

Drought, slowdown cut growth forecast

"challenging" in light of the impact of the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations. A significant improvement in GDP growth, the report noted, was unlikely till pending tax and financial sector reforms were carried out.

According to the review, the economy is now expected to grow at 7-7.5 per cent in the fiscal year ending March 2016, down from an estimate of 8.1-8.5 per cent announced in the Budget in February. This brings the Centre's growth estimate in line with the projections by the Reserve Bank of India, which in September had marked down the growth projection for 2015-16 to 7.4 per cent with a downward bias.

In its mid-year review, the government, however, reaffirmed its commitment to stick to its budgeted fiscal deficit target of 3.9 per cent of GDP for the current fiscal.

"The economy is recovering but it's hard to be very definitive about the strength and breadth of the recovery for two reasons — the economy is sending mixed signals and

second, there is some uncertainty how to interpret GDP data," Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian said.

The downward revision in the growth projections comes in the wake of the economic growth slowing to 7.2 per cent in the first half of the current fiscal.

Subramanian said that "the outlook, going forward is little bit challenging... Private sector investment remains challenge because of legacy issues. Investment recovery will remain weak. Corporate sector is indebted and agriculture is not contributing as much".

The report noted that the improvement in growth has been uneven, powered only by private consumption and public investment. "To move India rapidly to its medium-term growth trajectory, supply side reforms and demand management will be essential," it said.

The projections come at a time when growth in profits at the country's top companies, during the quarter ending

September, was the slowest in two-and-a-half years. Declining profit growth has proved to be a continuing drag on corporate spending, with the mid-year review offering no hope for a quick turnaround in corporate balance sheets, which it expects to "recover slowly".

In the interim, the prescription includes a further increase in public spending on roads, bridges and railways, as well as a recalibration of fiscal and monetary targets to help kick-start demand.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his last budget, has committed to pruning the fiscal deficit to 3.9 per cent of the GDP in the current fiscal and 3.5 per cent in 2016-17. While the government is slated to meet this year's target, the report said the Pay Commission commitments next year could make it tougher to stick to the committed fiscal consolidation roadmap. "Both fiscal and monetary policy stances will need to be carefully re-assessed," the ministry said in the review.

Drought, slowdown cut growth forecast to 7-7.5%

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU

NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 18

THE CENTRE pruned its gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for this fiscal by a percentage point to 7-7.5 per cent on Friday, citing sustained weakness in corporate spending and global demand, and risks to farm output due to two successive droughts.

The growth projection for fis-

cal 2016-17 is grim as well, with the additional boost to consumption this year prompted by the decline in oil prices likely to recede by next year, the finance ministry said in its mid-year economic review.

Compounding the worries for next year is the fiscal outlook, which is expected to be

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

RELATED REPORT

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J&K'S WINGED VISITORS MAY HAVE TO LOOK FOR A CLEANER WINTER HOME

Shrinking wetlands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, 20 December

Nearly four lakh migratory birds from as far as Central Asia and Europe have arrived in Kashmir but the winged visitors might be forced to look for alternative winter homes in near future due to increasing encroachments, waste disposal and noise pollution.

Brahminy Duck, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Garganey, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Common Merganser, Northern Pintail, Common Pochard, Ferruginous Pochard, Red-Crested Pochard, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Common Teal, and Eurasian Wigeon are some of the most sighted birds in the wetlands of Kashmir.

The birds ~ which feed on insects, worms and fish in these water bodies ~ present a beautiful picture, changing the colour of the Valley landscape amidst the onset of winter.

The winged visitors start arriving in the Valley towards the first week of November as Kashmir presents them a hospitable alternative home compared to the extreme freezing conditions in their natural habitats in Siberia, China, Japan and other countries in northern hemisphere, an official of the Wildlife Department said.

"We have recorded



more than 3.5 lakh bird arrivals in the wetlands of Kashmir since November this year," Wildlife Warden (Wetlands) Roauf Zargar told PTI.

More birds are likely to arrive in the next couple of weeks as the temperature is expected to drop in some of the places where these birds come from.

While there has been no obvious effect of climate change on number and species of birds arriving here, Zargar said encroachment of the wetlands and unscientific waste disposal around these ecosystems was playing havoc.

"The wetlands are shrinking due to encroachments which has resulted in drop

in the number of birds visiting Kashmir in view shrinking food availability.

"The other major cause of concern is the waste material coming from areas inhabited by humans around the wetlands. If the unscientific way of waste disposal continues, we will be in for major problems," he added.



ers: New policy for allotment of land near rivers on cards

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RUCHIKA M. KHANNA

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 18

The state government is likely to bring in a new policy for allotment of land along the rivers to those who have been cultivating them. The policy is expected to be presented during the Cabinet meeting, scheduled to be held on December 22.

The Cabinet meeting, like the previous one held last month, is expected to give its consent to a plethora of sops for various sections of the society. With the Akali-BJP government getting into the election mode, the coming Cabinet meeting will see the government dole out more social security pensions to try and woo socially backward classes and offer doles to urban population.

Sources say that the new policy for giving ownership rights to almost 20,000 odd families, mostly belonging to socially backward classes, for 70,000 acres near river banks, is likely to be discussed in the Cabinet meeting. Though the Akali-BJP government had come up with a policy for cultivators of these lands in 2007, the policy was struck down by the Supreme Court.

The state Cabinet is also

Sop opera

- The Cabinet will discuss new policy for giving ownership rights to 20,000 odd families for 70,000 acres near river banks
- It is also expected to enhance transportation allowance for war widows

expected to announce nominal charges for water supply and sewerage in urban areas. Though the BJP, led by Local Bodies minister Anil Joshi had opposed the imposition of water and sewerage charges, maintaining that it would hurt their urban vote bank, sources say that the two coalition partners have reportedly agreed on the issue and nominal charges are expected to be imposed on urban population.

It is learnt that these charges will be clubbed with the consumers' electricity bill. Residents will have to pay nominal charges, ranging from Rs 50-Rs 400 per household, based on the power tariff he pays in each cycle. The state government is expected to earn Rs 700-800 crore annually through the imposition of these charges.

It's minus 5°C in Manali; snow, fog disrupt life in interior areas



A snow-covered road at Kufri on Friday. PHOTO: AMIT KANWAR



Labourers remove snow at a village in Lahaul and Spiti. PHOTO: JAIKUMAR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, DECEMBER 18

While intense cold wave continued unabated in tribal areas and other higher hills in Himachal, most places in lower hills virtually froze as mercury plummeted and hovered around freezing point. The high altitude tribal areas had another spell of moderate snowfall while Theog, Fagu and Kufri had mild snowfall, causing further drop in mercury.

Thick ground frost occurred in mid and higher hills while fog engulfed the lower hills and towns along

river banks, disrupting normal traffic. Slippery road conditions made driving risky in mid hills while fog reduced visibility in lower areas in the morning hours.

State capital Shimla recorded a minimum temperature at 0.9 degree, three degree below normal, while key tourist resort of Manali shivered at minus 5.0 degree. Keylong and Kinnaur in tribal areas recorded a low of minus 6.0 degree and minus 4.8 degree C, respectively.

Mercury dipped to minus 1.5 degree in Una in Shivalik foothills, six degree below normal while Bhuntar froze

at minus 1.0 degree, followed by Solan (0.2 degree), Sundernagar (0.3 degree), Palampur (1.0 degree), Dharamsala (5.8 degree) and Nahan (6.0 degree).

The minimum temperatures remained below 6 degree in most places in the state while high-altitude tribal areas recorded night temperature between minus eight and minus 12 degree.

The maximum day temperatures remained close to normal. Una was the hottest during the day with a high of 21.7 degree followed by Sundernagar (18.9 degree), Nahan (17.5 degree), Solan

(17.0 degree), Bhuntar (16.5 degree), Dharamsala (13.8 degree), Shimla (12.7 degree) and Kalpa (6.4 degree C).

Scattered rains accompanied by strong icy winds lashed the mid and lower hills. Baijnath and Gohar recorded 9 mm and 7 mm of rains, followed by Kumar-sain (5 mm), Manali (4 mm), Jogindernagar and Tissa (3 mm) and Palampur and Seobagh (2 mm).

The local MeT office has predicted dry weather in the state during the next six days and rains or snow at some places in higher hills on December 20.

Cold desert getting warmer, remedial measures stressed

Melting of glaciers has become a regular phenomenon in Ladakh

ARTEEV SHARMA

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, DECEMBER 20

A gradual rise in temperature and receding glaciers during summer have turned out to be a challenge for people of the cold desert in Ladakh. Experts and locals believe that some "drastic and immediate remedial measures" are required to deal with the changing climate in the region.

What is more worrying is that "glacier lake bursts" (melting of glaciers and formation of lakes), which is triggering floods in Ladakh, has become a regular phenomenon. Man-induced anthropogenic interference and global warming are attributed as the main reasons for it.

"In recent years, we have experienced this kind of climate change (high rain in summer and less snowfall in winter), which can be a part of global warming. Its intensity has increased and it is happening almost every year now. It is a matter of concern for the people of Ladakh," said Jigmet Takpa, Chief Conservator of Forests, Ladakh. He recently took part in the United Nations Conference on Climate Change at Paris in France.

Takpa said the temperature was gradually soaring in Ladakh, which had enhanced the frequency of creation of artificial lakes due to melting of glaciers, causing danger to life and property in the region.

"Earlier, there used to be floods once in a decade in Ladakh. Now, it has become



Global warming is impacting the Ladakh region. A TRIBUNE PHOTO

Flood threat

Earlier, there used to be floods once in a decade in Ladakh. Now, it has become a permanent phenomenon. Incidents of heavy rain in July and August have gone up and there has been uncertainty and unpredictability among people about climate change. It is happening because of human-induced anthropogenic interference.

Jigmet Takpa, chief conservator of forests, Ladakh

a permanent phenomenon. Incidents of heavy rain in July and August have gone up and there has been uncertainty and unpredictability among people about climate change. It is happening because of human-induced anthropogenic interference," he said.

Takpa, however, said water had become a big challenge for people as they feared a drought-like situation in the near future because glaciers had been melting and shrinking in the region. "People along streams fear that they may face a water crisis in the near future due to melting and shrinking of glaciers," he said.

Sonam Lotus, Regional Director, Meteorological Department, who belongs to Ladakh, said there had

been an "agricultural shift" due to change in the climate pattern of the region.

"There has been a gradual rise in temperature, but this rise is not significant for the time being. In the global pattern, there is melting of glaciers, but it will be wrong to say that temperature in winter is relatively high these days. The lowest-ever temperature in Ladakh was - 28°C, which was recorded many decades ago. These were extreme weather conditions which happen once in many years," Sonam Lotus said.

He said people of Ladakh had learnt from the previous incidents of flash floods and they shifted their families to safer places whenever there was a thunderstorm or heavy rain, which

had significantly reduced the number of casualties.

Leh district had suffered colossal damage to government and private infrastructure and its impact this time was quite higher than what the district had witnessed in 2010 flash floods in the district that left close to 200 deaths and rendered thousands homeless.

A total of 45 villages of Leh district were affected in the floods. As many as 105 residential houses were fully damaged, 158 residential houses partially damaged and 227 non-residential houses partially and fully damaged. In addition, at least 3,829 kanals, 1,574 quintals of standing crops and 18,690 trees got damaged in incessant rain and multiple cloudbursts in the district recently.

The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Leh, said it would submit a detailed proposal to the state government, demanding a comprehensive package of Rs 350 crore for rebuilding the infrastructure which got damaged in the floods in August this year.

Nawang Rigzin Jora, MLA, Leh, expressed concern over the "fast changing climate" in the region and said some "drastic and immediate remedial" measures were required to be taken to deal with the challenge.

"Ladakh is getting warmer. We have seen that there is less snowfall in winter while the intensity of rain has gone up in summer. Our glaciers are melting and it has caused a massive problem in Ladakh," Jora said.



Clockwise from left: **OPEN FOREST** in Ramnagar Forest Division, Uttarakhand; **MID-DENSE FOREST** in Palamu Tiger Reserve, Jharkhand; **DENSE FOREST** in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh. Jay Mazoomdaar

Looking behind the numbers on India's 'stable' forest cover

While the best forests have been lost, plantations have been gained, and have become more visible



IN FACT
BY JAY MAZOOMDAAR

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

THE FIRST time the Forest Survey of India (FSI) measured the country's forest cover was in 1987, using satellite data captured during 1981-83. Its latest biennial report released recently shows that India has gained 60,854 sq km of forests over the past three decades, 43,907 sq km having been added under the dense forest category.

In the last two years, while the gain in overall forest cover has been an impressive 3,775 sq km, our dense forests have shrunk by only 654 sq km. These figures were highlighted by the government to claim an overall stability in India's forest cover.

Indeed, this is a remarkable feat considering the intense pressure on forest land for the agricultural, industrial and infrastructural needs of a rapidly growing population. But before celebrating the achievement,

there is need to look behind the numbers.

The FSI uses satellite images to identify green cover, and does not discriminate between natural forests, plantations, thickets of weeds such as juliflora and lantana, and longstanding commercial crops such as palm, coconut, coffee or even sugarcane. In the 1980s, satellite imagery mapped forests at a 1:1 million scale, missing details of land units smaller than 4 sq km. Now, the refined 1:50,000 scale can scan patches as small as 1 hectare (100 metres x 100 metres), and any unit showing 10 per cent canopy density is considered forest. So millions of these tiny plots that earlier went unnoticed, now contribute to India's official forest cover.

This can throw up very interesting results. Take Delhi, for example. The first FSI report

recorded only 15 sq km of forests in the capital. The latest report found 189 sq km — an over 12-fold increase in three decades. Nearly a third of this is recorded under the 'dense' category. So how come oxygen-starved Delhiites do not have a guide map to take a breather in these 'forests'?

Similarly, the highly agricultural Punjab and Haryana have managed to add more than 1,000 sq km each of forests since the 1980s. Arid Rajasthan has gained as much as 30%. A third of Tamil Nadu's forests are on private land that also has a fifth of the state's dense forests.

Even as invasive weeds and commercial plantations masqueraded as 'forests' across the country, India kept losing its vital dense forest cover (canopy density of 40% or above). For example, dense forests have shrunk by 2,254 sq km in Gujarat, and by 1,887 sq km in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana since the first FSI report.

What's worse, the net loss, or gain, in dense forests does not show how much is actually being lost. A dense forest can deteriorate to open forest (10%-40% canopy density), or can be wiped out altogether to become non-forest. On the other hand, open forests can improve in density, and even non-forests can grow into open and, subsequently, dense forests over a length of time.

Since 2003 (see chart), 9,513 sq km of India's dense forests have been wiped out, and have become non-forest areas. What offsets this loss in the forest reports is the conversion of non-forest areas to dense forest every two years. Since 2003, a total of 4,809 sq km of non-forest have become dense forest. In the last two years alone, this has added 1,135 sq km under the best forest category. The secret: these are all fast-growing plantations — not detected by satellites in the early stages, but considered dense forests when they ultimately show up.

Planting mixed native species is perhaps the best means to create new forests. But they cannot compensate, certainly not overnight, for the loss of old-growth natural forests. For three decades, our net dense forest cover has remained stable on paper. There is nothing in the FSI reports until 2005 to show how much of these prime forests were actually lost, and compensated for, by plan-

CHANGE IN NET FOREST COVER

	DENSE	OVERALL
1987	357,686	640,819
1989	361,412	638,804
1991	385,008	639,364
1993	385,676	639,386
1995	385,756	638,879
1997	367,260	633,397
1999	377,358	637,293
2001	416,809	675,538
2003	390,564	678,333
2003 (R)	386,191	677,816
2005	387,243	677,088
2005 (R)	403,420	690,171
2007	402,522	690,899
2007 (R)	403,666	692,394
2011	404,207	692,027
2013	402,247	697,898
2015	401,593	701,673



LOSS OF DENSE FOREST

	VDF to NF	MDF to NF	Total	NF to VDF	NF to MDF	Total
2003-05	61	1,191	1,252	0	91	91
2005-07	76	2,130	2,206	36	1,441	1,477
2007-11	45	1,888	1,933	7	1,442	1,449
2011-13	106	1,505	1,611	0	657	657
2013-15	257	2,254	2,511	157	978	1,135
TOTAL	545	8,968	9,513	200	4,609	4,809

VDF: Very Dense Forest **MDF:** Mid-Dense Forest **NF:** Non-Forest

Source: Forest Survey of India, Ministry of Forests, Environment and Climate Change

tations. But the data in the last 10 years reveal that we are destroying around 1,000 sq km of dense forest every year, and compensating for nearly half of this with plantations.

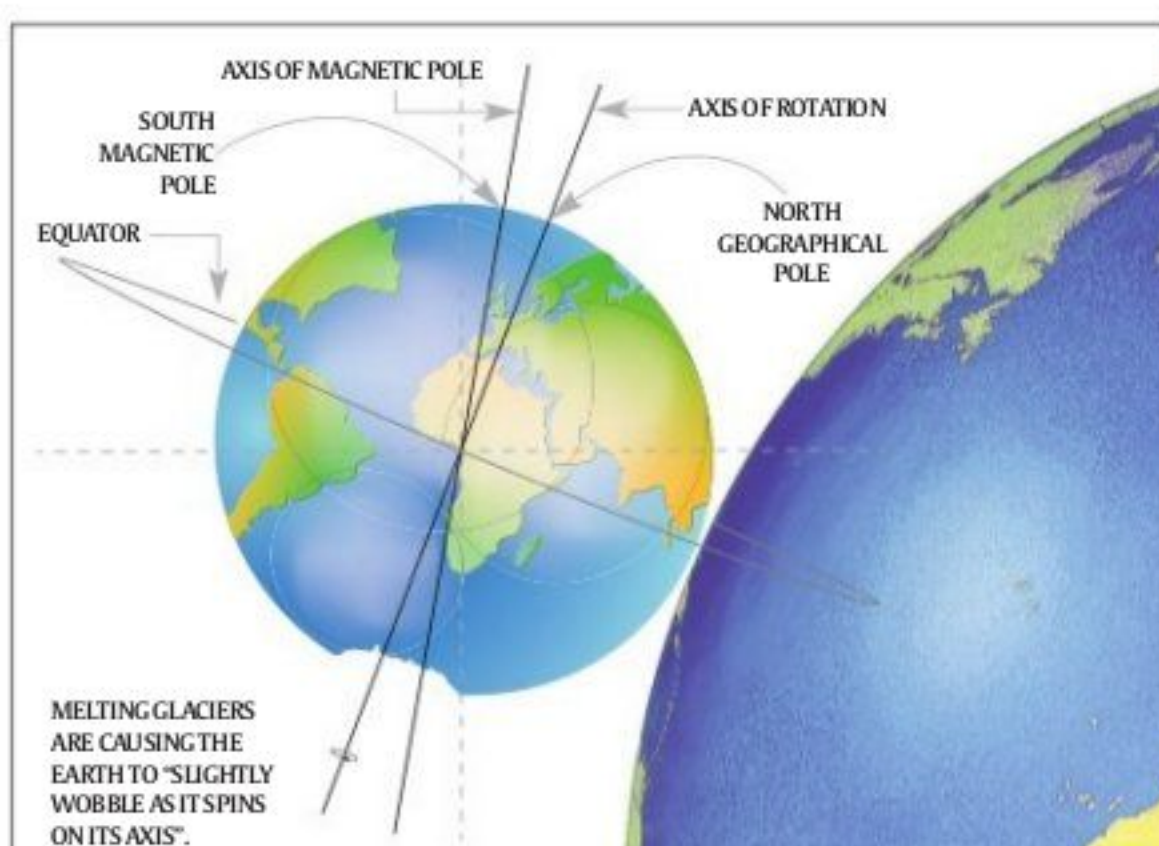
Depending on where one stands, one can be smug that we are losing only this much

and not more, or worry that so much is being lost. Either way, this realisation — and not the jugglery of marginal net gains or losses — is the real takeaway from our forest reports.

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Melting glaciers, a spoke in Earth's wheel

So claims a new study. This is why



THE STUDY

Rising global temperatures are causing glaciers to melt at the poles, leading to an influx of large amounts of water into the ocean and resulting in a shift in the "weight" of the planet. This meltdown from higher altitudes is moving towards the Equator, swelling up the water bodies in the region. According to a new study by a group of researchers from Harvard University, the shrinking of glaciers, and the resultant "slight shift" of the North Pole — a phenomenon known as "polar wander" — is "causing the Earth to slightly wobble as it spins on its axis".

The study, published in the *Science Advances* journal, also claims that the shift in Earth's weight has slowed down its rotation by 1.7 milliseconds a century — similar to how figure skaters begin to slow down when they reach their arms out away from their body. This has also increased the duration of a day by about a thousandth of a second over the 20th century.



THE BREAKTHROUGH

The research examined the changes in Earth's rotation in the context of rising sea-levels in the 20th century. The researchers used a "new model and cross-referenced rotation information with ancient astronomical observations". The results showed that the increase in sea-level was about 1-1.5 millimeters per year. They also factored in the viscous nature of Earth's interior and the motion in the planet's core. This showed a co-relation between rotation changes and estimated sea-level rise and led the scientists to conclude that Earth's rotation had slowed down, though very little. But if the melting continues, the effect can be more drastic, the researchers said.



MUNK'S ENIGMA

In a study in 2002, Walter Munk, an American oceanographer based at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, California, found a "discrepancy between historic sea level rises, the amount of glacial melting, and the rotation of the planet".

In his study, Munk pointed out that "although 20th century sea-level rise should have brought a change in Earth's rotation, there was no available observational data to this effect". This inconclusive result was referred to as "Munk's Enigma" and the exact relation between



melting glaciers and Earth's rotation remained unknown till this latest study put a number to the slow-down.

WHAT MUNK MISSED

Munk's study was derailed because of a few incorrect assumptions.

- New measurements show that glacier melting is about 30 per cent less severe than what Munk assumed.
- Munk had overestimated the average increase in sea level (2mm).
- He ignored the internal structure of Earth — which is viscous in form. This means that the rocks that make up the planet tend to "flow and reshape themselves over long periods of time". This factor too affects the rotation of Earth.
- Interaction between Earth's rocky mantle (layer between the crust and the outer core) and the planet's molten metal outer core was discounted.



THE LOOPHOLES

William Richard Peltier, a professor of physics at the University of Toronto, thinks that while the new paper makes "some interesting and important points about the rotational relationships between the mantle and core", he says that the viscosity data of the Earth's interior used by the Harvard University researchers is not accurate and is "not reflective of the way the Earth's core actually behaves".

The new research, he says, is a "nice try, but no cigar".

(Source: Science Advances)

Published: December 19, 2015 23:31 IST | Updated: December 19, 2015 23:31 IST SRINAGAR, December 19, 2015

Dal Lake freezes after season's coldest night



The Hindu

A boatman holds up a piece of ice from the Dal Lake in Srinagar on Saturday. Kashmir valley is in the grip of a cold wave. Photo: Nissar Ahmad

The fringes of famous Dal Lake froze in the season's coldest night, with the minimum temperature dropping below zero to minus 4.4 degrees Celsius.

The fringes of famous Dal Lake froze in the season's coldest night, with the minimum temperature dropping below zero to minus 4.4 degrees Celsius, a dip by over a degree from the previous night's minus 3.2 degrees Celsius, an official of the Meteorological Department here said.

The mercury in Qazigund, the gateway town to the Kashmir Valley, went down from the previous night's low of minus 3.3 degrees Celsius to settle at a low of minus 3.8 degrees Celsius, the official said. The tourist resort of Pahalgam, which serves as a base camp for the Amarnath Yatra, registered a low of minus 7.9 degrees Celsius, lower than the previous night's minus 7.7 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature in Kupwara in north Kashmir went down by nearly a degree to settle at a low of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius. Leh witnessed a slight decrease in the night temperature to minus 13.7 degrees from to the previous night's minus 12.9 degrees Celsius.

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GULMARG WHITEWASHED

The Times of India (New Delhi edition) · 21 Dec 2015 · 12 ·

The popular ski-resort of Gulmarg draped in snow on Sunday. The hill station in Jammu & Kashmir recorded a temperature of -7.8°C . Leh town recorded a night temperature of -12.6°C , whi...



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A soil tainted by an industrial hub that once brought cheer

HTSPECIAL

Punya Priya Mitra
and Manoj Ahuja

■ letters@hindustantimes.com

PITHAMPUR (INDORE): In the 1980s, when the Pithampur industrial hub came up in Dhar district, people from the villages nearby rejoiced at the prospect of an increase in employment opportunities. Today, thousands of jobs have materialised in 800-odd industrial units, but villagers wonder if they are worth the catastrophe that has now visited upon them.

As many as 10,000 villagers are suffering from the adverse effects of the industrial pollutants that have contaminated the groundwater in the area. The problem is so acute that the residents of Chirakhan, Dhannad and Bajrangpura villages as well as the surrounding areas have stopped drinking water directly from their wells. While some villagers have taken to using filters to purify the water, others – such as the residents of Chirakhan – travel over five kilometres in search of more potable alternatives.

Their worries have only increased ever since a treatment, storage and disposal facility for hazardous industrial waste was set up in Pithampur. The residents of Tarpura, situated adjacent to the Ramky Enviro Engineers hazardous waste unit, have been living in constant fear ever since it was decided that 350 tonnes of toxic waste from the defunct Union Carbide plant in Bhopal be incinerated at the facility.

“We approached everyone from district officials to politicians, but nothing came out of it,” said Saligram, a 53-year-old shopkeeper, when asked about the recent trial runs conducted at the facility.

The remaining 340 tonnes of Union Carbide waste is also likely to be disposed at the facility once the Supreme Court lays down the procedure.

“There is a terrible stench when the wind blows the smoke from its chimney towards the village. The well water has also been

DEVELOPMENT COLLATERAL



■ Residents of Pithampur live in constant fear.

HT FILE PHOTO

EFFECTS OF POLLUTANTS

- Lack of potable water
- Unfiltered water causing ulcers
- Premature greying of hair
- Itchy skin
- Farm yield hit due to soil losing its fertility

WHAT THEY SAID

The only unit that is discharging effluents, contaminating the ground water, is Ramky's storage and waste disposal unit (in the Pithampur industrial area). We have raised this issue with the MP Pollution Control Board on several occasions.

Gautam Kothari, president, Pithampur Audyogik Sangathan

We have managed to keep the discharge of effluents in check, but pollution on a small scale does take place. We had taken action against a unit a few years ago, and since then no major case has been reported. We will investigate this complaint.

Hemant K Sharma, regional officer, MP Pollution Control Board

contaminated,” Narayanbhai, a shopkeeper, said. Efforts to contact Ramky officials proved futile.

Other villages located about four kilometres from the Ramky facility attribute their woes to effluents discharged by some units into a nullah that flows downhill from Pithampur. “Almost all the villagers have installed water-purifying units at their homes. But the filter rod, which usually lasts for a year, has to be changed every two months,”

said Murarilal Patel, former sarpanch of Chirakhan village.

The ground water drawn by borewells is used to water the fields, but even here the output has been affected – with the agricultural yield of vegetables like lauki (bottle gourd) and staple cereals such as wheat dropping significantly.

Dhannad village, located about four kilometres from Pithampur, has a similar story to relate. Water from a well that had been quenching their thirst for over a

century is now being used only for washing and other domestic purposes. “We get mouth ulcers if we drink this water,” said Ramprasad, a villager.

Meanwhile, life goes on in the Pithampur area – for better or worse. A stone's throw away from the Ramky unit is a small playground where children play with gay abandon, completely oblivious to the fact that in their neighbourhood lies chemical waste that is hazardous to both man and beast.

SUDDEN SPATE

4/19



■ More than 100 people in temple town Rishikesh had a close shave on Friday when the water level in the Ganga rose. Police said it occurred after the water was released from Tehri Dam. Jal Police (water police) rescued the people, sources said.

HT PHOTO

Settle all flood claims in 4 weeks: FM Jaitley Tells Banks To Extend Soft Loans To Affected People; Meets TN CM

The Times of India (New Delhi edition) · 21 Dec 2015 · 14 · TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Union finance minister Arun Jaitley on Sunday said he has instructed insurers to settle all claims relating to floods in Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu within four weeks.

Jaitley met chief minister J Jayalalithaa at the Secretariat here where she apprised him of the “calamity of unprecedented magnitude” that ravaged the Chennai, Kancheepuram, Tiruvalur and Cuddalore.

During the 40-minute meeting, she also requested the Centre to release Rs 2,000 crore for sustaining reconstruction efforts.

Jaitley, who met representatives of insurance companies, banks and financial institutions earlier in the day, said if there were any disputes, each insurer should have an ombudsman to settle disputed claims in another four weeks, instead of approaching courts.

Jaitley told reporters that he met representatives of LIC and other insurance companies, 27 public sector banks, National Housing Bank and 17 private sector banks. He said he has asked bankers to go “almost on a mission mode” to extend soft loans to people in the flood-affected districts.

“We have set high targets for the banks today,” Jaitley told reporters after his meeting with Jayalalithaa.

“The eventual target is that almost every legitimate claimant should be entertained. Banks have a sufficient amount of fiscal place for that,” he said, adding that there will be constant review with bankers on the progress by representatives from Delhi. Further, as many as 11,000 claims were made with general insurance companies, with 2,000 of them settled, said Jaitley.

“So, what we discussed at the meeting and with the chief minister is that about 2,000 of the claims have already been settled. All balance claims will be settled in four weeks,” he said. People in the affected districts have to be rehabilitated in terms of housing, household articles and vehicles even as there has been damage to crops and MSME units, noted Jaitley.

“In some cases, people need education loans. And these are the banking facilities which are available to people,” he said.

He said that loans could be distributed under the MUDRA scheme as “we have a large amount of headspace” till the end of this financial year. The scheme applies to entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprise owners, and around 28 lakh families in the four districts can apply for soft loans right away, he added.

With increased inflow, 4 shutters of Mullaperiyar dam opened

- [A Correspondent](#)



A view of the water released from the Mullaperiyar dam flowing under a bridge at Vallakadavu in Idukki district on Sunday. It is the first village downstream of the dam.

With an increased inflow of water following heavy rain in the upstream forest area, four shutters of the Mullaperiyar dam were opened at 3 a.m. on Sunday.

Initially four shutters were opened half a foot to release water into the Idukki reservoir when the water level reached 141.7 ft.

Later, two of the shutters were downed and two shutters were lifted one foot each. By afternoon, two more shutters were lifted half a foot each.

The Additional District Magistrate, who is in charge of the Mullaperiyar affairs, told *The Hindu* in the evening that Tamil Nadu had informed that more shutters were likely to be opened in case of an increased inflow of water.

Tamil Nadu was drawing water at 2,100 cusecs, while the inflow was 3, 552 cusecs. The rainfall recorded in the catchment area of the dam was 5.2 mm.

Thekkady recorded 2.8 mm of rainfall on Sunday. District Collector V. Ratheesan issued an alert to the people living on the banks of the Periyar in the downstream of the dam.

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