां नदी के दो किलोमीटर दायरे में चीनी मिल, पेपर मिल, डिस्टिलरी और टैक्सटाइल मिल लगाने पर प्रतिबंध लगा दिया है। गंगा के किनारे 50 लोगों से अधिक की क्षमता वाले होटल-आश्रम बनाने पर रोक लगाने को भी कहा है।

की होगी।

सीवरेज प्लांट नहीं तो आश्रम सील करें : याचिका पर सुनवाई के दौरान खंडपीठ को बताया गया कि हरिद्वार-षिकेश में बने कई आश्रमों और होटलों का सीवर सीधे नदी में डाला जा रहा है। इस पर नाराजगी जताते हुए हाईकोर्ट ने डीएम हरिद्वार को निर्देश दिए कि क्षेत्र के आश्रमों की जांच की जाए। अगर किसी आश्रम में सीवरेज प्लांट नहीं लगा पाया

मिला तो इसकी जिम्मेदारी जिलाधिकारी जाता है तो उसे तुरंत सील कर दिया जाए। इसके साथ ही कोर्ट ने तीन हफ्ते के भीतर हरिद्वार और षिकेश में सीवर ट्रीटमेंट प्लांट स्थापित करने को भी कहा है।

गंगा को संरक्षित घोषित करे सरकार हाईकोर्ट ने सरकार को निर्देश दिया है कि वह गंगा नदी के आसपास के क्षेत्र को संरक्षित घोषित करे। संरक्षित क्षेत्र में किसी भी तरह के सरकारी और गैर सरकारी निर्माण को प्रतिबंधित करने का निर्देश सरकार को दिया गया है।