

Sophisticated system to be installed to detect deep sea movements

HD-13 30/12
By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29. The Centre has decided to install a sophisticated system for detecting deep sea movements, such as the tsunami, and develop a network with the countries in this region for sharing information on this.

The Deep Ocean Assessment and Reporting System (DOARS), which be installed at a depth of 6 km under the sea, will have pressure sensors to detect the water movement. These will be linked to the satellite which will relay the information to the earth station.

Announcing this here today, the Minister of State for Science and Technology and Ocean Development, Kapil Sibal, said the project would cost about Rs. 100-125 crores and would be functional within 30 months.

"The network we are planning to establish with Sumatra, Myanmar and Thailand will also involve using software technology, already available with the international organisations. This virtual reality system would calculate the magnitude and intensity of the tsunami from the data available to it."

Data buoys

India already has 20 data buoys (sensors) installed in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea but these were not pressure-sensitive and now appeared inadequate. The DOARS system would involve installation of 6-12 more pressure sen-

sors and linking the data buoys to the system that would record changes in the water level.

Rejecting the claim that the intensity of the tragedy could have been lessened if India had been part of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre, Mr. Sibal said the Centre supplied information of the 26 Pacific rim countries on the east of Sumatra while the tsunami hit the regions on the west of Sumatra, extending up to African coast. About a dozen more acoustic tidal gauges were to be installed to help detect tidal changes.

Pointing out that the tsunami could only be detected when it hit the shallow waters on the coast, Mr. Sibal said that it did not leave enough time for evacuation.

According to Mr. Sibal, this was the world's fifth worst earthquake and the worst after 1964 when Alaska was hit by the massive quake.

Also, going by the reports that the landmass at Sumatra had suffered a shift up to 30 metres because of the quake, the Centre had decided to despatch Sagar Kanya, the sea search vessel, to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to detect any geographical displacement. It would survey the island for any physical changes.

On the rehabilitation efforts, Mr. Sibal said his Ministry had developed a composite material for the construction which was light-weight, water-resistant and had a life span of 5 years.

30 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

CWC meet expresses grief

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) today expressed its profound sense of shock, grief and sorrow at the trail of death and destruction left behind by a devastating natural calamity and extended its sympathies and condolences to the people of the States affected by the tsunami wave as also to the Governments of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Mynamar

and Maldives.

At a special meeting here this evening, the CWC took note of the extensive relief and rehabilitation operations already mounted by the United Progressive Alliance Government in close collaboration with the concerned State administrations. It also took note of the numerous initiatives already announced by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh.

The CWC asked the UPA Government to closely monitor all relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement activities to ensure that whatever is needed to bring back life back to normal in the affected areas gets done with a sense of purpose, a resolution adopted at the meeting said.

The meeting also took note of the steps announced by the Congress and that the party president, Sonia Gandhi, had

personally interacted with the distraught in the affected areas.

The CWC called upon party members to extend help and assistance in whatever manner they can. "This should be and is our New Year's pledge. We cannot bring back lost lives, especially those of thousands of children. But we can and must extend our helping hand towards our brethren who have been displaced and shattered," the resolution said.

30 DEC 2004

THE HINDU



A young boy, whose parents are missing, being treated at the Phuket International Hospital on Tuesday.

Biggest ever relief operation begins

Guardian News Service
London, December 28

THE BIGGEST, costliest and most complex international relief effort ever mounted got under way yesterday, with governments and aid organisations sending money and aid teams to bring relief to survivors of the Indian Ocean earthquake.

With at least nine countries affected from the Horn of Africa to Indonesia, including some heavily populated areas, the daunting magnitude of the task

was gradually becoming clear.

"It's a disaster of catastrophic if not biblical proportions," said Mike Kiernan of Save the Children. "It takes your breath away when you look at a map. Tens of thousands have lost their lives, but there are also hundreds of thousands who have lost everything. But for a family the numbers mean nothing. When you see a child in your home swept away without a moment's warning — that's the human cost."

The chief UN relief coordinator, Jan Egeland, said the recovery effort was unlike anything the UN had ever attempted because so many different areas were affected. "This may be the worst natural disaster in recent history because it is affecting so many heavily populated, coastal areas," he said.

Assessing needs in areas with disrupted communications and on isolated islands is a formidable challenge, as are the logistical complexities of delivering aid. It is also a race against time to prevent more deaths from disease, hunger and thirst. "Many more

people could die in the coming days," said Jasmine Whitbread, the international director of Oxfam. "The flood waters will have contaminated drinking water and food will be scarce."

The relief efforts will also have to tackle the longer-term problems of those who have lost their homes and livelihoods. "We will be at it for many months to come," said David Alexander, international director of the British Red Cross.

Titon Mitra of Care International said many of those affect-

ed were farmers. "Their crops will have been wiped out. That means they will have problems with food security for the next six months."

The UN was ready to offer any assistance needed, the secretary general, Kofi Annan, said. The organisation's office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs offered emergency grants to governments for immediate humanitarian needs. "This is the first step in what will surely be a larger United Nations response to catastrophic losses,"

said Egeland.

Australia, which has thousands of miles of coast facing the Indian Ocean but was largely unaffected, pledged almost \$4m and sent two freight planes to Malaysia with water purification supplies, blankets and bottled water.

The US released \$400,000 and said it expected to increase that to \$15m. "Some 20,000-plus lives have been lost in a few moments but the lingering effects will be there for years," the secretary of state, Colin Powell, said.

Two-year-old loses parents, identity

Associated Press
Bangkok, December 28

DOZENS OF parents desperate to find missing children after massive tidal waves battered southern Thailand turned up at a local hospital hoping that an unidentified two-year-old boy was theirs, officials said on Tuesday. But all left disappointed.

Authorities were still unsure even of the blonde-haired boy's nationality. Some said maybe he was Swedish, but his incomprehensible babble was little help in discovering his identity.

The boy — with red marks streaking his face — was found sitting on a road not far from the town of Khao Lak in Phang Nga province, shortly after surging waves swept away hundreds of tourists and trapped people inside flooded buildings.

Some tourists saw the toddler sitting alone and took him to a nearby hospital, said Vilad Mumbansao, a staff member at Phuket International Hospital. "He looked bleak when he arrived at the hospital on Sunday night with some surface wounds on his face and body," he said.



Relatives of a tsunami victim cry before her coffin in Korawalwa, south of Colombo, on Tuesday.

Travellers' kin get ready for worst

USA Today
Jakarta, December 28

IN THE Garuda Indonesia airline executive lounge at the airport here, three travellers stood hypnotised before a TV screen. All were transfixed by the same fear: that the next image might reveal the fate of a loved one.

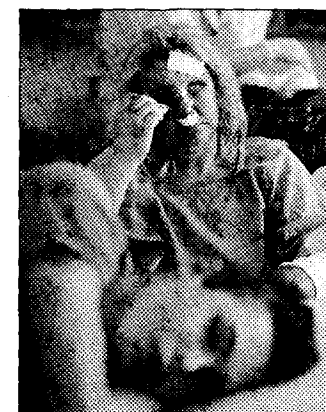
"I'm very worried. I've heard nothing from my family since the earthquake and am now prepared for the worst," said civil servant Derry Ananta, 42, waiting here for a flight back to Banda Aceh. The Indonesian provincial capital is the town nearest the spot where the ocean floor cracked on Sunday, unleashing one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded. Villages near the epicentre were levelled. The waves spread death and destruction as far as East Africa, 4,200 miles across the Indian Ocean.

Caught up in the disaster were a grandson of Thailand's king, an Olympic skiing medalist from Sweden, an American interior decorator who is a frequent guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show, and hundreds of thousands of citizens of some of the poorest nations on Earth.

In the US, anxious people burned up the phone lines for word on missing friends and family. For Wije Kottahachchi, a paediatrician who reached his relatives in Sri Lanka, the news was good, although it had been a close call for his brother-in-law. "He managed to escape by climbing a big gate," Kottahachchi said. "But he was telling us he saw many others washed away."

For Ayub Abdi, a University of Colorado graduate who was waiting at the Jakarta airport for a flight to Banda Aceh, there was only grief ahead. "Already, I know six men I grew up with are dead," he said.

Another traveller here, Asrifal Ranguti, 26, described a last-minute telephone conversation.



Injured Swede tourists wait to be airlifted out of the Thai resort island of Phuket on Tuesday.

TOURIST TOLL

Thailand More than 700 foreigners dead
Lanka 200 foreign tourists killed
Swedes 1,600 tourists missing in Thailand
Americans 11 dead
French 22 dead
Britons 16 dead

Fields of death found in Phuket's tourist paradise

Agencies
Khao Lak, December 28

VOLUNTEERS DRAGGED scores of corpses from beaches, inland pools and once top-class hotels on Tuesday with the Prime Minister saying the death toll from earthquake-powered tidal waves could pass 2,000.

Deputy Interior Minister Sutham Saengprathum said it was certain that more than 700 foreigners were among the dead, but the exact number was still not known. The stench of death hung in the air for a 30-km

stretch of beach north of the international resort island of Phuket, to which Western and Asian tourists seeking tranquility used to flock.

At least 1,600 Swedes in Thailand were still unaccounted for on Tuesday, according to estimates from tour operators. This figure does not include people who organised their own holiday in Thailand without the help of a travel agency, media reported.

Some 200 bodies, by volunteer Somsak Palawat's count, lay within the Buddhist Ras-

neramith temple, up to 70 per cent of them foreigners. Bloating, black and green corpses, many of them children and babies, were also scattered around the temple.

Local hotel owner Yanyong Korpetch said he believed half the estimated 5,000 foreign tourists staying at Khao Lak had been killed when the wall of water struck on Sunday. The bodies of more than 100 of his 300 guests had been recovered, he said.

Chantima Saengli, owner of the Blue Village Pagarang hotel, told a Bangkok radio station she knew about 60 of her Scandina-

vian guests were safe. She feared the other 340 were dead, their bodies swept into the lush rain forest behind the beach.

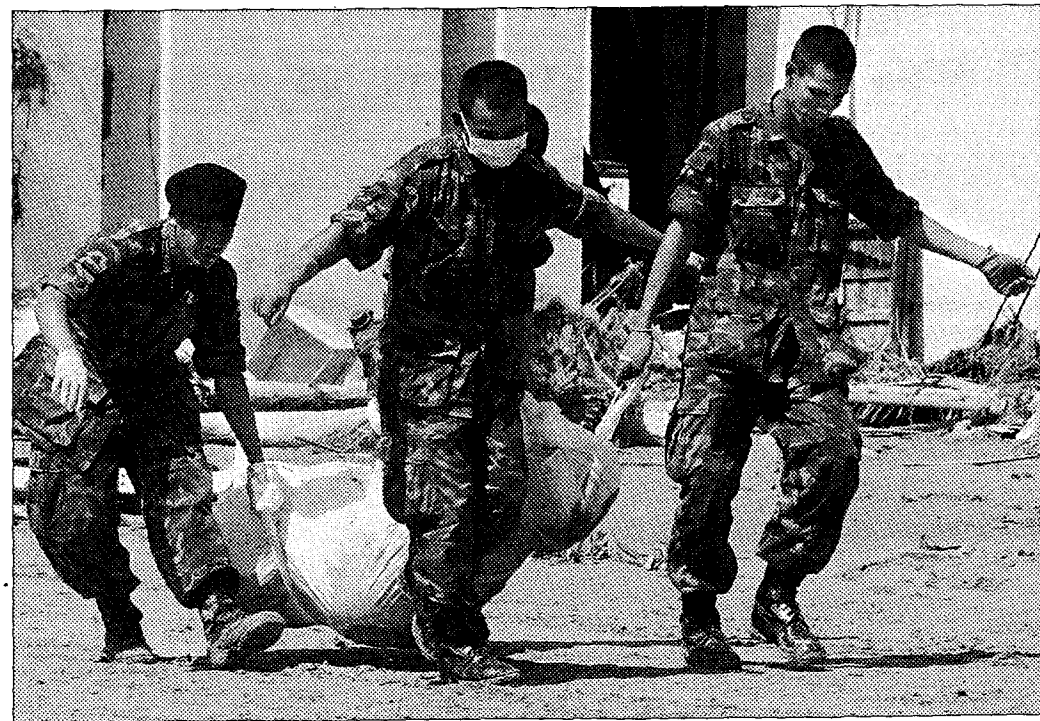
Bejkhajorn Saithong, 39, searching for the body of his wife at the Ban Khao Lak Hotel, said the tsunami had swept 500 metres inland and struck the second floor of a row of shops.

It knocked the hotel off its foundations. A few body parts jutted from the wreckage. "My son is crying for his mother. I think this is her. I recognise her hand, but I'm not sure," he said.

In some places, the tsunami

swept even further inland. It left a 100-foot marine police patrol boat tangled in the forest one km from shore, four bodies beside it. Koh Phi Phi, the island southeast of Phuket made famous by Leonardo DiCaprio's *The Beach*, was also devastated.

Near the devastated Similan Beach and Spa Resort, where some 60 mostly German tourists had been staying, the corpse of a naked man hung suspended from a tree as if crucified. "Khao Lak will take several years to restore," Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said.



Thai soldiers carry the bodies of victims of Sunday's tsunami in Phang Nga province, about 788 km south of Bangkok, on Tuesday.

Quake's power = million atomic bombs

Associated Press
California, December 27

SCIENTISTS DESCRIBE Sunday's devastating earthquake off the island of Sumatra as a "megathrust" — a grade reserved for the most powerful shifts in the Earth's crust.

The term doesn't entirely capture the awesome power of the fourth largest earthquake since 1900, or the tsunami catastrophes it spawned for coastal areas around the Indian Ocean. Despite its awesome power, the quake itself was not much of a surprise, scientists said on Monday.

Sumatra is one of the most earthquake-prone places in the world, sitting atop one of the handful of sites where several plates of the planet's crust overlap and grind. Colossal pressures build up over decades, only to release in a snap. "These subduction zones are where all the

world's biggest earthquakes are produced," said geologist Kerry Sieh of the California Institute of Technology. "Sunday was one of the biggest earthquakes in the region in the past 200 years."

How powerful? By some estimates, it was equal to detonating a million atomic bombs. Sieh and other scientists said it probably jolted the planet's rotation. "It causes the planet to wobble a little bit, but it's not going to turn Earth upside down," Sieh said.

Researchers also speculated on the extent to which the jolt might have changed Sumatra's coastline. Extensive damage and flooding was preventing investigators from immediately reaching the scene. Beneath the ocean, the flexible edges of the crustal plates might shifted vertically by as much as 60 feet relative to each other. But even that kind of displacement would lift or lower the Sumatran

coast by only a few feet or less, they said, and sea levels would not change dramatically.

"Basically, the run up of high tide will be just a little further up or further back," said Paul Earle, a geophysicist with the US Geological Survey.

But inland, ground levels in northern Sumatra might have changed noticeably in places, Sieh said. "As the block of land on top of subduction zone lurches out west toward the Indian Ocean, you expect that area behind it to sink," he said.

Seismologists said the epicentre of Sunday's quake was more than 5.5 miles below the Indian Ocean off the west coast of Sumatra and about 150 miles south of the city of Banda Aceh on the island's northern tip.

Beneath the ocean floor, the quake occurred along a long north-south fault where the edge of the Indian plate dives be-

low the Burma plate. A sea floor feature known as the Sunda Trench marks where the Indian plate begins its grinding decent into the Earth's hot mantle.

Complicating matters, the edges of three other tectonic plates also bump here, with the Indian and Australian plates slowly sliding northwest relative to the Burma plate.

A magnitude 8.0 earthquake on the island's southern tip was the most deadly tremor of 2000, causing at least 103 fatalities and more than 2,000 injuries. Giant quakes also rocked the area in 1797, 1833 and 1861.

But they were pre-les to Sunday's event. From many directions, s up along the fault line of the Sumatra coast. A north-south fault ruptured along a 747-mile stretch. It started off the zigzagged inland bend of the island's northern tip.

Centre to disband Task Force on interlinking of rivers

By Gargi Parsai

HD-12
26/12

NEW DELHI, DEC. 25. The Centre has decided to constitute a Special Cell on Interlinking of Rivers under the Ministry of Water Resources in place of the high profile Task Force, which is being disbanded.

The venue of the Task Force — Trikoot in Bhikaji Cama Place — has already been pledged to the newly-constituted Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal, which is yet to hold its first formal meeting.

The Cell, to be headed by a bureaucrat, would coordinate with a Committee of Experts, which will be announced shortly. Some of the experts who are being taken on board include the former Water Resources Secretary, Z. Hasan, Alwar's 'waterman' Rajendra Singh and

environmentalist Ashok Khosla. The term of the experts who formed part of the Task Force has not been renewed.

The suggestion to involve experts on the socio-economic aspect was made by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, last month, when the Union Water Resources Ministry made a presentation on interlinking of rivers. With the Common Minimum Programme focus on starting interlinking with peninsular rivers, it is likely that the Ministry would take up the Ken-Betwa and Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal links first, which involve Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Rehabilitation package

Sources said the Committee would advise the Government on the socio-economic aspects

including the impact on displaced populations, their occupations and on environment during the preparation of the Detailed Project Reports. It will advise on a rehabilitation and resettlement package and suggest the agency for implementation.

While the Minister for Water Resources, Priyaranjan Das-munshi, is likely to meet the Chief Ministers soon to evolve a political consensus, a Consensus Group headed by the Central Water Commission Chairman has had meetings with the engineers of the three States.

Not satisfied

Rajasthan has sought larger share of water under the Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal link. The Uttar Pradesh Government is

also not satisfied with the proposed feasibility report on the Ken-Betwa link with Madhya Pradesh prepared by the National Water Development Agency.

Both the links are estimated to cost about Rs. 8,500 crores, whereas all the 30 links proposed under the interlinking plan are estimated at Rs. 560,000 crores.

The Task Force headed by Suresh Prabhu had given its Action Plan II on the financial aspect but the United Progressive Alliance Government is yet to take a view on it. It had suggested imposition of cess, taxes and duties on certain items to raise funds for the project and recommended fund mobilisation through a combination of private funding, public-private partnership and public funding.

26 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Deal reached on global warming

Environment

HD-12

19/12

BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA), DEC. 18. In a United Nations conference's final hours, the United States and the European Union worked out a modest deal early on Saturday to inch ahead in the international efforts to put a cap on global warming.

The Americans avoided any commitment to negotiate mandatory reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, something the U.S. President, George W. Bush, rejected in 2001 when he renounced the Kyoto Protocol, which requires rollbacks in other industrial nations by 2012.

New discussion forum

On their side, the Europeans won a new forum for discussing

just that — a "seminar" next May at which Governments can informally raise a range of climate issues, including next steps on emissions control after 2012.

"The only thing we want to discuss is future options, and we will," said a key E.U. negotiator, Pieter van Geel, the Dutch Environment Secretary.

If they do, U.S. diplomats are sure to ignore them. That was one reason other Europeans saw the Buenos Aires agreement as at best a small step to keep the multilateral process moving on climate change.

"It's a finger-hold, like hanging on by your nails," said Michael Zammit Cutajar of Malta,

a veteran climate negotiator.

The accord on the seminar was the chief outcome of a low-key, two-week annual conference on climate change, notable otherwise for its timing: on the eve of the final entry into force of the 1997 Kyoto pact next February 16.

In 2001, when he rejected the Kyoto Protocol to the umbrella U.N. climate treaty, Mr. Bush said its pre-2012 emissions cuts would damage the U.S. economy, and he complained that China and other poor but industrialising countries were exempt under Kyoto. Here in Buenos Aires, the United States resisted efforts to design seminars in 2005 as forums to ex-

plore ways to control emissions after 2012.

'Talks premature'

"We think it is premature," the U.S. delegation chief, Paula Dobriansky, said of the idea of post-Kyoto talks.

The Americans sought to focus attention here instead on long-range U.S. programmes to develop cleaner-burning energy technologies.

Although they won no U.S. commitment to talk about reductions, the Europeans viewed the deal as a start, possibly to spur talks with developing nations, such as China and India, about post-2012 steps to help the climate. — AP

19 DEC 2004

THE HINDI

দায়কাহার, কে লয়

বুয়েনোস আইরেসে পরিবেশের পরিবর্তন-সংক্রান্ত দশম আন্তর্জাতিক সম্মেলনে (সিওপি ১০) ভূগোলকের দ্বিখণ্ডিত রূপটি আরও এক বার স্পষ্ট হইয়া ফুটিয়া উঠিল। আয়োজক দেশ আর্জেন্টিনার প্রেসিডেন্ট নেক্টর কাশনার অতি-ভদ্রতাবশত সত্যকে চাপিয়া রাখেন নাই, বরং সাফ জানাইয়া দিয়াছেন, ভূগোলকের শিল্পোন্নত উত্তর-ভাগ ক্রমাগত একটি দ্বিচারিতা চালাইতেছে। এই দেশগুলি ঋণ দিবার পরে উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলির নিকট হইতে কড়ায়-গণ্ডায় অর্থ আদায় করিয়া লয়, কিন্তু তাহাদের কৃতকর্মের ফলে পরিবেশের যে মারাত্মক দূষণ ঘটতেছে, সেই 'এনভায়রনমেন্টাল ডেট' অর্থাৎ 'পরিবেশ-ঋণ'-এর বিপুল বোঝার বিষয়ে উন্নত দুনিয়া হয় নীরব, অথবা সেই দায়ভার এড়াইতে ব্যস্ত। সত্য সে কঠিন। গ্রহীতার ভূমিকায় থাকিলে কড়া ভাবে বিধিনিয়ম মানিব, অথচ প্রদাতা হইলে ব্যয়ের বেলায় গড়িমসি করিব, এমন বিচিত্র দ্বিকর্মক রূপ তঞ্চকতারই নামান্তর। বুয়েনোস আইরেস-এর সিওপি ১০ সেই তঞ্চকতার বিলোপসাধন না হউক, ঈষৎ হ্রাসসাধনের ক্ষেত্রে সদর্ধক কিছু করিতে পারিবে, এখনও পর্যন্ত তেমন আশা বিশেষ দেখা যায় নাই। আশা অবশ্য মরিতে মরিতেও মরে না। 'গ্রিনহাউস এফেক্ট'-এর জুকুটি বিশ্বময় ছড়াইয়াছে। বায়ুমণ্ডলের তাপবৃদ্ধি এবং তঞ্জনিত কারণে সমুদ্র-তল উঠিয়া আসার শঙ্কা ক্রমেই গভীর। শিল্পোন্নত দেশগুলিই যে এই পরিবেশ-সঙ্কটের জন্য প্রধানতম রূপে দায়ী, সেই কথাটি ইতোমধ্যে বহু বার বলা হইয়াছে, উন্নত দেশগুলি সেই কোলাহলে কর্ণপাত করে নাই। পরিবেশের দূষণকারী দেশগুলির তালিকায় প্রথম স্থানে আমেরিকা, পরেই আছে চীন। প্রশ্ন উঠিবে, উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলি কি পরিবেশের দূষণ ঘটায় না? নিশ্চিত ভাবেই ব্রাজিল বা ভারতের ন্যায় দেশে 'জীবাশ্ম জ্বালানি' (ফসিল ফুয়েল) ব্যবহারের কারণে বা গবাদি পশুর শরীরজাত মিথেন গ্যাসের আধিক্যের ফলে দূষণ ঘটতেছে। কিন্তু, সাধারণ জ্ঞানই বলিয়া দিবে, জ্বালানি ব্যবহার কমাতে হইলে উন্নয়নমূলক কার্যক্রম কমাতে হইবে, কিন্তু উন্নয়নশীল দেশগুলির পক্ষে উন্নয়নের গতি থাম করিয়া জ্বালানি ব্যবহার কমানো তুলনায় কঠিন। উন্নত প্রথম বিশ্বের পক্ষে কিন্তু কাজটি তুলনায় অনেক সহজ। সুতরাং, দায়ভারটি প্রথম বিশ্বের প্রতিই ঘুরিয়া যাইতেছে। সেই দায় লইবার ব্যাপারে প্রথম বিশ্বকে আদৌ রাজি করানো যাইবে কি না, তাহাই প্রশ্ন। উন্নত ও উন্নয়নশীল দুইটি দুনিয়ার ক্ষেত্রে এই দায়ভারটি ঠিক কী হইবে, তাহা স্পষ্ট করিয়া বলিয়া দেওয়াই কিন্তু সিওপি ১০-এর প্রধান কর্তব্যকর্ম।

তৎসহ কিয়তোটা প্রটোকলের কথাও উদ্ভিয়া আসে। রাশিয়া প্রটোকলটিকে ছাড়পত্র দিবার পরে আগামী বৎসরের ১৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি হইতে তাহা বিশ্ব জুড়িয়া বলবৎ হইবার কথা। আমেরিকা অবশ্য স্বীয় স্বার্থ ক্ষুণ্ণ হইবার আশঙ্কায় প্রবল রূপে ইহার বিরোধিতা চালাইতেছে। এই বিরোধিতায় আর এক গুরুভার দেশ অস্ট্রেলিয়া। বৃহত্তর ভূ-পরিবেশগত স্বার্থে বাকী পৃথিবী আমেরিকা এবং অস্ট্রেলিয়ার উপর কতটা চাপ দিতে পারিবে, তাহাও সিওপি ১০-এই প্রমাণ হইয়া যাইবে। এই চাপপ্রদানের বিষয়টি অবশ্য নানা মাত্রা হইতেই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। 'কার্বন-ট্রেডিং' বলিয়া যে বিধি আছে, আমেরিকা সেই ব্যাপারেও স্বীয় স্বার্থরক্ষার উদ্দেশ্যে কিছু আবদার রাখিয়াছে। এই বিধি অনুযায়ী কোনও দেশ চুক্তিসম্মত সীমা হইতে কম জ্বালানি খরচ করিলে বাকী অংশটি অন্য কোনও শিল্পোন্নত দেশকে বিক্রয় করা চলে। ফলে, শিল্পোন্নত এবং উন্নয়নশীল দেশ মিলিয়া জ্বালানি ব্যবহারের মাত্রা বিধিসম্মত সীমার ভিতরেই থাকে। ইউরোপীয় দেশগুলি প্রস্তাব করিয়াছে, ধনী দেশগুলি যাহাতে দরিদ্র দেশগুলি হইতে অবাধে এই জ্বালানি-মাত্রা ক্রয় করিতে না পারে, তাহার জন্য কর বসানো হউক। আমেরিকা বাঁকিয়া বসিয়াছে। তাহার যুক্তি, মুক্ত অর্থনীতির নীতি মানিয়াই এই 'কার্বন ট্রেডিং' হওয়া উচিত। ভারত এবং চীনের মতো দেশ মার্কিন প্রস্তাবের বিরোধিতা করিয়াছে। ভবিষ্যতে ঠিক কী হইবে তাহা বিচারসাপেক্ষ, কিন্তু সিওপি ১০-এ সমাগত বিভিন্ন দেশ যদি আপন স্বার্থের উপরে বিশ্ব-পরিবেশের স্বার্থকে অগ্রাধিকার দিবার ব্যাপারে একমত হয়, তাহাই হইবে এই সম্মেলনের মূল সাফল্য।

18 DEC 2004

ANADARABAD PAKISTAN

KILLER RULES



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee:
Promise not kept

Calcutta is the world's third most polluted city
Winter air in city is the foulest in India
10-12 lakh people have respiratory disease
In past decade, 50% rise in respiratory disease



Subhas Chakraborty:
Passing the buck

Law eye shifts from govt

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Dec. 15: When Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's government gets a breather, Calcutta's children may be gasping for air.

Calcutta High Court today turned its eyes on the quality of fuel supplied by oil companies in a case where the state government was required to show progress or otherwise in controlling air pollution.

After twice seeking time to file a compliance report on establishment of auto emission testing centres that can measure levels of pollution under the new norms notified by the central government, the state managed to slip out of focus.

It did file a status report but that is a story of non-compliance, as foul as its record in combating pollution in the backdrop of the alarming fact that 47 per cent of Calcuttans suffer from lower respiratory tract infection.

So far, only three testing centres have been "upgraded" to check if vehicles are conforming to the new tailpipe emission norms, according to the status report. All existing

or new centres were to have the equipment to do so by October, in tune with a directive issued from Delhi.

The state failed to meet the deadline and, seeking more time, said it would set up 50 centres, a commitment not kept.

Intending to get to the "basics of the problem", the court decided not to take up the status report now. Instead, it asked oil companies to file affidavits by January 12 on the quality of their supplies. It wants to know the percentage of benzene and sulphur components in fuel, which cause pollution.

A national fuel policy already exists, under which oil companies have to follow benzene and sulphur standards.

The court also sought information from the motor vehicles department whether vehicles, which use multiple fuel injection (new generation cars), and those which have carburettors (old vehicles), are meeting emission norms.

These centrally-notified norms are exactly what the state was to make sure vehicles running in its territory complied with by October.

S.M. Ghosh, whose peti-

YOUR CHILDREN SUFFER BECAUSE THE STATE DOES NOT CARE



Rachik Das (1), hospitalised once already, now on inhaler and drugs



Shaori Mondal (4), breathing trouble since age one and a half



Sreya Choudhury (8), chronic wheezing caused by pollution



Inaya Khan (12), bronchial asthma attacks since she came to Calcutta

tion in 1999 set the ball rolling, said: "The case continues to linger as about 4 lakh cars have been added to the city's traffic in the last five years."

In 1995, when a survey was conducted the last time, some 10,647 deaths were traced to air pollution. Around 55 lakh people were hospitalised that year. The previous such study in 1991-92 had yielded numbers that were nearly half. It implies that every four-five years, the number of people dying or being hospitalised because of pollution is doubling.

Transport minister Sub-

has Chakraborty said: "It is good that the court has asked the oil companies about their contribution to pollution.... However, maintaining fuel quality is the central government's responsibility."

Chakraborty has been on record saying that autorickshaws, among the biggest polluters, could not be touched because too many people's livelihood depended on them.

Environmentalists are looking at the development differently. Subhas Dutta, an expert assisting the court in the case, said: "It will be an

- IN 1999, PETITION FILED IN HIGH COURT SEEKING IMPROVEMENT OF AIR QUALITY
- COURT FORMS COMMITTEE IN FEBRUARY 2000 TO SUGGEST POLLUTION CONTROL STEPS

Report in June 2000 suggests:

- Better fuel quality
- Introduction of alternative fuel
- Stiffer emission standards and phase-out of old commercial vehicles

• In 2002, Bengal submits alternative fuel (LPG/CNG) plan for Calcutta in Supreme Court

• Supreme Court transfers case to high court, already hearing the case

• State does not mention the cleaner-fuel plan in high court

• Court orders compulsory introduction of BS II emission standards from April 1, 2004

• As BS II norms apply to engines, this would have meant scrapping old vehicles, a hard decision that would upset transport lobby

• State fails to meet deadline and takes different

tack. Says it will abide by tailpipe emission norms from October 1, 2004.

• October 1 comes and goes but government fails to comply again. Gets a one-and-a-half-month breather

• On December 8, it is given another week to file status report

• On December 15, another switch — from alternative fuel to BS II-compliant engines to tailpipe emission standard to fuel quality

• Now, oil companies, and not the state government, will be under scrutiny

other extended holiday for a government which does not have the minimum concern for the health of its people."

The chief minister had promised in public that vehicles over 15 years of age would be phased out, but the step was never implemented under pressure from the transport lobby.

"Having a clean environment is one of the prerequisites for industry," said Nazib Arif, secretary-general of the Indian Chamber of Commerce. "I hope something will be done immediately before the situation goes out of hand."

HD-12
15/12

ETHICS AND SHORT CUTS

Environment

IF THE RATIFICATION of the Kyoto protocol by Russia is seen as a landmark event that ushered in a new international framework for the reduction of greenhouse gas emission, the recently released eight-nation Arctic Climate Impact Assessment report published by the University of Cambridge reinforces its vital importance. The watershed study makes disquieting projections about the likely consequences of unchecked global warming. As ice caps melt and changes occur to the seas, indigenous people of the far North could be deprived of their food security, species such as the polar bear be driven to extinction, and the global climate be affected by the rise in sea levels. More immediate evidence of the effects of unbridled economic activity on the environment is available in the aftermath of the storms that have led to severe loss of life in the Philippines. Mindless logging by commercial interests caused deadly mudslides, leading to a belated ban on all logging in the archipelago. These seemingly unconnected events provide a new context for the debate on the far-reaching changes that are being proposed for environmental regulation in India.

There is well-founded concern among Indian conservationists that environmental laws are being portrayed as the major stumbling block to development. Delays in granting environmental clearances, in some cases solely on account of red tape, are cited as justification for downgrading the major instruments of due diligence in the clearance process. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), through its notification in 1994, stipulated that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and public hearings should be undertaken for specified types of projects, covering 32 categories at present. This requirement was controversially modified in 2002 to exempt some projects, such as installation of pipelines, from the EIA process. In its present form, the EIA mechanism is criticised for producing data that

sometimes fail to stand up to scientific scrutiny. The EIA reports on the Dandeli dam in Karnataka and the Pathrakadavu hydroelectric project in Silent Valley are cited as examples. Scientists raise pertinent questions about the ethics of consultants being retained and compensated by project proponents to undertake the EIA. In some cases, the proponents are allowed to conduct a 'rapid EIA' so that a more extensive study of forest areas can be avoided. New concerns have arisen in the wake of a move to re-engineer the clearance process as a component of the World Bank-assisted Environment Management Capacity Building programme. The controversial idea is to enable project proponents to commission EIAs and hold public hearings. This will do away with the requirement that these checks on behalf of the environment should be conducted by statutory agencies.

Any measure to modernise the functioning of the departments that deal with environmental clearance must be welcomed. The Govindarajan committee on investment reforms has submitted its recommendations in this regard. The basic objective of preserving the environment, however, cannot be sacrificed at the altar of speeding up sanction for projects. The Bhopal gas tragedy was a horrific example of inter-generational harm done to tens of thousands of people by a pliant bureaucracy that could not ensure elementary industrial compliance with environmental laws. (*Post facto*, the Government could do little to help the victims.) Scientific bodies in the country have advocated the introduction of a more transparent process of environmental and forest clearance and the immediate elimination of red tape in decision-making. The overriding concern of the Government must be to rule out obvious conflicts of interests. For one thing, common sense dictates that the EIA and public hearing process must be insulated from the project proponents' sphere of influence.

15 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Green activist gets Nobel

Agencies
Oslo, December 10

KENYAN ENVIRONMENTALIST Wangari Maathai has been presented with the Nobel Peace Prize for 2004 at a ceremony in Oslo.

Professor Maathai, also Kenya's deputy environment minister, is the first African woman and environmentalist to win the prestigious award.

The 64-year-old was honoured for her campaign to save Africa's trees and for promoting social, economic and cultural reforms that are ecologically viable.

She was described as an example for all Africans seeking democracy and peace. "There can be no peace without equitable development and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space. This shift is an idea whose time has come," said Prof Maathai in her acceptance speech.

"Industry and global institutions must appreciate that ensuring economic justice, equity and ecological integrity are of greater value than profits at any cost."

Introducing her at the prize-giving ceremony, Nobel committee chairman Ole Mjoes said that conflicts such as in West Asia and Sudan's Darfur region had their roots in competition for natural resources.

"Environmental protection has become yet another path to peace ... There are connections between peace on the one hand and an environment on the other in which scarce resources such as oil, water, minerals and timber are quarrelled over," he said. Maathai is the founder of the Green Belt Movement, which has planted 20-30 million trees in Africa to counter forest loss and slow the spread of the deserts. The movement went on to campaign on education, nutrition and other issues important to women.



Nobel Peace laureate Wangari Maathai holds her prize at Oslo City Hall on Friday.

Oprah, Cruise to add glitter to award show

TOM CRUISE and Oprah Winfrey will continue the tradition of bringing a superstar shine to dark December nights in Norway, when the pair hosts the annual Nobel Peace Prize Concert on Saturday.

The concert will also feature musical artists such as British teen soul singer Joss Stone, opera vocalist Andrea Bocelli, jazz singer Diana Krall, and pop singers Cyndi Lauper and Patti Labelle. Winfrey said it was a "great pleasure" to celebrate "the first African woman recipient of one of the most meaningful awards of our time". Cruise said he was "exceptionally proud" to



Oprah Winfrey at the Nobel ceremony.

pay tribute to Maathai. "Wangari is a real example of what one person, determined to help her fellow man, can accomplish," he said. "She has showed that change in conditions can occur by one's willingness."

AP, Oslo

11 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

কীটনাশক থাকতে পারে, কোক-পেপসিতে লিখতে হবে সতর্কবাণী

নয়াদিল্লি, ৬ ডিসেম্বর: বোতলে কীটনাশক থাকতে পারে— ঠান্ডা পানীয়ের বোতলে এ বার চালু হতে চলেছে এই বিধিসম্মত সতর্কীকরণ।

সুপ্রিম কোর্টের চাপে শেষ পর্যন্ত পেপসি ও কোকা-কোলা তাদের বোতলের গায়ে এই সতর্কবাণী লিখতে রাজি হয়েছে। শুধু ওই দুটি বহুজাতিক সংস্থা নয়, সব নরম পানীয় প্রস্তুতকারক সংস্থাকেই কীটনাশক সম্বন্ধে ওই সতর্কীকরণের উল্লেখ করতে হবে। যদিও দুই বহুজাতিকের আইনজীবী দাবি করেছেন, তাঁদের ব্র্যান্ডে কীটনাশক থাকলেও তা নির্দিষ্ট সীমার অনেক নীচে। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের শুনানির পরে কোকা-কোলা এক প্রেস-বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে দাবি করেছে, তাদের পণ্য নিরাপদ এবং তা দেশের আইন মেনেই তৈরি। সারা বিশ্বে একটি মানেই তারা পণ্য তৈরি করে থাকে। তবে বিষয়টি বিচারাধীন হওয়ার জন্য এ ব্যাপারে তারা কোনও মন্তব্য করতে চায় না।

আজ প্রধান বিচারপতি আর সি লাহোটি, বিচারপতি ডি এম ধর্মাদিকারী, ও বিচারপতি জি পি মাখুরকে নিয়ে গঠিত ডিভিশন বেঞ্চে পেপসি ও কোকা-কোলার তরফে দুই আইনজীবী অরুণ জেটলি এবং হরিশ সালভে জানান, বোতলের লেবেলে পানীয়ে কীটনাশক থাকলেও তা অনুমোদিত সীমার নীচে বলে একটি বিধিবদ্ধ সতর্কীকরণ ব্যবস্থা চালু করা যেতে পারে। আইনজীবীদের বক্তব্য

থেকে স্পষ্ট, দুটি সংস্থাই তাদের পানীয়ে কীটনাশকের অস্তিত্বের কথা আজ কার্যত মেনে নিয়েছে। জনপ্রিয় নরম পানীয়ের বোতলে বিপজ্জনক মাত্রায় কীটনাশক আছে বলে গত বছর দিল্লির স্বেচ্ছাসেবী সংস্থা সেন্টার ফর সায়েন্স অ্যান্ড এনভায়রনমেন্ট একটি রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করার পরে দেশ জুড়ে যে-হইচই শুরু হয়েছিল, এই সিদ্ধান্তের পরে তা একটি পরিণতিতে পৌঁছল। শীর্ষ আদালতের এই নির্দেশের সংবাদ ছড়িয়ে পড়ার পরেই দেশ জুড়ে নরম পানীয়ের বিক্রি আবার পড়তে পারে বলে বিভিন্ন মহলের আশঙ্কা।

কোক-পেপসির আইনজীবীরা আদালতে বলেন, তাঁদের পক্ষে কীটনাশকের যথার্থ পরিমাণ জানানো সম্ভব নয়। কারণ, দেশের বিভিন্ন এলাকায় জল ও চিনির মধ্যে কীটনাশকের মাত্রাও আলাদা। তবে বিচারপতিরা জানিয়েছেন, 'এক জন ক্রেতা কী খাচ্ছেন, তা জানার অধিকার তাঁর আছে।' আর এই যুক্তিতেই ওই সতর্কীকরণের উল্লেখ করা প্রয়োজন।

গত ৩ নভেম্বর রাজস্থান হাইকোর্ট তাদের নির্দেশে পেপসি, কোক-সহ সব ঠান্ডা পানীয় প্রস্তুতকারক সংস্থাকে কীটনাশক ও রাসায়নিকের পরিমাণ বোতলে উল্লেখ করতে বলেছিল। সেই নির্দেশের বিরুদ্ধে বিশেষ অনুমতি আবেদন করেছিল পেপসি ফুডস এবং হিন্দুস্তান কোকা-কোলা বেভারাজেস।

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

সুপ্রিম কোর্টের

প্রথম পাতার পর
তা খারিজ করে দিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের বেঞ্চ বলেছে, "হাইকোর্টের নির্দেশে অমৌজিক বা অসাংবিধানিক কোনও দিক আমাদের চোখে পড়েনি।" হাইকোর্টের নির্দেশ তারা কতটা মেনে চলতে পারবে, তা জানতে হাইকোর্টেরই দ্বারস্থ হতে বলা হয়েছে ওই দুই সংস্থাকে। নির্দেশ রূপায়ণের জন্য দু'সপ্তাহ সময় দেওয়া হয়েছে তাদের। শীর্ষ আদালত জানায়, জনগণের স্বার্থের কথা ভেবেই তারা বিষয়টি নিয়ে উদ্বিগ্ন ছিল।

শুনানিতে সালভে বলেন, ঠান্ডা পানীয় উৎপাদনের সময় কীটনাশক মেশানো হয়নি। জল ও চিনিতে থাকা কীটনাশকের ফলেই পানীয়ে তার উপস্থিতি দেখা গিয়েছে। কৃষিতে কীটনাশকের যথেষ্ট ব্যবহারই চিনিতে তা মিশে যাওয়ার কারণ। তাঁর কথায়, "আমাদের দেশে কোনও সরকারই কৃষিকে 'পবিত্র গোমাতা'র মতো স্পর্শ করতে সাহস করছে না। অঞ্চ সবাই জানেন, কফি, চা, ফলের রসে ঠান্ডা পানীয়ের তুলনায় বেশি কীটনাশক রয়েছে। কৃষি তবু আইনের ধরাছোঁয়ার বাইরে।" জেটলি বলেন, পানীয়ের উপাদান উল্লেখ করতে বলায় 'ট্রেড সিক্রেট' বা বাণিজ্যের গোপনীয়তা রক্ষার ব্যাপারে সংস্থার অধিকার খর্ব করা হচ্ছে।

— পি টি আই

07 DEC 2004

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

How BBC was taken for a ride

Vijay Dutt & GNS
London, December 4

THE BBC's reputation took a blow yesterday after it broadcast an interview with a hoaxer who claimed to offer a \$12bn settlement to the 120,000 surviving victims of the Bhopal disaster.

Hopes were raised in India when BBC World, interviewed a man identified as a representative of Dow Chemical, which now runs the Bhopal plant after taking over Union Carbide. He said Dow accepted full responsibility for the disaster.

But it emerged that Jude Finisterra was a hoaxer who has targeted Dow Chemical in the past. His interview, which was picked up and reported internationally, was shown twice on BBC World, and on BBC television and radio, before it was pulled.

In public, the BBC said it moved "swiftly" to correct the mistake and stressed that it had been the victim of an "accidental" hoax.



IN FULL CRY: Bhopal gas leak victims demonstrate against Union Carbide.

It condemned the actions of Finisterra as a "tasteless publicity stunt". But in private, some BBC journalists expressed surprise that the hoax was not identified more quickly: the apology seemed extraordinary because Dow maintains that it has "no responsibility" for Bhopal.

The corporation said a producer on BBC World had

been asked to book a representative from Dow for the 20th anniversary of the disaster. He went to the Dow website, and was directed to the media section. Email cor-

A toxic gift for Dow

S. Rajagopalan
Washington, December 4

The bosses of US chemical giant, Dow, received an unusual present on Friday: a container of toxic well water from Bhopal.

Activists of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal delivered the stuff at Dow Chemical offices in Washington DC and Chicago on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy. "We demand that Dow clean up the site and compensate the thousands of victims", ICJB's coordina-

tor Ryan Bodanyi said. Greenpeace's legal director Rick Hind handed over the water sample to the guards, who prevented the activists from meeting Dow's board member Barbara Franklin at the Watergate building here.

Dow stuck to its guns, saying as a company that has "never owned or operated" the Bhopal plant, it bears no responsibility for the tragedy. A statement posted on its website claimed: "While Dow has no responsibility for Bhopal, we have never forgotten the tragic event.

been hijacked in a carefully planned operation.

Finisterra later said he was part of Yes Men group, which hoaxes businesses and governments.

The future of GM food

Most media coverage of genetically modified food has centred on disputes between Europe and the USA. But it is in Asia that the new techno-food will live or die, writes JOHN FEFFER

THE transatlantic brawl between the USA and Europe over genetically modified food is attracting much media interest. Billions of dollars in sales, the genetic fate of food crops, and the future safety of human beings hinge on this debate between sceptical Europeans and American technophiles. But it is in Asia that the new techno-food will live or die.

Asia is home to the world's largest consumer base and the greatest number of farmers. If Asians accept US claims about GM food - that it is safe to eat, safe to grow, and the only way to feed growing populations - these new varieties of rice, soybean, and corn will rule the world. If Asian countries follow the cautious lead of the Europeans, however, by labeling GM products and establishing a system that can trace health problems back to their source, biotechnology will occupy a more modest niche on the farm and marketplace.

Put another way, if the GM struggle were an election, with the USA and the European Union the two frontrunners, then Asia would be one huge swing state. And so far, the undecideds rule. Take China. It is the only country in Asia growing a significant amount of GMOs - more than half of its cotton crop. Chinese biotech research programmes employ 20,000 people in 200 labs. China claims to have developed the world's first genetically modified wheat in 1990, is now running 10 GM rice field trials, and has become the world's largest importer of GM soybeans.

Yet, the Chinese government has, until now, avoided planting GM food crops for public consumption. China also joined the Likeminded Group, a coalition of 100 developing countries favouring strict regulation of GMOs. But quietly, China is trying to corner the Asian market on GM research and development and even overtake the US sector. As Wang Feng, a biotech expert at the Fujian Academy of Agricultural Science, told *China Daily*, "If we do not boldly push ahead with our GM technologies, we will never have our own Monsanto or Syngenta (biotech firms)."

Not all Chinese agree with the government's policy. Shanghai resident Zhu Yanling launched the country's first consumer lawsuit (against Nestle for a symbolic \$1.64 in damages) because she consumed a Nesquik instant chocolate drink that she believes contained unlabelled GM ingredients; GM sceptics demand appropriate labelling to alert consumers to possible risks. According to a recent poll by Zhongshan University, nearly nine out of 10 citizens of the southern city of Guangzhou want GM ingredients labelled - roughly the same number shows up in polls in Europe and the USA. In what may be the first of many state-level challenges, Heilongjiang province in the north-east, China's leader in soybean pro-

duction, has banned the import of GM soybeans.

India and Indonesia have also been cheerleaders for GM research, hopeful that the new crops can feed burgeoning populations and produce pest-free crops. But when both countries began easing into the technology by planting GM cotton, they discovered mixed results: crop failures in some Indian districts, lower yields and more pesticide use than conventional varieties in parts of Indonesia. Still, the two countries are continuing research: Indonesia plans a "bioisland" on Rempang Island near Singapore, while India pours money into bio-fortified foods, such as vitamin A-enriched rice, peanuts and mustard.

Japan is in a similarly ambivalent position. The world's largest importer of food, Japan is a huge potential market for GM products. The government is cautiously researching GM applications, such as super carbon dioxide-absorbent trees to combat global warming.

But Japanese people, reeling from a series of food scares including beef-mislabelling, mad cow disease and contamination of GM corn

feed in the human food chain, are highly cautious. Japanese consumer groups take credit for persuading their government to stop GM rice trials and - after a March 2004 meeting between US officials and representatives of 414 Japanese consumer and environmental groups opposed to biotech foods - for Monsanto's recent decision not to release GM wheat on the global market.

Japan has a labelling law, but it is somewhat looser than the European standard. While a product in Europe must be labelled if more than 0.9 per cent of its ingredients are from GM sources, Japan has set the bar at 5 per cent. Thailand also has chosen the 5 per cent threshold. South Korea's threshold is 3 per cent, and the government further requires all advertisements for food products to indicate GM presence. Neither India nor Pakistan has adopted labelling laws.

The issue, of course, runs a lot deeper than labels for consumers. As Anuradha Mittal, executive director of the US-based Oakland Institute, points out, the USA and Europe look at the GM issue differently from the developing

world. "The talk in the USA and Europe is about consumers," she points out. "The issue in Asia is livelihood, the farmers and the takeover of the food system." And it is the USA, Mittal points out, that is transforming food production around the world through a mixture of carrots and sticks.

In terms of carrots for Asia, the USA is providing research grants, such as a five-year agreement with India that has a strong biotech component. In 2002, the USA provided \$15 million for a GM research centre in the Philippines. The USA hopes the research grants will serve as a hook, and that the recipients will be seduced by the new technology.

If the carrots fail, however, there is always the stick. As a warning to all GM-ambivalent nations, the USA has challenged the EU in the World Trade Organisation, under the presumption that a cautious stance toward the new technology is a trade barrier. When India rejected imports of a GM corn-soya blend in 2002, Washington enlisted CARE-India and Catholic Relief Services to lobby on its behalf. And Thailand must back GM foods before the USA will approve a free-trade agreement.

To counter US pressure, anti-GM activists are pushing their governments to assume the European stance. They've also been active at the international level, lobbying for the passage and ratification of the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol, under which any country can justify their refusal of imports on the grounds of health and safety. Top GM-growing countries have not ratified the agreement, however.

Activists have also been working with farmers on the ground. In South Korea, for instance, organic farming nearly doubled in acreage from 2001 to 2002. In Japan, the Soy Trust movement has been contracting farmers to increase production of domestic soybeans to substitute for GM imports. In place of the modified "golden rice" that biotech enthusiasts are promoting, advocates of System of Rice Intensification promise higher yields with less irrigation and fewer chemical inputs.

The stakes in Asia's decision on GM food are enormous: a huge market in seeds and crops, a total restructuring of farming practice, and a test of civil society's strength in countries where governments routinely dictate agricultural policy. The backlash against new technologies can be either a temporary speed bump or a significant obstacle. In the end, Asians will determine whether the new techno-foods remake the global diet or join radioactive fertiliser and cold fusion in the junk bin of science.

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Poisoned futures

By Kalpana Sharma

The apex court's guidelines on dealing with hazardous waste are observed more in the breach.

*Environment
HD-10
2/12*

THE KATTEDAHN Lake in Andhra Pradesh is so polluted that it is "pinkish and turbid." This is how an expert committee looking at the extent to which industrial wastes pollute our water bodies describes this lake located next to an industrial area. It is not the only lake or river that has been poisoned. In all our States that boast of industrial progress, there are mountains of waste, much of it poisonous, and water bodies that are polluted beyond redemption. Yet, reports and court cases, media exposés and dramatic actions by environmental groups have failed to inject the political will in governments to do something about this.

In January 2001, the Supreme Court-appointed High Powered Committee on Management of Hazardous Wastes, chaired by M.G.K. Menon, found "the hazardous waste situation in India fairly grim." Today, despite this report, and a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court just over a year ago, we have not moved forward. If anything we are slipping back.

Politicians, they say, think of the next election and statesmen of the next generation. If you consider the complete absence of urgency on this one issue, there are obviously no statesmen in environmental policy-making positions. How else can you explain the persistent indifference to a problem that over time has poisoned our water sources and soil, and every day exposes ordinary people to lethal and hazardous substances that have known, and even unknown, health consequences?

The M.G.K. Menon committee took almost four years to come up with a report that looks at all aspects of the generation and disposal of hazardous waste. It set out specific recommendations, many of which were endorsed by the apex court in its final ruling given by Justices Y.K. Sabharwal and B.N. Agrawal on October 14, 2003. In the course of the hearing on the writ petition filed by the Research Foundation for Science Technology and Natural Resource Policy in 1995, the court passed several interim orders, heard depositions by pollution control boards and the Union Environment Ministry as well as civil society groups concerned about the issue.

The judgment that was delivered is probably one of the most important environmental rulings in recent times. Coupled with the detailed rec-

ommendations contained in the Menon report, we have a blueprint on how to deal with the problem of generation and disposal of hazardous waste. The court has gone further by appointing the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC) on Hazardous Wastes. It has been given the job of monitoring the implementation of the guidelines laid down by the court.

Yet, despite these positive steps, what is the reality on the ground? Not only are the court's guidelines openly flouted but despite the problems faced in enforcing rules, several State Governments are rushing ahead granting permission to more polluting industries without serious thought to the consequences.

On paper, India has supported most international conventions relating to the environment. It has signed and ratified the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. It has formulated Hazardous Waste Rules in 1989 and periodically updated them. There is a full-fledged Ministry of Environment at the Centre and there is a Central Pollution Control Board as well as State pollution boards that are supposed to monitor and implement the various laws relating to protecting the environment.

Yet, in the last one year since it was constituted, the SCMC has concluded that in the five States that account for 80 per cent of the hazardous waste generated each year — Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka — the Supreme Court's orders "are not being carried out with zest."

That is a classic understatement. In fact, the SCMC's recent reports read like a virtual horror story. There are industrial estates where dangerous chemicals are used in the process of production. Yet, effluents are dumped untreated, either outside the estates or within the estates in unlined ponds. Over time the surrounding countryside is so poisoned as to render the water unusable and the land destroyed. Yet, no one is penalised, no one pays the price for this crime against people and the land.

What are the pollution control

boards doing? Spot checks carried out by the SCMC at different locations, after it had heard reports from various pollution control boards, revealed that not much was being done. On the contrary, despite the apex court having laid down strict guidelines about the process of authorising industries that generate hazardous waste, many such units were working without authorisation.

For instance, the SCMC heard presentations made by the A.P. Pollution Control Board on the steps it was taking to deal with hazardous waste. It was led to believe that 52 per cent of this waste was being "recycled." But in just one instance that the Committee looked at closely, it found that there was no documentation or authorisation for the ostensible "recycling," in this instance of potassium sulphate generated in the process of manufacturing a bulk drug. In fact, the company itself did not have the proper authorisation to operate under the Hazardous Waste Rules, 1989 and yet continued to do so.

In another instance, the SCMC visited a Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in Jeedimetla in Andhra Pradesh. The sludge generated by the CETP was being stored in the estate in open ponds that are exposed to the rain. The excuse given was that the sludge could be sent to the Treatment Storage and Disposal Facility (TSDF) in Dindigul only after it dried. Even if that had been done, the TSDF would not have been able to deal with the waste, as it was not adequately equipped.

Given these instances, it is not surprising that the SCMC has concluded that the A.P. pollution control board needs to be reconstituted. Andhra Pradesh is just one instance that illustrates the casual way in which the problem has been handled. The root of the problem lies with the entire monitoring mechanism.

The pollution control boards at the State level and at the Centre have been expressly established to monitor and implement environmental regulations. But as is already evident from the expert reports, as well as newspaper articles and campaigns by civil society groups, the system has failed completely. Pollution

boards have neither the manpower nor the expertise to deal with the variety of pollution related problems that arise, particularly with hazardous waste. A bureaucrat who may not necessarily have the technical competence usually heads them. He is also vulnerable to political interference.

Worse still, lack of manpower forces these boards to accept whatever the industries tell them about effluent discharge or production processes. They do not have the ability to do an independent audit. At most they can check the effluent coming out of an industrial estate or an industrial unit and then move against them if they have violated the norms. Meantime, the damage has already been done and it is not clear who will carry out the remedial action or pay for it.

The Menon committee suggested the formation of a National Environment Protection Agency that would have autonomy and the powers to move against polluters. It is urgent that this be considered or some other way to make the pollution control boards autonomous and more competent. Unless this kind of systemic problem is sorted out, no amount of expert committees or writ petition will stop the poisoning of India.

It is also clear that what little has been achieved in the field of environmental protection has been the result of vigilant civil society groups that have moved the media and the courts to create awareness and demand changes in the law. This, too, can be institutionalised to some extent as has already begun to happen in Kerala.

As a result of the intervention of the SCMC, the Kerala pollution control board has appointed a seven-member Local Area Environment Committee for the Eloor-Edayar area. It has been given the task of conducting environmental audits of 247 industries that generate hazardous waste and to submit its report within six months. Soon such committees will be established in Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, and Maharashtra.

It is this kind of pressure from outside the Government that will help the authorities if they really want to implement the law. People need to be vigilant but the Government also needs to care about the future, and ensure that it will not be a poisoned one.

Typhoon claims 350 lives in Philippines

MANILA, NOV. 30. The death toll from the typhoon in the eastern Philippines jumped to nearly 350 with 150 others missing today, most of them from a region still reeling from last week's deadly storm.

The Social Welfare Secretary, Corazon Soliman, said 316 persons were killed and 150 missing in Quezon province, about 70 km east of Manila.

The Office of Civil Defence reported 19 were killed in Aurora province, eight in Rizal province, and one each in the Manila suburb of Marikina and Camarines Norte province. Other officials reported three died in Bulacan province.

Rescue mission on

Ms. Soliman told *ABS-CBN* television that bad weather and roads blocked by landslips and submerged in flood waters prevented authorities from delivering relief supplies and rescuing people on rooftops. Helicopters had to drop food packs to those on rooftops because there was no place to land, she said.

Town under water

Officials were arranging for a coast guard boat to reach the three Quezon towns facing the Pacific Ocean, from where a new typhoon was approaching.

Reuben Sindac, police intelligence chief in Quezon, quoted a colleague as saying he saw 10-20 bodies floating in the floodwaters. He said police communications equipment and vehicles in Infanta were damaged and the whole town was underwater. An air force spokesman said that stricken towns in Quezon were inaccessible after swollen rivers washed away bridges and uprooted trees.

A coast guard helicopter flew 12 persons who were injured in the Quezon landslides to Manila for treatment, most with fractures. — AP

01 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

57-9
29/11

SC pulls up Centre and six states over pollution

Environment ✓

SNS & PTI

NEW DELHI, Nov. 19. — Finding pollution in key cities rising at an alarming rate, the Supreme Court today issued notices to the Centre and states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, UP and Andhra Pradesh for enforcement of emission norms for vehicles.

A Bench comprising Mr Justice YK Sabharwal, Mr Justice Arijit Pasayat and Mr Justice SH Kapadia passed this order as the Environment Pollution Control Authority suggested measures to improve air

quality in Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Ahmedabad and Sholapur. The EPCA suggested that the



Union government must be directed to ensure that the state governments implement the new in-use emission norms. The Union ministry of road transport

and highways should be directed to develop central software for all PUC certification centres leading to standardisation of format across the country.

Ban on projects

The Supreme Court (coram, Sabharwal, Pasayat, Kapadia, JJ) today directed the Delhi government not to clear any commercial or industrial project in the National Capital Territory before it readied and presented to the court a comprehensive parking policy to accommodate the fast rising number of vehicles in the city.

Kyoto Protocol set to be born

Environment
HFB
19/11

Russia nod to global warming treaty

Associated Press
Nairobi, November 18

RUSSIA FORMALLY notified the United Nations on Thursday of its acceptance of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, starting a three-month countdown for the long-debated 1997 pact on cutting greenhouse gas emissions to come into force.

President Vladimir Putin signed the protocol into law earlier this month, allowing it to take effect in 128 nations that ratified it, said UN environmental agency spokesman Eric Falt. The United States has refused to join.

On Thursday, Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations, Andrei Denisov, turned over the accession documents to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in Nairobi, where the UN Security Council is hold-

ing a rare meeting outside its New York headquarters.

"I congratulate President Putin and the Russian Federation for their leadership in making it possible for the protocol to enter into force — as it will, 90 days from Friday on February 16, 2005," Annan said.

"This is a historic step forward in the world's efforts to combat a truly global threat."

The protocol, ratified by both houses of Russia's parliament last month, commits 55 industrialised nations to make significant cuts in emissions of gases like carbon dioxide by 2012.

Developing nations like Brazil, China, India and Indonesia also are parties to the protocol but do not have emission-reduction targets.

The United States and Australia rejected the pact, which could not have come into effect without Russia, which accounted for 17 per cent of carbon dioxide emission in 1990.

The US accounted for 36 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions in 1990.

The Bush administration opposes the protocol because it assigns different levels of carbon dioxide reductions to wealthy and developing countries, a provision it says is unfair.

Industrialised countries will have until 2012 to cut their collective emissions of six key greenhouse gases to 5.2 per cent below the 1990 level. Greenhouse gases are believed to trap heat in the atmosphere, warming the Earth.



AP
Russia's representative to the UN, Andrei Denisov, with Kenyan Nobel Peace prize winner Wangari Maathai after the Kyoto Protocol was signed on Thursday.

19 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Toxic cloud over Bengal industry

The steel sector has been playing a key role in ushering in industrial resurgence in the state. But its citizens are paying a high environmental cost. **SUMAN LAYAK** probes deeper

Kolkata, November 12

INDIA IS now the largest sponge iron producer in the world accounting for 15 per cent of global production. And in India, West Bengal is the biggest contributor. Hence, the state is now a major player in the global sponge iron market. There are more than 25 sponge iron units operating in the state, producing Direct Reduced Iron and at the same time spewing dark fumes of pollution in surrounding areas. The pollutants are oxides of sulphur, oxides of arsenic, free arsenic, carbon monoxide, phosphates and sulphates of different metals — some poisonous and the others toxic.

Unsustainable development

At Durgapur, Jhargram and Purulia across districts of southern and western Bengal, the story is the same — of rapid growth of sponge iron industry and resultant pollution.

If we consider the actions taken by the West Bengal Pollution Control Board over the last few months, the problem would be apparent. The board had issued an ultimatum in early August to all these units, asking them to shape up before August 31. It had imposed fines of between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh on five of these units. Later, on September 30, 2004, the board issued another notice to SPS Sponge Iron, probably the largest among these units, threatening to close it down in the first week of January. During a surprise raid at night at Durgapur, officials found that many units that had an electrostatic precipitator were switching them off during the night to save on electricity costs. It is a practice across the state that these units follow to save on costs.

The board has also started imposing a pollution cost on these units. The amount is, however, a measly Rs 5,000 per day. The feeling in the locality in Durgapur is that the cost of paying the fines is something that the units have decided to bear instead of spending on pollution control equipment.

A report has been prepared by two professionals in Durgapur under the banner of a non-governmental organisation Vasundhara. It says that the pollution control board has identified both Durgapur and Howrah as critically polluting zones, but has not conducted any comprehensive study on these zones. There is a curious tolerance to the pollution from both the board and at higher levels of the government.

They have cited an interesting example.

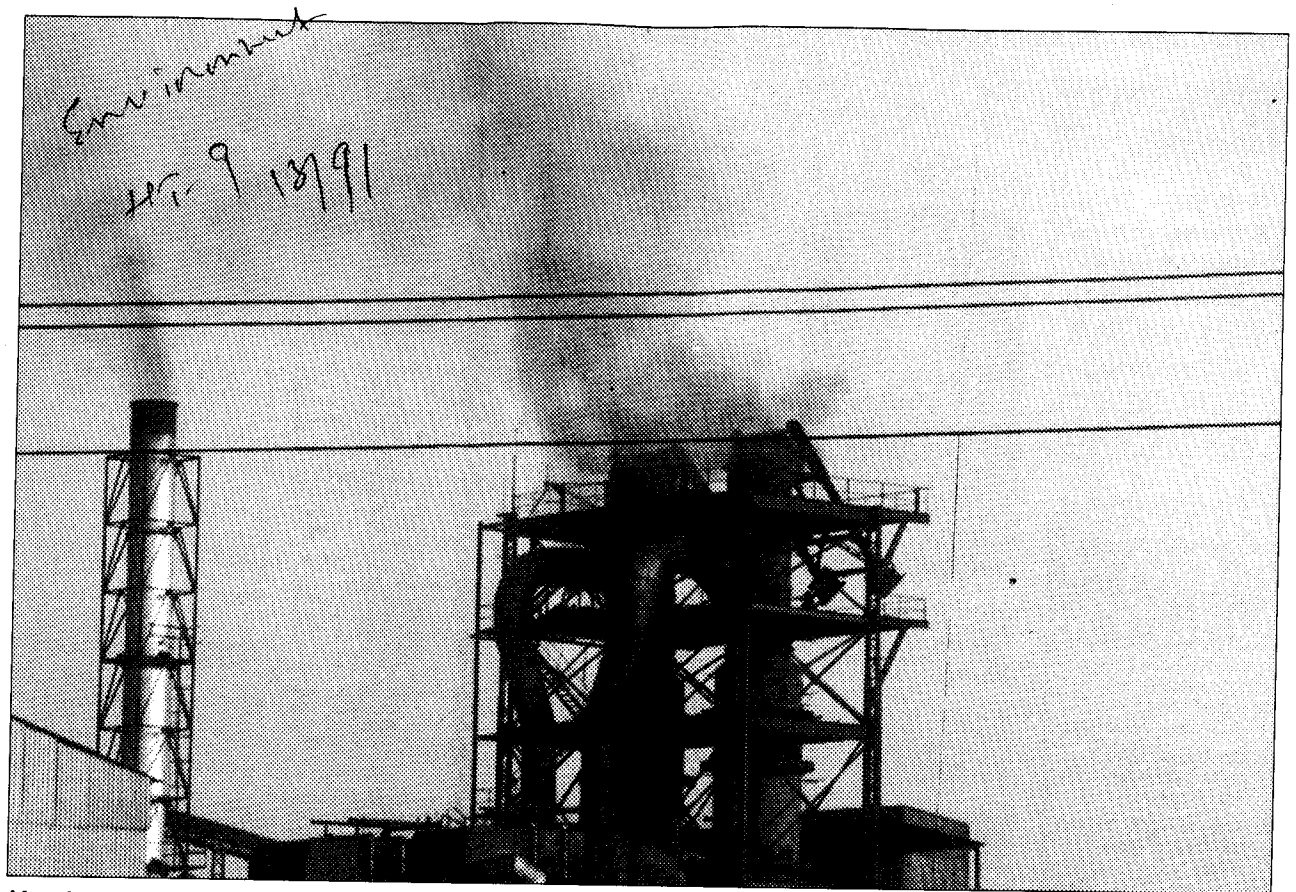
When Durgapur Projects Ltd submitted its plan to install a 250mw thermal power unit, its environmental impact assessment report did indulge in an amazing jugglery. It has calculated an average figure of ambient air quality to prove that the pollutant level is at permissible limits. However, the pollution data would have no meaning if an average is worked out and data from highly polluted areas in a city are clubbed with less polluted areas to declare the city as pollution free.

Such jugglery fools no one. Least of all the people who live near the polluting units and have to suffer for them. The Khairasole cluster of sponge iron factories in Durgapur located right next to highly populated Bidhannagar area is a case in point. The sponge iron factories here are located within a kilometre of four major schools. The report from Durgapur stresses that the PCB has been lax in cracking down on the polluting units because of the political support that the units have. There have been cases where PCB has been discouraged from implementing strict norms. In fact, ministers visiting the area have scoffed at the pollution bogey suggesting that fighting poverty by creating employment in nearby rural areas is more important than fighting pollution.

Durgapur Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a company manufacturing intravenous fluids had complained that the pollution created by the neighbouring sponge iron industry has affected its equipment and machinery. An official of the company, A. Mukherjee had expressed fear in a letter to the PCB that the license to manufacture life-saving medicine may get cancelled due to the pollution created in the neighbourhood.

The picture in Jhargram is equally bad. Bijon Sarangi of Quark Science Centre says, "The Jitusol Sponge Iron Factory is surrounded by eight villages and is just eight kilometres east of Jhargram. The pollutant are rendering the local agricultural land infertile. It is threatening the livelihood of people who depend on the forests as the pollutant are deposited on trees leading to their slow death."

There have been seminars and demonstrations organised at Jhargram. Even the local political leadership has taken note of the popular discontent. "Rupchand Murmu, the local



Manufacturing units like SPS Sponge Iron have been repeatedly fined by the West Bengal Pollution Control Board.

MP has asked M.L.A. Mina Sanatani to look into the matter. I hope this will help," says Sarangi.

There are two other units in the area. One of them named Rashmi Ispat was penalised by the PCB for switching off its electrostatic precipitator during the night. A few resorts near the Garh Salboni area that had been attracting tourists over the last few years has seen their business dry up. Minati Gupta of Niribili Natureventure says, "Tourists often curtail their stay and return when they encounter the pollution."

She adds that not just tourism but crops too have been affected. Cashew, the local cash crop, has failed for the last two years.

Divide and rule

The workers in the sponge iron factories in the Durgapur-Raniganj region are divided into three classes. Nearly all the workers have been provided jobs through the trade union organisations. The trade unions here are also operating as labour contractors. Now about the classes. There are two main classes or workers — the union workers and the personal workers, says the report.

The union workers are the ones who are better paid — around Rs 83 a day and they work for eight hours a day. The

others are called personal workers. These men are working around 12 hours a day and are paid much less, around Rs 63 a day. There are differences in benefits between these two grades of workers and the union-workers are often exempted from tougher jobs like those near the furnace. The units employ between 200 to 1500 workers each who hail from the neighbouring villages.

Apart from these, there are the virtually bonded labourers who are brought in from other states. While this practice is not so prevalent in the Durgapur belt, in Jhargram it seems to be the norm.

Sarangi says, "These men come from Orissa through labour contracts. They are here for forty days at a time and are paid around Rs 42 per day. They stay in the factory, work in inhuman conditions and are packed off after their stint is over."

There has been no study about the workers or their health in any of these units. The workers are the worst affected by the pollution and yet there has been no study as yet. The PCB has not been allowed to operate. It did manage to take samples from 12 workers in SPC Sponge Iron. Of these, eight were found to be suffering from lung diseases caused by pollutant.

School children exposed to industrial pollutant

THE POLLUTION by the sponge iron factories has affected the schools students the most. The Khairasole cluster in Durgapur is within a kilometre of four major schools. A study by the Chittaranjan Cancer Institute found that students in the Durgapur-Raniganj region suffer from upper and lower respiratory tract ailments.

"The students are exposed to high air pollution levels due to the emission from power plants as well as iron, steel and other industries. We have found schools where many student body suffers from respiratory infection." The report noted that the children might look healthy but their lungs have symptoms of chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases.

Durgapur has already seen demonstrations by school children in front of a sponge iron factory.

Global warming hits Arctic

Polar Bears May Go Extinct By 2100 As Ice Melts, Says Report

Oslo (Norway): Global warming is heating the Arctic almost twice as fast as the rest of the planet in a thaw that threatens millions of livelihoods and could wipe out polar bears by 2100, an eight-nation report said on Monday.

The biggest survey to date of the Arctic climate, by 250 scientists, said the accelerating melt could be a foretaste of wider disruptions from a build-up of human emissions of heat-trapping gases in Earth's atmosphere.

The "Arctic climate is now warming rapidly and much larger changes are projected," according to the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), funded by the United States, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

Arctic temperatures are rising at almost twice the global average and could leap 4-7 Celsius by 2100, roughly twice the global average projected by UN reports. Siberia and Alaska have already warmed by 2-3 C since the 1950s.

Possible benefits like more productive fisheries, easier access to oil and gas deposits or trans-Arctic shipping routes would be outweighed by threats to indigenous peoples and the habitats of animals and plants.

Sea ice around the North Pole, for instance, could almost disappear in summer by the end of the century. The extent of the ice has shrunk by 15% to 20% in the past 30 years.



"Polar bears are unlikely to survive as a species if there is an almost complete loss of summer sea-ice cover," the report said. On land, creatures like lemmings, caribou, reindeer and snowy owls are being squeezed north into a narrower range.

The report mainly blames the melt on gases from fossil fuels burned in cars, factories and power plants. The Arctic warms faster than the global average because dark ground and water, once exposed, traps more heat than reflective snow and ice.

Klaus Toepfer, head of the UN Environment Programme, said the Arctic changes were an early warning.

"What happens there is of concern for everyone because Arctic warming and its consequences have worldwide implications," he said. And the melting of glaciers is expected to raise world sea levels by about 10 cm by the end of the century.

Many of the four million people in the Arctic are suffering. Buildings from Russia to Canada have collapsed because of subsidence linked to thawing permafrost that also destabilises oil pipelines, roads and airports. Indigenous hunters are falling through thinning ice and say that prey from seals to whales is harder to find. Rising levels of ultra-violet radiation may cause cancers.

Changes under way in the Arctic "present serious challenges to human health and food security, and possibly even (to) the survival of some cultures," the report says.

Farming could benefit in some areas, while more productive forests are moving north on to former tundra. "There are not just negative consequences, there will be new opportunities too," said Paal Prestrud, vice-chair of ACIA. Reuters

Environment
11-18

Global Warning

Climate change is now being described as a "weapon of mass destruction", a far greater threat to the world than international terrorism. Yet, laments Christopher Layton, chairman of the UK-based Action for Global Climate Community, it hasn't evoked sufficient global political response. In the Capital to participate in a conference on climate change, Layton talked to Narayani Ganesh about the "contraction and convergence" concept to tackle emissions:

What do you mean when you say we need equitable distribution of emissions at the individual level?

We are each emitting about six tons of toxic gases in the world today, and we're six billion people. The problem is that the emissions are very unevenly distributed. We've got to reduce the average emission rate to two tonnes per person. We're talking about the entitlement for every citizen; about the unfair distribution. With convergence, all will have equal rights.

Participating countries will have to agree on targets to reduce global emission levels so that temperature increase does not exceed 2 degrees centigrade. This century, global temperatures could rise by six degrees, threatening the very survival of the human race. Through convergence, those who want to use more fossil fuels and so likely to emit more, can buy additional quotas from others either by paying money or by delivering clean technology know-how.

Are you mooting an alternative to the Kyoto Protocol?

In 2005, the protocol will be reviewed. Action for a Global Climate Community (AGCC) is calling for a new political initiative within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that will unite a group of countries, north and south, to lead the world in a commitment to reduce their carbon emissions farther and faster than existing Kyoto obligations. We hope to work on the principle of contraction and convergence — the contraction of emission of greenhouse gases and convergence to equal emission rights for all. In the European Union, industries have a ceiling on emissions. They are penalised with fines if they exceed their limits. We're merely extending this.

But when progress and development is equated in terms of how much you produce and consume, how can countries cut back on their emissions?

Up to now economic development has come with expenditure of carbon. So we had the developed world fouling up the earth's atmosphere. There are only three choices: Stop developing, continue with the same carbon emissions or evolve some fundamental principles that allow the developed world to develop while reducing emissions. Ideally, the developed world has to limit its own carbon production and provide clean technology for itself and others. India and Europe are vibrant, large democracies. We could formulate a policy

along with maybe Brazil, South Africa and others to implement clean development models. *What about the US, the chief culprit?*

Yes, countries like the US and Australia are awkward customers. Just the wastage from US power stations could fuel Japan's economy. Science is saying this trend is dangerous. We hope the US will eventually come around, of course. The EU has managed to reduce its emissions by 8% since 1990. I am glad the oil prices are staying high — at least it will inhibit some from using up too much. There is enormous scope for change provided the change is market-driven. Our long-time aim should be zero carbon emissions.

Why are developing countries being asked to cut back emissions and sacrifice development while the developed world buys its way through pollution?

The developed countries have much less scope to reduce emissions. In the case of developing countries, emissions will rise first before going down. So we're saying that unless there is equity, what motive do they have to reduce? Equity is essential for survival. Post-Kyoto Protocol, the focus has to be on equity. Cut-off dates have to be negotiated with participating countries. The new agreement should set the initial target, with strong institutional provisions. Britain and France have committed themselves to reduce 60% emissions by mid-century and then halve it by the end of the century. India and South Africa have spoken in favour of contraction and convergence. Others can have dialogue and establish common ground.

How can clean technology be made more accessible for developing countries?

Under the WTO, rich countries have begun to flex their muscle. But the rich world cannot afford to ignore the concept of equity. The point is that if developing countries start emitting more, it is tantamount to becoming a weapon of mass destruction. So a common fund should be set up to fund new technology research so that its benefits can be accessed by all. India and China, for instance, are on the threshold of a new era and they are bound to be under great pressure to mass produce. So it's a very tough challenge.

Who or what will implement global emissions control?

We're looking to setting up a global climate community with ministers meeting frequently with a parliamentary assembly with representatives, to whom institutions will be accountable. The WTO has operated in the private world where deals are done behind closed doors. What is really required is strict accountability. Health costs, for instance, are hidden costs — they are never factored in when computing pollution costs. And we can't leave implementation of contraction and convergence to international bureaucracy — businesses and people have to be involved. Maybe a court of appeal should be set up so that non-conformists can be pulled up.



Ludayshankar

Q&A

The developed world has to limit its own carbon production... India and Europe could formulate a policy along with maybe Brazil, South Africa and others to implement clean development models.

01 NOV 2004

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Floods: Environmental concerns

By Dilip Chandra

THE silence in Bolbala in Assam's Goalpara district is broken occasionally by the shrill cries of people as vultures hover overhead to feast on carcasses. This disaster has received little attention in the metro media or from political leaders, who are often quick to rush to cover such events. The Moran by-election in Assam which was won handily by the Congress was perhaps one reason since politicians from all parties shuttled in and out of Upper Assam for weeks.

Away from the hustle of politics, 80 bodies were recovered from the villages of Kholsamari and Khagrabari. The waters have receded although rescue operations continued for days after the flash floods earlier this month.

Kachem and Rajuddin are among the victims of Bolbala. The tragedy there and in the Krishnai and Hatimura areas was caused by water run off from Meghalaya's Garo Hills, which started gushing down early on 8 October. People were caught unawares as they were asleep. Darkness also added to their problems. Those who managed to reach country boats escaped nature's wrath and moved to a safer place. Others were not as lucky. Many took shelter on trees and rooftops. With daybreak, several trees collapsed.

The river Dudhnoi with its tributaries, the Krishnai and the Jinary, flow through this region and originate in the Garo Hills as do eight other rivers including the Bugi or the Bhogai. The Somaswari or the Singsang originates near Nokrek, the highest peak (4652 ft) and flows southward. "We have seen such a flood for the first time," said Rahman Ali, an old villager of Bolbala. "We could not escape it and lost everything overnight. We were swept away."

With the recovery of more bodies every day, the death toll has shot up to 300 (as on 25 October). Some believe it may even cross the 1,000 mark because many are still missing. They are neither in the relief camp nor on the highway. About 12,000 people are taking shelter in 56 relief camps, while 71,000 are sheltering on the highway and other high areas. Naga Regiment soldiers are engaged in a difficult and massive rescue operation, recovering the bodies of children, women and old people. Many bodies are rotting and this, with the stench from putrefying animal carcasses, has created unhygienic conditions. The Goalpara district administration has prohibited the sale of fruits, fish and dry fish to prevent the outbreak of diseases.

An analysis of the disaster would also need to look at the



Indian Army officials distribute lunch to flood victims at Jagiroad in Morigaon district in Central Assam. — Eastern Projections

Open forum

devastating impact of indiscriminate tree felling in Meghalaya, which was part of undivided Assam until 1972. It is a matter of concern that in the past 32 years of its existence, the once dense forest cover of Meghalaya has plummeted from 40 per cent to less than 20 per cent. Many accuse the timber lobby for the loss, together with a political-bureaucratic nexus. Deforestation is particularly severe in the southern Garo hills.

But some even go so far as to say that they believe that a landslide may have caused a natural lake in a river stream, which then burst causing the devastation downstream. There are other views which point the finger at open cast

mining in the Garo region.

"The colour and the composition of the flood water made flood victims believe that there must be some link between the flood water and a burst in a lake created by open cast mining of coal in the nearby Garo Hills," said Brindaban Goswami, the president of the regional Asom Gana Parishad.

There has been little official support for the theory of the landslide but some state Water Resource Department officials say the release of such a huge amount of water could be explained by a surge from some form of storage.

There is concern about the growing depletion of ecosystems in the region from a number of quarters. Environmentalist Sundarlal Bahuguna says, after a recent visit to Assam, that the region's ecology is "delicately balanced" because of the extensive degradation and destruction of forests. Trees, by their ability to open up vertical space, allow generation of more resources than other human activities like industry, which occupies huge horizontal space.

In addition, it is worth noting that the Draft National Environment Policy has little on offer for the region. It is being rushed through without adequate consultations or public involvement in issues that touch their lives and the future of generations to come.

Earlier, a major campaign of public participation through non-government groups was responsible for involving people at the grassroots level in the preparation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. The same rigour and participation is not visible in the processing of the DNEP. Comments on the draft have been invited with a deadline of 30 October — which barely gives any group enough time to prepare an adequate response.

There is suspicious haste in the draft's preparation. Whether the Krishnoi disaster was triggered by an artificial lake bursting its banks or a landslide or the depletion of forests, Assam, Meghalaya and other states of the Northeast need to work with vigour to develop disaster preparedness plans. Over and above that, they must protect their natural heritage and resources, saving them from plunder by unscrupulous timber merchants and others, to whom the lives of the innocent matter little.

In this process, a tough national environment policy has a role. Civil society groups must be involved in forcing a change: they must challenge the system which has allowed minimal involvement of independent representative groups and not given voice to the people.

(The author is editor, Asom Bani, Guwahati.)

Pesticide poison: Killing fields of Punjab

Arun Anand
in New Delhi

Oct. 26. — Punjab, the foodgrain basket of India, is facing a major threat — "poisoning" from pesticides. Recent studies have indicated that as a result, the number of deaths is growing and severe ailments are on the rise in several areas of the state. Indeed, the traditional land of the robust appears to be going bust.

A study by a Punjab-based non-governmental organisation Kheti Virasat which focused on three villages of Bhatinda district — Ramanavas, Mandi Khurd and Harikishanpura — found an exceptionally high number of cancer patients there.

The survey concluded that excessive use of pesticides for cotton crops was the main reason for this situation.

The survey reveals that Ramanavas — with a population of 2,000 — has in the recent past recorded 25 cancer deaths. Fifteen residents have been diagnosed with other types of cancer. The village also has 50 diabetics.

Mandi Khurd and Harikishanpura have recorded six and ten cancer deaths in the past eight years. The two villages also have eight and ten diabetic patients respectively.

A large number of residents were also found suffering from dental ailments, joint pains, respiratory problems and skin



disorders. The number of children with congenital defects, including mental retardation, is also higher than average.

In Harikishanpura alone, about a dozen such births have taken place over the past decade. Mandi Khurd has recorded four such births over

the last four years. The survey team was told by the sarpanch of Harikishanpura, Mrs Harbans Kaur, that miscarriages, abnormal births and jaundice during pregnancy have gone up considerably over the last few years.

Earlier, Kheti Virasat in

collaboration with another NGO, Greenpeace, had conducted a similar study in three other villages of Bhatinda — Mahinangal, Jajjal and Bangi Nihal-singh.

These villages are a part of the cotton belt of the state. Around 150 children were selected from these three villages and put through various physical and mental ability tests.

A similar study was conducted in four villages of Ropar district where use of pesticides is relatively less. The result: Children in Bathinda were found to have performed significantly worse than those in Ropar.

It may be too early to draw definitive conclusions, but the evidence is ominous.

Choking on industries

HYDERABAD, Oct 26. — Had Indira Gandhi been alive she would have been horrified with the disastrous after-effects of her accelerated industrial development in her home constituency of Medak, which she represented in 1977.

Greenpeace has demanded that the government declare a state of chemical crisis at Patancheru. There are over 100 industries manufacturing bulk drugs, paints, plastics, chemicals, among others. Their pollutants have, over two decades, rendered 2,000 acres of agricultural land fallow and contaminated ground water up to 140 feet. Greenpeace conducted a study of 10,874 people in nine villages, of which 8,925 formed the study group and 1,949 made up the control group. The systems and organs affected among the study group when compared to the control group were: The nervous system — thrice higher than the control group, circulatory system — twice higher, respiratory system — 3.81 times higher. The digestive system — 1.98 times higher, endocrine, nutritional and metabolic systems — 1.84 times higher where one in 35 persons are affected, blood and blood forming organs — 2.9 times higher where one in 29 persons are affected, skin and subcutaneous tissues — 2.67 times higher. "We are shocked. It's Bhopal happening in slow motion at Patancheru," Greenpeace toxic campaigner and the survey's principal investigator Mr Bidhan Chandra Singh said. — Stanley Theodore

Planet Under Pressure

WWF's Earth report warns of spiralling ecological debt

How big is your ecological footprint? That's the question asked by the World Wildlife Fund, referring to the negative impact of development and consumerism of different regions on the state of the planet's health. The size of the ecological footprint is measured according to the rate of over-consumption and exploitation of natural resources, leading to a major impact on wildlife and habitats across the globe. The WWF's latest global report ranks Saudi Arabia with its oil spills as the worst offender. It is followed closely by the US and others like Australia. The statistics are, in fact, quite alarming: We are currently consuming 20% more natural resources than the Earth can produce. Species' numbers — terrestrial, freshwater and marine — fell by 40% in the 30 years between 1970 and 2000. Fossil fuel consumption has increased by 700% in the 40 years between 1961 and 2001. The North American footprint, it seems, is double that of Europe's and seven times that of Asia's or Africa's. This reveals the obvious linkage between development and ecological degradation. The report also 'warns' that future pressures on the planet will result from "spiralling consumption in Asia".

Two things are clear from the report. One is that unsustainable development, increasing population and consumerism, wastage and poor understanding of the interconnected nature of life are causing the unnatural extinction of species and irreparable damage to the environment. Two, that it is those countries which enjoy the greatest economic prosperity which have been responsible for the wanton exploitation of life and resources. However, by cautioning the world against the impending consumer boom in Asia, the report has shifted all future responsibility onto today's developing countries. True, Asia can learn from the mistakes of the West and adopt sustainable development models that will be kinder on the environment. The developed world, however, will need to create eco-friendly technologies both for itself and for Asia to help maintain a global balance. And while noting that species are dying out prematurely, we need to examine the creation and breeding of entirely new life forms like the AIDS and SARS viruses. These were born of unnatural mutations resulting from a breach of the mutually beneficial man-nature relationship. James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis suggested that the Earth is a super-organism that was self-regulating. All we need to do to keep it going is for each species to take care of its survival — provided, of course, we don't overstep our limits and crunch everything else into extinction with our rapidly growing footprint.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 OCT 2004

Quake jolts Japan

Quake
G.M. 25/10
Ojiya, Japan, Oct. 24 (Reuters): Thousands of weary and frightened residents in northern Japan were spending a second night in shelters, cars or in the open today after Japan's deadliest earthquake in nine years killed at least 21 people.

More than 2,000 were injured when the 6.8 magnitude quake and a series of powerful aftershocks struck rural Niigata prefecture, about 250 km north of Tokyo, yesterday, setting off landslides, wrecking houses and buckling railway tracks.

Several aftershocks struck the region today, raising concerns of more landslides in the largely mountainous region.

One slide devastated a village, killing at least two people and cutting off about 600 residents for more than 12 hours.

The quake, coming days after a typhoon killed at least 80 people, is the deadliest in Japan since the Kobe earthquake killed more than 6,400

in 1995. In Tokyo, where the government set up a crisis centre, officials were trying to contact remote areas and arrange to transport food, water, blankets, heaters and other necessities.

The quake and aftershocks shook buildings in Tokyo yesterday but there were no reports of injuries or major damage. Officials have estimated a quake of similar scale in the Tokyo area would kill about 7,000 people.

As darkness fell, nearly 130,000 households in Niigata were without power and many also lacked water, gas or phone service. Some mobile phone services were not working while operators limited use on others to ensure emergency calls got through.

"Our life-line has been cut. There is no toilet, gas or electricity and it was cold last night," Toshiro Hosoya, 57, a high school teacher in the town of Ojiya, said.

"I'm not terrified, but the aftershocks keep coming, so I

have a strange feeling of unease."

People huddled around small bonfires as night fell and temperatures began to drop. The night before, temperatures fell to about 5 degrees Celsius. "I'm wearing at least six layers of clothes," one woman said. "But it's still safer than being inside."

"We are gathering information but we can't figure out details of the disaster damage as the roads are blocked in the mountain areas and phone lines are still suspended," Kyodo news agency quoted Ojiya Mayor Hirokazu Seki as saying.

Ojiya is a textile centre of 40,000 and fears emerged today that 30 residents who had evacuated downstream of a river blocked by a landslide might be swept away, Kyodo added.

In the city of Nagaoka, the lopsided front carriage of a bullet train rested on the side of its track, the first derailment since the high-speed service began 40 years ago.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 OCT 2004

New terror ahead: global warming

Johannesburg, Oct. 24 (Reuters): Rising sea levels force millions of Bangladeshis into India, fuelling ethnic and religious tensions that end in bloody riots.

In Africa, crops wither in the parched landscape of a once-lush nation, bringing strife to the countryside and leading city dwellers to clash with the army as they loot shops for food.

As Russian lawmakers ratified the Kyoto protocol on climate change on Friday after years of dithering, grim scenarios like these may have been on the minds of some.

A growing number of analysts argue that global warming linked to greenhouse gas emissions is not just a "green issue".

They argue it might eventually top terrorism on the global security agenda, provoking new conflicts and inflaming old ones.

"The biggest security problem from global warming would be forced migrations, the dislocation of people because of flooding or drought," said Steve Sawyer, climate policy adviser for environmental group Greenpeace. "Or drastic ecosystem change could change the resource base and uproot rural people. Forced migrations of people almost always cause problems."

Former Canadian envi-

ronment minister David Anderson said earlier this year that global warming posed a greater long-term threat to humanity than terrorism because it could force hundreds of millions to move out of their homes.

Russia's ratification of Kyoto cleared the way for the long-delayed climate change pact to come into force worldwide.

Kyoto obliges rich nations to cut overall emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide to 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008-12 by curbing use of coal, oil and natural gas and shifting to cleaner energies like solar or wind power.

The United Nations projects that temperatures may rise by 1.4-5.8 Celsius by 2100. That could raise sea levels, swamp low-lying states, and bring desertification or floods.

Even if fully implemented to 2012, Kyoto would only curb the projected rise in temperatures by 0.15 Celsius. Anything more would require far deeper cuts likely to cost trillions of dollars.

Climate change is taking its worst toll on the developing world, although the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions stem from rich nations.

Global warming may already be a source of violence in heavily populated central Nigeria, where nomadic cat-

tle herders and peasant farmers have been locked in conflict over scarce land for decades as the Sahara desert creeps southwards.

"The frequency and impact of natural disasters are on the rise, driven in part by an unpredictably changing climate. The poor are most threatened by these catastrophes and the least equipped to recover," says the International Institute for Sustainable Development. "Evidence is emerging that many conflicts around the world are driven by natural resource scarcity or inequitable access and benefit-sharing."

A United Nations and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) report released on Friday looked at the ecological roots of conflict in the tension-ridden southern Caucasus region, which includes Chechnya.

"Environmental degradation and the use of natural resources are identified as factors that could deepen contention in areas of existing conflicts as in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent regions of Azerbaijan," it said.

Another recent study, the Southern African Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (SAMA), stressed that many conflicts in Africa were driven by land degradation.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 OCT 2004

Russia brings alive emission pact

Decisive boost to toxic war

Moscow, Oct. 22 (Reuters): Russia's lower house of parliament ratified the Kyoto Protocol today, clearing the way for the long-delayed climate change pact to come into force worldwide.

The UN accord aimed at battling global warming is already backed by 126 countries, but it needed Russia's support to make it internationally binding after the US, the world's biggest polluter, pulled out in 2001.

"We'll toast the Duma with vodka tonight," Greenpeace climate policy adviser Steve Sawyer said.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol obliges rich nations to cut overall emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide by 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008-12 by curbing use of coal, oil and natural gas and shifting to cleaner energies like solar or wind power.

"The entry into force of Kyoto is the biggest step forward in environmental politics and law we have ever seen," said Jennifer Morgan, director of the WWF conservation group's climate change programme.

To come into force, the pact needed to be ratified by countries accounting for at least 55 per cent of developed nations' greenhouse gas emissions.

Russia, which accounts for 17 per cent, became the key to

Kyoto after the US pull out.

Washington said the pact was too costly and unfairly exempted large rapidly industrialising countries such as China and India.

But EU Commission President Romano Prodi said Russia's backing would put additional pressure on the US to reconsider its position.

"The Kyoto Protocol may not be perfect but it is the only effective tool that is available to the international community," he said in a statement.

"The United States should not abstain from the one fight that is crucial for the future of mankind."

Russia's Duma passed the Kyoto bill by 334 votes in favour, with 73 against and two abstentions. The Upper house will consider Kyoto on October 27, Interfax news agency said. After that it will go to President Vladimir Putin, who will have up to two weeks to sign it.

These steps are seen as formalities after today's vote in the Duma, which is controlled by pro-Kremlin parties.

Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said the decision would help concentrate global efforts on meeting Kyoto's targets.

But he added that "the goal of stabilising the climate and securing the stability of the



A Russian deputy gestures during the session of the Duma in Moscow. (Reuters)

planet is however a long way off".

Rising global temperatures have been linked to extreme weather including droughts, flooding and higher sea levels, which some see as possible sparks for regional

conflicts. Russia signed the Protocol in 1999. But it only signalled it would ratify it this year in exchange for EU agreement on the terms of Moscow's admission to the World Trade Organ-

■ *What is the Kyoto protocol?*

It is a pact agreed by governments at a 1997 UN conference in Kyoto, Japan, to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by developed nations by 5.2 per cent of 1990 levels during the five-year period 2008-2012. A total of 122 nations have ratified the pact or acceded to it, according to UN data.

■ *Is it the first agreement of its kind?*

Governments originally agreed to tackle climate change at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At that meeting, leaders created the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which set a non-binding goal of stabilising emissions at 1990 levels by 2000, a goal not met overall. The Kyoto protocol is the follow-up to that and is the first legally binding global agreement to cut greenhouse gases.

■ *So it's legally binding?*

It is binding once it has been ratified by at least 55 nations and by countries representing at least 55 percent of developed countries' carbon dioxide emissions. Kyoto has been ratified by 126 states but has so far only received pledges from nations representing 44 per cent of total emissions.

Russia holds the key to Kyoto's success or failure with its 17 per cent share of emissions by developed nations. US President George W. Bush pulled out in 2001, arguing Kyoto was too expensive and unfairly excludes developing nations. The US is the biggest polluter with a 36 per cent share.

■ *When will it enter into force?*

Kyoto will apply worldwide 90 days after Russia completes ratification formalities, including approval by the Duma, upper house and signature by its key advocate, President Vladimir Putin.

■ *How will it be enforced?*

Under a 2001 deal made by environment ministers in Bonn, Germany, if countries emit more gases than allowed under their targets at the end of 2012, they will be required to make the cuts, and 30 per cent more, in the second commitment period which is due to start in 2013. They rejected the idea of a financial penalty.

■ *Does every country have to reduce emissions by 5.2 per cent?*

No, only 39 countries — relatively developed ones — have target levels for the 2008-12 period, adhering to the principle established under the UNFCCC that richer countries should take the lead. Each country negotiated different targets, with Russia aiming for stabilisation at 1990 levels and the European Union trying for an 8 per cent cut.

■ *How are they doing so far?*

Most countries are lagging targets under Kyoto. The

UNFCCC secretariat says emissions by Spain and Portugal were worst, at 40.5 per cent above 1990 levels in 2002 while US emissions, for instance, were up 13.1 per cent. Emissions by ex-communist bloc states had fallen most sharply after the collapse of Soviet-era industries — Russian emissions were down 38 per cent from 1990.

■ *What are greenhouse gases?*

Greenhouse gases are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. The main one is carbon dioxide (CO2), most of which comes from burning fossil fuel. The protocol also covers methane (CH4), much of which comes from agriculture and waste dumps, and nitrous oxide (N2O), mostly a result of fertiliser use. Three industrial gases used in various applications, such as refrigerants, heat conductors and insulators, are also included.

■ *What happens to countries that miss the target?*

The protocol provides for "flexible mechanisms" — ways for countries to reach their targets without actually reducing emissions at home. These include emissions trading — where one country buys the right to emit from another country which has already reduced its emissions sufficiently and has "spare" emissions reductions.

Another is the "clean development mechanism" where developed countries can earn credits to offset against their targets by funding clean technologies, such as solar power, in poorer countries.

Crack the Kyoto puzzle

India a major importer of toxic wastes

By Man Mohan/TNN

minerva 11-11 14/10

New Delhi: More deadly than "exploding scrap" is the export and import of toxic wastes to the Third World countries. Attention is now shifting to these "killer wastes" of which India is a major importer.

The bereaved families of the workers who died in the Ghaziabad steel factory accident will, in all probability, be compensated but others like them, victims of gross neglect and indifference to hazardous wastes being brought into the country, die ignominious deaths.

The export and import of toxic wastes justified as recycling is now one of the biggest threats to global environment. The process of recycling also generates lot of toxic materials, which pollute environment and place workers at risk.

Following the first international toxic waste trade scandals that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the environmentally friendly word 'recycling' began to increasingly be used by waste traders to justify the export of hazardous wastes from rich to poor countries. Ramapati Kumar, toxics campaigner, Greenpeace India, said that the export and import of toxic wastes to the Third World countries, ostensibly for recycling is an unacceptable transfer of responsibilities to those least able to afford it.

"Such trade leaves the workers in developing countries with a choice between poverty and poisoning, a choice nobody should have to make," said Kumar. India's main entry point for scrap and toxic wastes is the ship building yard at Alang, Gujarat. Compared to the recovery of explosive material in scrap in many parts of northern India, Alang is a disaster on a much larger scale. At

Alang, accidents occur with a dismal regularity.

On average, 300 to 350 ships are scrapped in India each year, to recover the steel and other re-usable components from the ships. But in the process, workers and the environment are exposed to a number of hazardous waste materials. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, 12,428 metric tons of hazardous waste and twice that amount of non-hazardous waste are produced by Alang annually, which seriously impact the soil, water and air.



The environmentally-friendly word "recycle" has been used by waste traders justify the export of hazardous wastes from rich to poor countries

"Exploding shells" in scrap seems to have once again attracted the world's attention towards the largest global \$521 scrap market at Alang. The incidents have prompted a global television channel to broadcast a new documentary on Indian ship breaking industry called "Cheating Death: Shipwreckers."

At Alang, the combination of hazardous working conditions, congested and unhygienic living conditions, poor quality of drinking water, availability of illicit country liquor and rampant prostitution have given rise to a number of skin, gastro-intestinal and liver diseases, TB, leprosy and malaria.

Global warming clock ticking faster: Scientists

CHARLES CLOVER

London, Oct. 11: Levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are rising faster than at any time since records began, figures reveal.

Scientists cannot explain the unprecedented increase in 2002 and 2003 but they believe it is more likely to be the result of a natural phenomenon rather than a surge in burning of fossil fuels.

The rise suggests that global warming is speeding up.

A possibility raised by scientists at the British Meteorological Office's Hadley Centre is that, as the world warms, it begins to release more carbon from natural sources which normally soak it up, such as forests, soils or oceans.

Dr Charles Keeling, 76, who began the longest-run-

ning carbon dioxide measurements at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii in 1958, said the unprecedented rise was "a cause for concern".

Carbon dioxide, mostly from the burning of coal, oil and gas, traps heat that otherwise would radiate into space. Temperatures increased by 0.6 degrees Celsius over the 20th century and an international panel of scientists has concluded that most of the warming was probably due to man-made greenhouse gasses.

While it has yet to be proved categorically that such gases will cause the world to heat up over the next century, the debate among serious scientists is no longer whether the emissions are altering the climate, but by how much and whether the costs of repairing the damage are worth it.

Before the industrial era, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere stood at around 280 parts per million (ppm), scientists have determined. The average concentrations last year, according to the figures recorded by Dr Keeling's equipment 11,141ft up Mauna Loa, Hawaii's second highest volcano, were 375.64 ppm.

The Mauna Loa records show that concentrations of the gas rose by 2.08 ppm in 2002 and 2.54 ppm in 2003, the first time successive years have seen an increase of more than two ppm.

According to the US agency which runs the observatory, the monthly average rises in carbon dioxide this year were higher than the 20-year average until June, when the rate of increase tailed off.

The rise for this year is expected to be just under two ppm.

Peter Cox, the head of the carbon cycle group at the Hadley Centre, said the figures for 2002 and 2003 looked like "an interesting anomaly" which "could not simply be explained by greater fossil fuel emissions".

He added: "There must be something else happening, adding carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. My guess is that there were extra forest fires in the northern hemisphere, and particularly a very hot summer in Europe. This led to a dieback in vegetation and an increase in release of carbon from the soil rather than more growing plants taking carbon out of the atmosphere which is usually the case in summer."

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

12 OCT 2004

Flash floods in Assam wash away 61

HTC & Agencies
Guwahati, October 9

SIXTY-ONE people — mostly women and children — were washed away by flash floods in two areas bordering Meghalaya in Goalpara district of Assam. The death toll due to floods and landslides in Assam has now risen to 78.

Incessant rain from Wednesday raised the water level of Krisnai, Dudhnoi, and Jinjimara rivers, which originate from the Garo Hills district in Meghalaya. All the rivers are tributaries of the Brahmaputra and are in spate. Nearly half a dozen villages have been washed away in the flash floods — including Balbala, Chandamari, Krisnai and Agia. More than 200 people are reported missing. Superintendent of Police, Goalpara, Vi-

olet Barua said there was possibility of more bodies being found.

"The flash floods have created havoc in Goalpara district", Assam Home Commissioner B.K. Gohain said, adding that the Army had been pressed into service to rescue the people marooned in Dudhnoi and the nearby areas. Indian Air Force helicopters were also assisting the administration in rescue operation.

Police rescue teams recovered 52 bodies, while the remaining bodies were recovered by the Army. Rescue operations for the missing persons were still on, Gohain said. The Goalpara district administration said the water levels of the Krisnai, Jinjimara and Dudhnoi were still rising.

The district administra-

tion has set up 50 relief camps in the areas to rehabilitate the homeless. Medical teams have been rushed to the area. The flash floods also swept away "countless" head of cattle and destroyed standing crops in the region.

Road communication between Goalpara and the capital city has been snapped since the water was flowing across the National Highway 37. Moreover, road communication to the three districts of Garo Hills was also cut off.

Meanwhile, flash floods have also inundated large areas of the Mahendraguni, Tikirkilla and Rajabala areas in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. Two persons were feared swept away by the Manda river in Dainadubi, while one villager was killed in a landslide in Kharkhutta block.

The situation in Guwahati city continued to be grave with almost all localities under waist-high water. Army boats were moving the waterlogged people to safer places. Schools and colleges were declared closed for two days from yesterday due to the waterlogging.

The worst-affected areas in the capital city are R G Baruah Road, Bhangagari, Panbazar, A T Road, Nabinagar, Rajgarh, Lachitnagar, Tarun Nagar, Krishna Nagar, Dispur, Hatigaon, Rukmimgaon, Panjabari, Beltola, Santipur and Kumarpara.

The rains accompanied by high velocity wind uprooted trees which blocked roads and disrupted power supply in the last three days. With no electricity in most parts of the city, water supply was also seriously affected.



AP
A boatman waits for passengers on a rubber dinghy as a rickshaw goes past in a flooded Guwahati street on Saturday.

Environmentalist Maathai wins Peace Nobel

Associated Press

OSLO, Oct. 8. — Kenyan environmental activist Ms Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize yesterday for her work as leader of the Green Belt Movement, which has sought to empower women, better the environment and fight corruption in Africa for almost 30 years.

Ms Maathai, Kenya's deputy environment minister, is the first African woman to win the prize since it was first awarded in 1901. She has been international-

ally recognised for her struggle for democracy, and gained recent attention for a campaign against land grabbing and rapacious deforestation. The Green Belt Movement has planted more than 30 million trees across Africa.

"We believe that Maathai is a strong voice speaking for the best forces in Africa to promote peace and good living conditions on that continent," the Nobel committee said in its citation.

With a record 194 nominations, the committee had a broad field to choose from and

speculation had focused on other candidates.

Ms Maathai, said she, too, was surprised. "I am absolutely overwhelmed and very emotionally charged, really," she told Norwegian state television. "I did not expect this."

It was the first time the prize honoured work to preserve the environment.

During the 2001 centennial anniversary of the prize, the committee had said it wanted to widen the scope of the award, including honouring those who worked to improve the environ-

ment, as well as contributed to advancing peace worldwide.

"This is the first time environment sets the agenda for the Nobel Peace Prize, and we have added a new dimension to peace. We want to work for a better life environment in Africa," said committee chairman Mr Ole Danbolt Mjoes.

Many observers had speculated that the committee might try to send a message about the US-led war in Iraq, as it did in 2002, when members said the choice of former US President Jimmy Carter should be seen as criticism of

the Bush administration's move to topple Saddam Hussein.

The choice of the 64-year-old Maathai was a clear answer that the committee eschewed politics this time around.

Mr Morten Hoeglund, a member of Norway's Progress Party, criticised the choice, saying there were more pressing issues — such as weapons of mass destruction — that the Nobel Committee should have focused on.

Oddsmakers had pointed to Mohamed ElBaradei and the International Atomic Energy Agency as likely winners.

শান্তির নোবেল ওয়াংগারি মাথাইয়ের

সমালো, ৮ অক্টোবর: সবুজায়নের স্বীকৃতি। কেনিয়ার 'গ্রিন বেল্ট মুভমেন্ট'-এর প্রবক্তা ওয়াংগারি মাথাই প্লাঙ্কেন এ বছরের নোবেল শান্তি পুরস্কার। এই সবুজের অভিযানে সামিল হয়ে গত প্রায় তিন দশক ধরে মাথাই ও তাঁর সঙ্গীরা গোটা আফ্রিকা জুড়ে প্রায় ৩ কোটি গাছ লাগিয়েছেন। দারিদ্র দূরীকরণে সবুজায়নের বিবিধ সুদূরপ্রসারী উপকারিতার কথাই তুলে ধরেছেন মাথাই। মরুপ্রধান অঞ্চলে বৃষ্টি আনতে, বন্যপ্রাণী সংরক্ষণে, জ্বালানি কিংবা নির্মাণের কাজে কাঠের প্রয়োজনে এবং সর্বোপরি দুর্ভিক্ষপীড়িত গরিব দেশগুলিতে খাদ্যের জোগান দিতেও প্রয়োজন সবুজায়ন। তা ছাড়া, এই কর্মকাণ্ডে মাথাই সামিল করেছেন মূলত দরিদ্র মহিলাদেরই। তাই নোবেল কমিটির কথায়, 'সুদূরপ্রসারী উন্নয়ন, গণতন্ত্র ও শান্তির লক্ষ্যে মাথাইয়ের অবদানই' তাঁকে এই স্বীকৃতি এনে দিয়েছে।

পুরস্কারের খবর পেয়ে দারুণ খুশি ৬৪ বছরের মাথাই। বলেছেন, "এ রকম খুশির খবর ভাবতেই পারিনি। সত্যি, শান্তির বীজ বপনের জন্যেই আমরা বৃক্ষরোপণ করি।" খুশি কেনিয়ার সরকারও। এক মুখপাত্র জানিয়েছেন, "বহু বছর ধরে মাথাই যে নিঃশব্দ বিপ্লব ঘটিয়েছেন, এই পুরস্কার তারই স্বীকৃতি।"

এ বছরে এই পুরস্কারের জন্য প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতায় এগিয়ে ছিলেন রাষ্ট্রপুঞ্জের অধীন আন্তর্জাতিক পরমাণু শক্তি সংস্থার প্রধান মহম্মদ এলবারাদেই। কিন্তু তাঁকে পিছনে ফেলে উঠে এলেন মাথাই। আফ্রিকার মহিলাদের মধ্যে ওয়াংগারিই প্রথম এই পুরস্কার পেলেন। নতুন শতকে সমাজসেবার বিভিন্ন নতুন দিক তুলে ধরতে চায় নোবেল কমিটি। পরিবেশবাদী মাথাইয়ের নির্বাচন তাদের এই প্রতিশ্রুতিরই সাক্ষ্যবহ।

—রয়টার্স

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

9 OCT 2004

Kick-starting Kyoto

Moscow's ratification changes the equations

The Russian cabinet's approval of the Kyoto pact takes it off the artificial respirator and kick-starts the process once again. The pact becomes binding once it is ratified by countries that accounted for 55 per cent of developed countries' carbon dioxide emissions in 1990, and it crossed that threshold when Moscow signed on. The pact has still to be ratified by the Russian Duma, but President Putin's deputies dominate this chamber and significant resistance is not expected, with Putin backing the move. Russia is actually in a unique position vis-à-vis Kyoto because its emissions have dropped 30 per cent since the demise of the Soviet Union and the closing down of many polluting and inefficient industries.

Since Russia's Kyoto target is zero increase in emissions over 1990 by 2012, that gives it room to increase its current emissions significantly and yet have plenty left over to sell to other countries that have exceeded their emissions quotas, a process that could rake in billions of dollars. Besides better relations with the EU and promised accession to the WTO, that may have been the icing on the cake for Moscow.

With NASA images from space recording progressive shrinkage of Arctic ice caps over the last quarter century, the issue of the harmful effects of greenhouse emissions is now beyond reasonable scientific doubt. That makes the United States, with a quarter of the world's emissions and an administration that refuses to sign on to Kyoto, the world's greatest environmental outlaw. Notionally, the US and other industrialized camp followers who have stayed out of Kyoto, such as Australia, will have an economic advantage as their industries will not be hobbled by restrictive environmental rules. But American companies need to work and sell their products in Europe, and they will fall behind if they cannot develop better technologies that cope with tougher environmental standards.

The American argument is to point to India and China, which also fall outside the purview of Kyoto. But in the case of newly industrializing countries there is an additional question of fairness, as their power and transport infrastructures were underdeveloped in 1990, and they cannot be expected to adhere forever to the level of emissions they generated in 1990.

Their share of world population, for which they have to provide a decent living standard, must also be made a criterion and given significant weightage in deciding their quota of emissions. But there is little doubt that not just the US, but China and India will have to grapple with the question of greenhouse gas emissions sooner or later.

THE STATESMAN

7 OCT 2004

নদী সংযোগ : রাষ্ট্রপতিকে বিশদে বোঝালেন প্রিয়রঞ্জন

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: দিল্লি, ৬ অক্টোবর— নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্পের ভবিষ্যৎ জানতে আগ্রহী রাষ্ট্রপতি এ পি জে আবদুল কালাম। আজ জলসম্পদ উন্নয়ন মন্ত্রী প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাসমুঙ্গিকে তাই যেতে হয়েছিল রাষ্ট্রপতি ভবন। প্রায় পঁয়তাল্লিশ মিনিট ধরে এই প্রকল্পের বর্তমান অবস্থা বর্ণনা করতে হয় তাঁকে। ইউ পি এ সরকার প্রকল্পটি যে সর্বসম্মতভাবে রূপায়িত করতে আগ্রহী তা রাষ্ট্রপতিকে জানানো হয়। প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী এর আগে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংকে চিঠি লিখে অভিযোগ করেছিলেন তাঁর এই স্বপ্নের প্রকল্পটি ইউ পি এ সরকার বাজে কাগজের খুড়িতে ফেলে দিয়েছে। অভিযোগ খণ্ডন করে মনমোহন একটি বিস্তারিত জবাব দিয়েছিলেন অটলকে। এর পর রাষ্ট্রপতির কানেও এই বিষয়টি তোলা হয়। রাষ্ট্রপতি তাঁর প্রথামাফিক ভাষণে সংসদে এই প্রকল্পের কথা বলেছিলেন। জাতির উদ্দেশে দেওয়া একটি ভাষণেও তিনি এর উল্লেখ করেছিলেন। সম্প্রতি আফ্রিকা ও তানজানিয়া সফরে গিয়ে রাষ্ট্রপতি সে দেশের বিজ্ঞানীদের কাছ থেকে এই প্রকল্প নিয়ে নানা প্রশ্ন শুনেছিলেন। রাষ্ট্রপতি তাই প্রকল্পটির বর্তমান পরিস্থিতি জানতে আগ্রহী হন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী এটা জানার পর প্রিয়রঞ্জনকে রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে গিয়ে প্রকল্পের বিষয়টি ব্যাখ্যা করে আসতে বলেন। নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্পটি বহু চর্চিত হলেও শেষ অবধি এমন প্রকল্পটি আদৌ রূপায়িত হবে কি না তা নিয়ে সন্দেহ থেকেই যায়। এর খরচ অন্তত পক্ষে সাড় পাঁচ লাখ কোটি টাকা। এই বিপুল অঙ্কের টাকা আসবে কোথা থেকে? এর পরেও আসবে নানা গুরুতর প্রশ্ন। সংশ্লিষ্ট সব রাজ্যকে সহমত হতে হবে। সময় কত লাগবে তার কোনও আভাস কেউই দিতে পারবেন না। প্রিয়রঞ্জন অবশ্য রাষ্ট্রপতিকে বলে আসেন ইউ পি এ সরকারের ন্যূনতম কর্মসূচিতেও এই নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্পটি আছে। সরকার সহমতের ভিত্তিতে প্রকল্পের কাজ এগিয়ে নিয়ে যেতে আগ্রহী। তাঁর মন্ত্রককে তিনি চার দফা কর্মসূচি তিক করে দিয়েছেন। (১) ন্যাশনাল ওয়াটার ডেভেলপমেন্ট এজেন্সিকে ৩০টি নদী সংযোগের মধ্যে ১৮টির সংযোগ সম্ভাবনা খতিয়ে দেখতে বলা হয়েছে আগামী বছরের ৩১ ডিসেম্বরের মধ্যে। এই ১৮টি সংযোগ হল উপদ্বীপ এলাকার নদীগুলির মধ্যে। (২) নদী নিয়ে গঠিত একটি টাস্ক ফোর্সকে বলা হয়েছে এই নদী সংযোগ নিয়ে একটি সর্বসম্মত কারিগরি পরিকল্পনা ৩১ অক্টোবরের মধ্যে তৈরি করতে। (৩) টাস্ক ফোর্সের যাবতীয় তথ্য সম্পর্কে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা পরিষদকে অবহিত করতে হবে। যদিও জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা পরিষদ শুধু প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে অবহিত করতে বলেছে। (৪) প্রথমে মধ্যপ্রদেশ-উত্তরপ্রদেশের নদী ও মধ্যপ্রদেশ-রাজস্থানের নদী সংযোগ নিয়ে কথা বলা হবে। উপদ্বীপ এলাকা ও অন্যান্য নদী সংযোগ নিয়ে সব রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের সঙ্গে কথা হবে আগামী বছরের জানুয়ারি মাসে। রাষ্ট্রপতি প্রিয়রঞ্জনকে এই চার দফা কাজ শেষ হওয়ার পর পরিস্থিতি জানাতে বলেন।

AAJKAI.

7 OCT 2004

সর্দার সরোবরের কল্যাণে নদী-সংযোগ হচ্ছে গুজরাতে

গৌতম হোড়

কেওরিয়ায় সর্দার সরোবরের

কেওরিয়া (গুজরাত), ৬ অক্টোবর: সারা দেশে নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্প নিয়ে যত বিতর্কই হোক না কেন, গুজরাতে কিন্তু নদী সংযোগের কাজ অনেকটাই হয়ে গিয়েছে। নরেন্দ্র মোদীর রাজ্যে নর্মদার জল নিয়ে আসা হয়েছে সবরমতী, মাহী, রুপেন, বনস-সহ ছোটবড় তেরোটি নদীতে। তাই বর্ষার কয়েকটা দিন ছাড়া যে সব নদীতে জল থাকত না, সেখানে বহু বিতর্কিত সর্দার সরোবর বাঁধের কল্যাণে এই সব নদীর একটা অংশে এখন সারাবছরই জল থাকছে। সর্দার সরোবরের প্রধান ক্যানালের ২৬৩ কিলোমিটারের কাজ সম্পূর্ণ হয়েছে। এই ক্যানালের গতিপথে যে সব নদী পড়ছে, সেখানেই পৌঁছে যাচ্ছে নর্মদার জল।

সারা দেশে নদী সংযোগের প্রকল্প আদৌ অনুমোদিত হবে কি না, হলেও তা পরিবেশগত ও আর্থিক কারণে বাস্তবায়িত হবে কি না তা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন রয়েছে। বাজপেয়ী সরকার এই পরিকল্পনা নিয়ে কিছুটা এগোলেও মনমোহন সিংহ ক্ষমতায় আসার পর কিন্তু এ ব্যাপারে খুব একটা উৎসাহ দেখাচ্ছেন না। এই পরিস্থিতিতে সর্দার সরোবরের কল্যাণে ছোট আকারে নদী সংযোগের কাজটা সেরে ফেলতে পেরেছে গুজরাত। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদীর অন্তত দাবি, এর ফলে পরিবেশগত কোনও সমস্যা হবে না। বরং খরাগ্রবণ গুজরাতের যে সব নদী এগারো মাস শুকনো থাকে তার কিছুটা অংশে অন্তত সারাবছর জল থাকবে। এর জন্য বাড়তি খরচও করতে হয়নি। কংক্রিটের ক্যানেল যেখানে কোনও নদীর উপর দিয়ে যাচ্ছে সেখানে স্লুইস গেট করে জল ফেলে দেওয়া হচ্ছে সেই নদীতে। তবে ঘটনা হল, এটা নদী সংযোগ পরিকল্পনার অঙ্গ নয়। সর্দার সরোবর ক্যানেল এমনিতেই কিছু নদীর উপর দিয়ে যাচ্ছে বলে তার সুযোগে কিছুটা জল ওই সব নদীতে পৌঁছে দেওয়া হচ্ছে। তাই ফাঁকতালেই নদী সংযোগের কাজ অনেকটা এগিয়ে গিয়েছে গুজরাতে।

উচ্চতা এখন ১১০ মিটার। মধ্যপ্রদেশে পুনর্বাসনের কাজ শেষ হলেই তা ১২২ মিটার হবে। ১১০ মিটার উচ্চতা থেকে এখন বিশাল ঝর্ণার মতো প্রবল শব্দ করে নীচে পড়ছে নর্মদা। এখনই সেই দৃশ্য এত সুন্দর যে বাঁধের কাজ পুরো শেষ হওয়ার পরে সর্দার সরোবর পর্যটক আকর্ষণের কেন্দ্র হয়ে দাঁড়াতেই পারে। বাঁধের থেকে জল নিয়ে যাওয়া হচ্ছে নর্মদা ক্যানালে। আর সেই মূল ক্যানেল থেকে তৈরি হচ্ছে ছোট ছোট ক্যানালের জাল। মূল ক্যানেল গুজরাত থেকে চলে যাবে রাজস্থানে।

তবে সে কাজ শেষ হতে এখনও আরও বছর ছয়েক দেরি আছে। এখনও পর্যন্ত ২৫০ মেগাওয়াটের জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্পটি শেষ হয়েছে। ইতিমধ্যেই পরীক্ষামূলক উৎপাদনও শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। এই প্রকল্পের উদ্বোধন করার জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহকে অনুরোধ করেছেন গুজরাতের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদী। প্রধানমন্ত্রী সময় দিলেই চালু হয়ে যাবে এই বিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্প। পাঁচ বছর আগেই এই প্রকল্পের কাজ শেষ হয়ে গিয়েছিল। কিন্তু মামলা মোকদ্দমার জন্য বাঁধের উচ্চতা ১১০ মিটার হাঙ্কিল না বলে তা চালু করা যায়নি। কারণ, যেখান থেকে নর্মদার জল এই বিদ্যুতের জন্য নিয়ে আসা হচ্ছে তার উচ্চতা ৯৭ মিটার। এখন অবশ্য উচ্চতার সমস্যা আর নেই। ফলে এই প্রকল্পও তৈরি।

তবে এটা ছোট জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্প। সর্দার সরোবরে প্রধান হল ১২০০ মেগাওয়াট ক্ষমতাসম্পন্ন জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্প, যার প্রথম ইউনিটের কাজ শুরু হবে নভেম্বরে। তারপর প্রতি তিন মাস পর পর আরও চারটি ইউনিট কাজ শুরু করবে। এই প্রকল্প যাতে অবিলম্বে চালু হয় তার জন্য গুজরাতের থেকে মধ্যপ্রদেশের গরজ বেশি। কারণ, উৎপাদিত বিদ্যুতের ৬৭ ভাগই চলে যাবে মধ্যপ্রদেশে। আর মধ্যপ্রদেশে সড়ক-বিজলি-পানির প্রতিশ্রুতি দিয়ে ক্ষমতায় আসা বিজেপি-র পক্ষে অত্যন্ত জরুরি এই বিদ্যুৎ।

Kalam wants more on river-linking

Srinjoy Chowdhury
in New Delhi

Oct. 4. — In a significant move, the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, has asked the Centre for details on the river-interlinking scheme.

Dr Kalam has always been an active supporter of the project, that could cost about Rs 500,000 crore over a decade. The previous NDA government had been a strong proponent of this scheme, and this government is examining the project with reports on the specific projects involving the peninsular rivers likely to be taken up first. It is mentioned in the UPA Common Minimum Programme.

Just when the Rashtrapati Bhavan presentation will be made is being worked out as there are "protocol issues involved," one official said. A presentation can be arranged for the President, but there is a feeling it will be better if the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and other cabinet ministers are briefed



first. It is possible that the water resources minister, Mr PR Das Munshi, will first call on the President for a discussion on the issues involved. Then, the presentation for the PM and other relevant cabinet ministers like environment and agriculture can be held. It was learnt that the UPA chairperson, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, was also invited for the briefing.

After that a full-scale briefing can be held for the President. Dr Kalam has always been interested in the river-linking project and even during his meetings with reporters during his recent trip to Tanzania and South Africa spoke about the project and expressed confi-

dence that the government would go ahead with it. He had been asked whether the UPA government is as keen on the project as the NDA government, which had appointed Mr Suresh Prabhu, the interlinking czar, giving him cabinet minister status. The Supreme Court is currently looking at the feasibility reports regarding interlinking.

This ambitious project aims to link all the rivers in the country through 30 links. A number of issues have to be looked at, including hydrological issues, environmental impact and resettlement before the project is cleared. It is possible that the project can be done in phases and the water resources ministry is keen that the feasibility studies regarding the 14 links of the peninsular rivers are looked at first. As for the Himalayan rivers, other countries are also involved. If successful, river-interlinking could end floods and drought in India increasing agricultural production.

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Buddha wants more say on environment

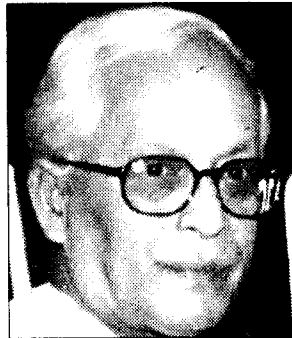
State's News Service

KOLKATA, Oct. 3. — The right to give environmental clearance to projects should rest with the state governments and not with the Union ministry of environment and forest, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said today.

He, however, added that the state does not want to enter into any confrontation with the Centre in this regard. "Though our view on this matter is clear we don't believe in confrontation with the Centre."

Mr Bhattacharjee was speaking at the presentation of the environment excellence awards 2004 to various industries, local bodies and NGOs. The function was held in association with West Bengal Pollution Control Board and Indian Chamber of Commerce.

The winners of the awards are MCC PTA India Corporation Limited, Budge Budge Generating Station, CESE Limited, Electrosteel Castings Limited (from the industries) Gontra Samabaya



Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

Krishi Unnayan Samity Limited, Lokmata Rani Rashmoni Mission, Madhyamgram Green March and Lok Sece Parishad— all NGOs. The local bodies that have won the awards are Kalyani Municipality, Nadia, English Bazar Municipality, Malda and Durgapur Municipal Corporation, Bardhaman.

After the award presentation ceremony there was a stake holders' consultation on Draft National Environment policy, 2004. The panelists comprising bureaucrats, academicians and activists dwelt upon various aspects of the environmental issues that can be incorporated in the national policy document.

British bank linked to Omkareshwar dam project controversy

LONDON, Oct. 2. The United Kingdom's Barclays Bank was yesterday accused of playing a vital role in the financing of an Indian hydro-electric dam which will force up to 50,000 people from their homes.

The Omkareshwar dam project, one of a series of large dams on the Narmada in Mad-

hya Pradesh, will flood 30 villages and over 100 sq. km. of forest and farmland.

According to papers seen by the London-based *Guardian* newspaper, no impact study has been done and no resettlement plans have been finalised.

The World Bank, the Deutsche Bank and the ABN

leave their homes.

Activists such as author Arundhati Roy have been imprisoned for trying to stop the dams, which would eventually force the relocation of more than 600,000 people.

Help sought

According to documents seen

by the *Guardian*, the Indian Government had asked the Unit Trust of India and Barclays to help arrange the finance for the dam, to run over 14 years.

Yesterday, in a statement, Barclays denied lending any of its own money to the scheme and claimed that its mandate from the Indian Government

had lapsed.

"As Barclays is neither providing finance for the project nor arranging finance we cannot comment further," it said.

However, the bank did admit "advising and assisting" in the project. A spokesman would not confirm the extent of the fees earned in the deal.

study as police chief Let
were killed in the clashes. T
officers were found on Frida
recovered after he was shot
Aristide, row in exile in Sou
ouster, called for a third day
to commemorate the 1991 a
government. Several roads in
blocked by flaming barricade

Photographer Avedon dead

NEW YORK: Richard Avedon, the revolutionary photographer

THE HINDU

3 OCT 2004

Kremlin approves Kyoto Protocol

By Vladimir Radyuhin

*H26
1/10*

MOSCOW, SEPT. 30. The Russian Government today approved the Kyoto Protocol despite strong opposition from academics and Kremlin bureaucrats in what is seen as a political gesture designed to ease Russia's admission to the World Trade Organisation.

The Cabinet's endorsement of the global warming pact gives the green light for its ratification by the State Duma, the Russian Parliament's lower House, which is heavily dominated by pro-Government parties.

Moscow's support became critical for the success of the Kyoto Protocol after the United States pulled out from it in 2001. The pact will automatically take effect 90 days after the Russian Parliament ratifies it.

The Russian Academy of Sciences earlier this year called for rejecting the protocol as scien-

Commitment

tifically untenable and "discriminatory" towards Russia. Russian academics came to the conclusion that it is the global warming that causes higher concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, not the other way round as supporters of the Kyoto pact said. Critics also warned that accession to the pact would derail the Russian President, Vladimir Putin's plan of doubling the size of the Russian economy by 2010. Mr. Putin's chief economic advisor, Andrei Illarionov, blasted the Kyoto Protocol as "international Auschwitz" that would strangle the Russian economy.

However, Mr. Putin decided that Russia would gain more by going along with the Kyoto Protocol than by killing it. In May, he promised to speed up ratification of Kyoto after the E.U. pledged support for Russia's WTO bid.

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THE HINDU

1 OCT 2004

The National Environment Policy

By N.R. Krishnan

119-10
2004

THE DRAFT National Environment Policy 2004 released in August by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) for public discussion is a welcome initiative. It is more a strategy paper than a policy pronouncement. The directive principle of state policy on environment has been articulated in Article 48A of the Constitution introduced by the 42nd Amendment in 1977. It says: "The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country." Likewise, Article 51(A) (g) laid down protection of environment as one of the fundamental duties of every citizen. Any restatement of these sentiments as new policy would have been superfluous. What is needed is a comprehensive strategy for environmental conservation. The NEP provides that and something more.

The NEP emphasises the often-overlooked truth that what is good for the environment is also good for the economy and that environmental protection "cannot be considered in isolation" from the development process. A fair trade-off between environmental costs, as far as they can be ascertained and monetised, and economic development imperatives is possible and desirable. The NEP is, however, quick to qualify that where money cannot compensate for loss of an environmental good, cost-benefit analyses and trade-offs are better avoided.

The draft policy accords priority to conservation of life-supporting systems such as land, forests and water. The causes of land degradation in India are many, ranging from the direct (water and wind erosion, loss of forest cover, and water logging) to the indirect (fragmentation of land holdings, inadequate tenure rights, wasteful subsidies on agricultural inputs such as water and power).

The NEP's prescription of adoption of "science-based and traditional land-use practices" developed "through research and development" for combating land degradation is too vague and general. Further, land degradation is often the result of unsustainable and incompatible land-use engineered by the market. The progressive deterioration of tracts once under cultivation into pastures and barren lands is a common feature in India. Two tragic manifestations of inappropriate land use are the spate of suicides in farming communities in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and the migration of the rural poor ('eco refugees' as M.S. Swaminathan once described them) to ur-

The National Environment Policy emphasises that what is good for the environment is also good for the economy and that environmental protection cannot be considered in isolation from the development process.

ban areas in search of employment. Enough is known of the nature of the problem and of measures to mitigate it. What is needed is more extension of knowledge already available rather than more research.

Forest and wildlife conservation has been the forte of the MoEF. The NEP breaks new ground in pleading for "legal recognition of the traditional rights of forest dwelling tribes" to "remedy a serious historical injustice." This, however, calls for a major overhaul of the Indian foresters' prevailing mindset that looks upon forests as garrisons to be protected against marauders and of the legal dispensation that extinguishes all traditional rights in protected areas. With 4.5 per cent of the country's land area already under some form of protection or the other, unrest among the populations traditionally dependent on the forests for sustenance is growing. Despite this situation, the NEP advocates that more areas be brought under the protected area network. A better solution, as the NEP itself acknowledges, is to encourage participative management of protected areas on the lines of the joint forest management programme already in existence.

Forest policy, for historical reasons, has been considered to be outside a general land-use policy. When the country's population was about half its present strength and economic development was minimal, forests could remain secluded and administered as such. In the changed circumstances of today, such an approach would be anachronistic. Consider the friction the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Forest Policy of 1988 have generated between the Centre and the States. Both the legislation need to be revisited urgently.

Biodiversity conservation has received adequate attention in the NEP. But here again, practice has departed from precept as demonstrated by the composition of the National Biodiversity Authority and the State level committees as announced in the April, 2004 notification of the MoEF. An important object of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 is to check piracy of biomaterial and traditional knowledge and to enforce intellectual property rights

(IPRs) over them. This would call for representation of bodies having administrative powers and expertise in these areas on the central authority and the State committees. Unfortunately, the Department of Revenue (which is concerned with prevention of illegal imports and exports), the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (which has expertise in IPR matters), the Department of Science and Technology, and the Department of Biotechnology are not represented on the regulatory bodies constituted under the Biodiversity Act.

While dealing with freshwater resources, the NEP expresses alarm over the wasteful and inefficient use of surface as well as ground water and points to a slew of actions that need to be taken for conservation. The policy does refer to levy of proper user charges to reflect water scarcity and calls for a review of the subsidies now being extended to the agricultural sector. Agriculture consumes nearly 80 per cent of the country's utilisable water. Surprisingly, the NEP makes no reference to the National Water Policy document already available.

Expectedly enough, NEP dwells on subjects such as air quality, mountain ecosystems, wetland conservation, creation of environmental awareness among the masses, and spreading environmental education.

There are, at least, three notable omissions in the NEP. Of these, energy has much relevance to environment particularly in the context of global warming. The day is not far off when India, the sixth largest emitter of greenhouse gases (which cause global warming), would be compelled to accept some limits on its emissions. This possible development has to be viewed in the light of the country's growing energy needs.

According to the "Hydrocarbon Vision 2020" prepared by the Planning Commission, even in 2020 the country will be dependent on fossil fuels such as coal and oil for a major share of its energy requirements. The implications of this prognosis for India's contribution to global warming as well as on air quality at home are clear. The first will be enhanced and the second will deteriorate. The NEP is silent on these developments.

Urbanisation has a strong adverse impact on environmental quality. The NEP rightly starts with the premise that the environmental problems of India arise mainly out of its large and growing population. The assimilative capacity of the environment for wastes is seriously challenged by the pattern of population distribution. Currently, about 30 per cent of the country's population lives in urban areas and this is projected to reach 40 per cent in the not-too-distant future.

Spatial planning of population centres and related activities has been found to be an effective tool in alleviating environmental problems abroad. The NEP has given short shrift to urbanisation and human settlements. One expects this lapse to be corrected in the final document.

The NEP is silent on the role of urban local bodies in environmental improvement. These institutions are poorly endowed with finances and lack expertise in managing the local environmental problems. To cite an example, the Municipal Waste Management Rules, 2000 have yet to be enforced in most urban areas due to financial and other constraints. Capacity building among the staff and devolution of adequate powers to them by the State Legislatures should find a place in the NEP. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution provides the backing for initiatives in this regard.

Finally, the NEP has not recognised adequately the potential of the State Governments in improving environmental quality. After all, most of the subjects that would fall under the definition of the term 'environment' are within the law-making powers of the State Legislatures.

Certain recent events have generated a feeling among State Governments that their acceptance of the Centre's actions is being taken for granted. There is little dialogue between the Centre and the States on environmental matters. With their variegated environmental and developmental needs, States would prefer smaller conclaves than the present annual meeting of State Ministers in New Delhi. One hopes that in its final form, the NEP would come up with suggestions on an appropriate consultative mechanism.

In the final analysis, the draft NEP, 2004 forms a good discussion paper. One should expect it to generate much interest among industry, academia and civil society.

(The writer is former Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.)

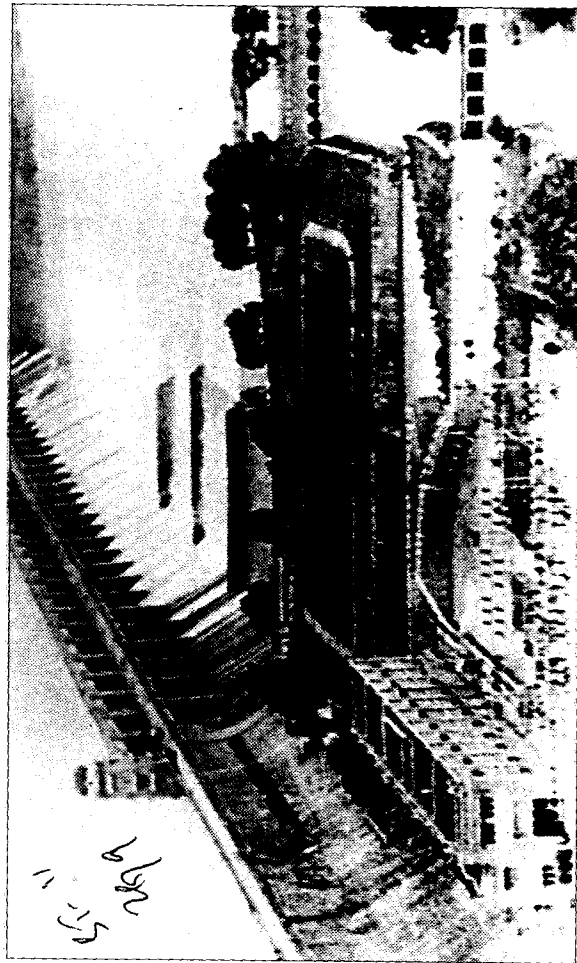
188 dams on brink of collapse

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 25. — Of the country's 4,050 dams, nearly 350 are between 50 and 100 years old and 188 have recently been identified as "distressed" and in need for urgent repair.

Earlier, the World Bank had helped to repair 49 dams but there are no central schemes to assist the states in the repair of the dams. The dams are in different parts of the country—the only damaged dams in West Bengal, according to a senior government official, are the Kangsabati-Kumari and the Massanjore projects. A large number are in the eastern states.

The 188 dams have different kinds of weaknesses, including leakages, leading to seepage and in need of concrete grouting or more serious problems. In others, the face of the spillway show damages with the concrete shearing off. In others a flaw in the design has been detected, especially after the dam was given 'additional capacity.'



An aerial view Tungabhadra Dam. — File photo

According to a government assessment in Orissa and Bihar. Among the eight troubled projects in Bihar are Gan-

dak and Kosi. Jharkhand, till recently a part of Bihar, has five. Orissa has 36 (the highest) such dams including Kumbho Kalo, Damsal, Talkhol, Banksal, Rengali, Talsara and Aradei. Bihar, in eastern Uttar Pradesh is also in the 'distressed' category.

Besides, Andhra Pradesh has nine, Gujarat 18, Karnataka 29, Kerala 31, Madhya Pradesh six, Maharashtra 13 and Tamil Nadu 12.

Some damage is inevitable as many dams were built during the British times. Some were ready by 1900 and between 1901 and 1950, 281 were built. Many huge projects happened in the Fifties and Sixties like the Bhakra-Nangal and the Damodar Valley. Since 2001, only four have been readied.

Eastern India has not only a large number of distressed dams, but most of the country's flood prone areas. About 7.56 million hectares are affected every year on an average, a little less than half of it being cropped land.

The annual average damage is Rs 1,347 crore.

8 million told to flee hurricane in Florida

AT 105 MPH, JEANNE'S THE STORM TO AVOID

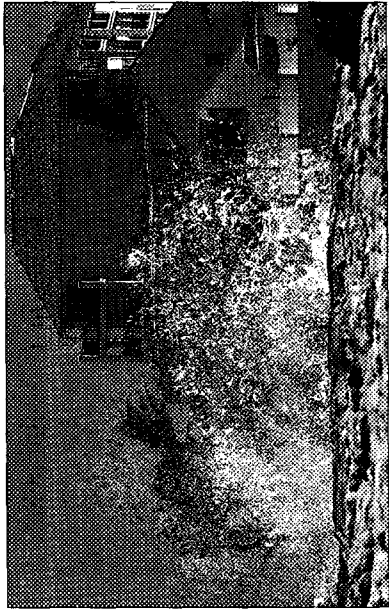
Associated Press
Fort Pierce (Florida),
September 25

HURRICANE JEANNE forced the evacuations of more than 8 million residents on Saturday as it sped up and bore down on Florida with winds near 105 mph and threatened to strengthen into a major storm.

If it hits Florida's Atlantic Coast late on Saturday or Sunday as predicted, it would be the fourth hurricane to slam the state this season, a scenario unmatched in more than a century. Jack Beven, a hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center in Miami, warned emergency managers early on Saturday that a Category 4 storm with winds of at least 131 mph "is not out of the question."

Jeanne, churning across the Bahamas, was poised to slam some of the same areas hit by the earlier storms, potentially transforming still-uncleared piles of debris into deadly missiles.

"This is all we have left," said Pam Curtis, shedding tears on Friday as she glanced at a heap of smashed furniture in front of her stripped Fort Pierce



REUTERS

High waves from the storm crashe into rocks on the coast of the Bahamas island as Hurricane Jeanne closes in.

condominium. The debris pile left by Hurricane Frances matched her own height. "When this other hurricane comes, this pile is going to be knocking down the rest of it."

No state has been struck by four hurricanes in one season since Texas in 1886. Jeanne could turn into the latest in a devastating chain of hurricanes that have rattled southwest Florida (Charley), the state's midsection (Frances) and Florida's Panhandle (Ivan). Combined, the storms have caused billions of dollars of damage and at least 70 deaths in Florida.

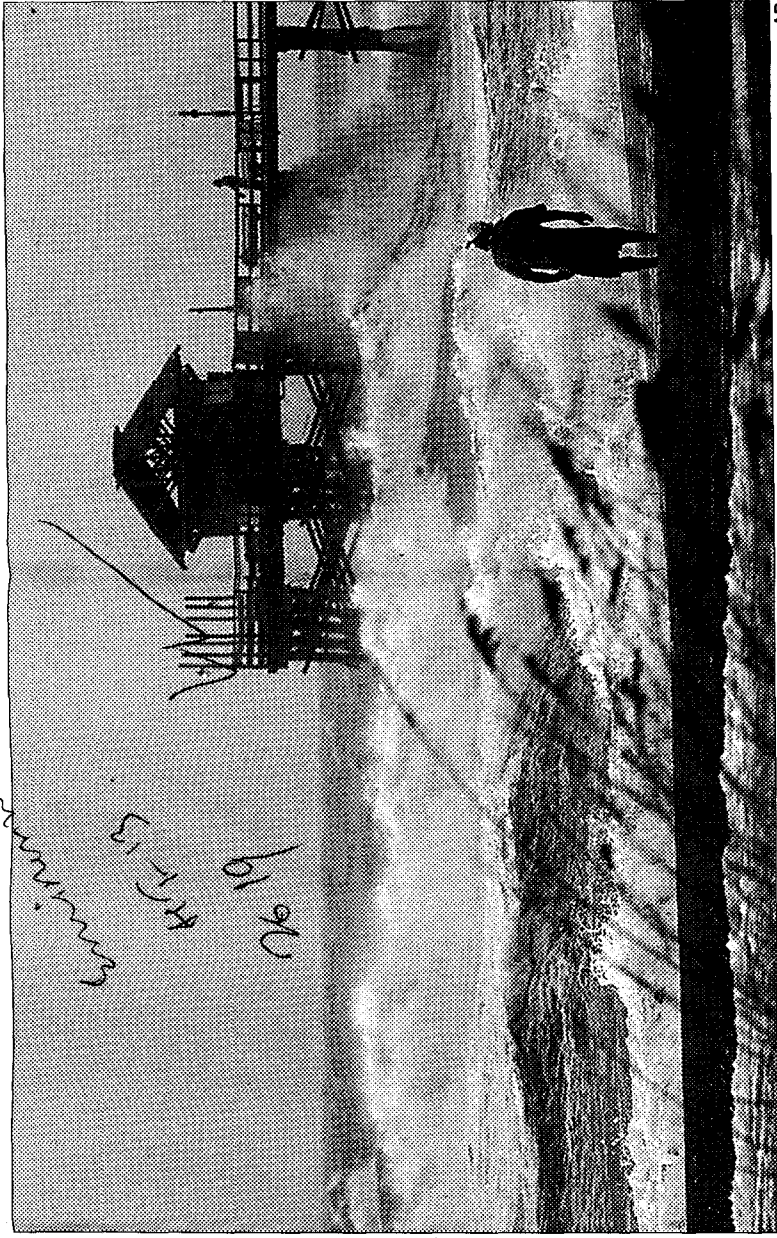
But many acknowledged it was a losing battle.

"They're trying their best, but there's a tremendous amount of debris out there. Realistically it doesn't really seem like it doesn't seem possible to get it all gathered before this storm hits", said Theresa Woodson, a spokeswoman for Indian River County. About 8.17 million people in communities from Miami to St. Augustine were under evacuation orders for mobile homes, low-lying areas and barrier islands.

Jeanne, earlier blamed for at least 1,100 flooding deaths in Haiti, looked early in the week like it had turned north and was headed safely out to sea, but it made a jagged loop that brought it toward the Bahamas and Florida.

At 5 am EDT, Jeanne was centered about 240 miles east of the Palm Beach area and was moving west at 14 mph, slightly faster than on Friday. Sustained winds were 105 mph, up from 100 late on Friday. Jeanne was expected to turn north after coming ashore over the Florida peninsula and stay inland over Georgia and the Carolinas through Tuesday.

Hurricane warnings were posted from south of Miami to St. Augustine in northeast Florida, and a



AP
A beachgoer bends into a stiff breeze as waves hit the pier on Cocoa Beach, Florida, as Hurricane Jeanne begins to lash the coastline at sunrise on Saturday.

hurricane watch was up from St. Augustine northward to Altamaha Sound, Ga. A tropical storm warning was issued for Florida's Gulf Coast from East Cape Sable, on extreme southwest Florida, northward to Anclote Key north of the Tampa Bay area.

A tropical storm watch wrapped around the southern tip of the Florida peninsula and down the Florida Keys to Seven Mile Bridge.

The watch was extended north of Anclote Key to the Ochlockonee River, southwest of Tallahassee. Rainfall totals of 5 to 10 inches

were expected in the storm's path and flooding could be a major concern because previous hurricanes have already saturated the ground and filled canals, rivers and lakes.

The timing of the storm raised concern for Jews observing Yom Kippur.

The holiest day on the Jewish calendar began at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown Saturday. During that period, observant Jews usually do not work, carry cash or travel by car, all of which could hamper hurricane preparations.

Asim's assurance to flood-hit



Life is fraught with difficulties for those who have lost their hearth and home in the floods. — The Statesman

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Sept. 24. — Flood victims of North 24-Parganas and Nadia pleaded for succour as Mr Asim Dasgupta, Mr Ganesh Mondal and Mr Hafiz Alam Sairani visited the homeless now sheltered in relief camps in the districts.

The camps are home to nearly 700,000 people in Bongaon, Bagda and Gaighata, North 24-Parganas and 238,000 people in Hanskhali, Kaliganj, Krishnaganj and Nakashipara, Nadia. Even after the 1999 floods, the state government has not kept its word of removing brick kilns and fishing *bheris* from the Ichhamati banks.

Five years ago, Mr Dasgupta had himself said that these were identified as causes for floods and would be removed. A task force chaired by North 24-Parganas district magistrate was formed in 2001 and assigned to: a) evaluate the cause of flood in the Ichhamati basin, b) conduct a field survey of drainage in the basin, c) locate the silted channels of Ichhamati and order 're-excavation' and dredging, d) monitor whether any impediments like fisheries or brick kilns are springing up again along the bank thus choking the basin's channels and e) setting up monitoring stations to survey the flood control measures of Ichhamati basin.

When asked whether the task force has performed its duties, Mr Manoj Panth, DM North 24-Parganas said: "I am new to the district, but have heard about it. From now on I will monitor its work." Admitting that extensive areas are still inundated in both districts, he said his department has little to do to drain the water.

The finance minister today assured the affected that the state will take steps for de-siltation of Ichhamati basin within 15 days, promised to allot Rs 10 crore for repair of Jessore Road and work out financial benefits for farmers whose crops were damaged by rains. He said, in Nadia he will allot Rs 10 crore for road repair, Rs 1 crore for supply of high quality seeds to farmers and promised that his department will try repaying a major part of the dues the handloom co-operatives owe to the state.

THE STATESMAN 23 SEP 2004

Cauvery panel to refer issues to PM

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 22. The Cauvery Monitoring Committee (CMC) today decided to refer to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, the "distress sharing formula" and related Cauvery issues, along with the views of all the basin States. The Prime Minister, who chairs the Cauvery River Authority (CRA), will later decide whether a meeting of the political panel should be convened to discuss the contentious issues.

At today's meeting, Karnataka reiterated its reservations on the pro-rata sharing distress formula in the event of deficient monsoon as well as on the jurisdiction of the CMC or the CRA to discuss it. The other three basin States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry — had accepted the formula at an earlier meeting of the CMC.

Karnataka did not make any commitment on correcting the deficit in water releases to Tamil Nadu at Mettur this year, despite the latter pressing for it by September-end when the south-west monsoon withdraws. The deficit, said to be

about 33 thousand million cubic feet, was also not accepted by Karnataka. The State said it was still recovering from three years of drought. Tamil Nadu recalled that at the CMC meeting this January, it had sought seven tmcft of water, which was not released. As a result, its "kuruvai" crop had withered.

"We will give a report of today's meeting to the Prime Minister," the Union Water Resources Secretary, V.K. Dugal, who chaired the meeting, said. "The meeting reviewed the storage in the reservoirs and other things. This year, rainfall has been normal in the basin except in some districts. There was broad agreement on some issues, while there were differences in perception on others."

Differences on all issues

The differences, according to knowledgeable sources, were on almost every issue — the release of waters by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu, the releases at Mettur and not at Biligundulu, the area irrigated by Karnataka with the Cauvery waters and the "distress sharing formula."

The meeting was attended

by, among others, the Karnataka Chief Secretary, K.K. Mishra, the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary in-charge, N. Narayanan, the Pondicherry Chief Secretary, C.S. Kherwal, the Kerala Water Resources Secretary, Alok Sheel, and representatives from the Central Water Commission, the Indian Meteorological Department and the Indian Council for Agriculture Research. The IMD representative reportedly indicated that the south-west monsoon had been "normal" this year, with some shortfall in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu.

Later Mr Mishra told *The Hindu* that the deficit in releases was "much less". Or Tamil Nadu seeking releases from Karnataka to make good the deficit, he said: "We will try and see by the end of December."

He said it was up to the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of the CRA, but the State believed it would be "premature" as the situation was normal. "The CMC or the CRA is not the forum to take up the distress issue. The tribunal should discuss it."

Floods hit seven lakh across five dists

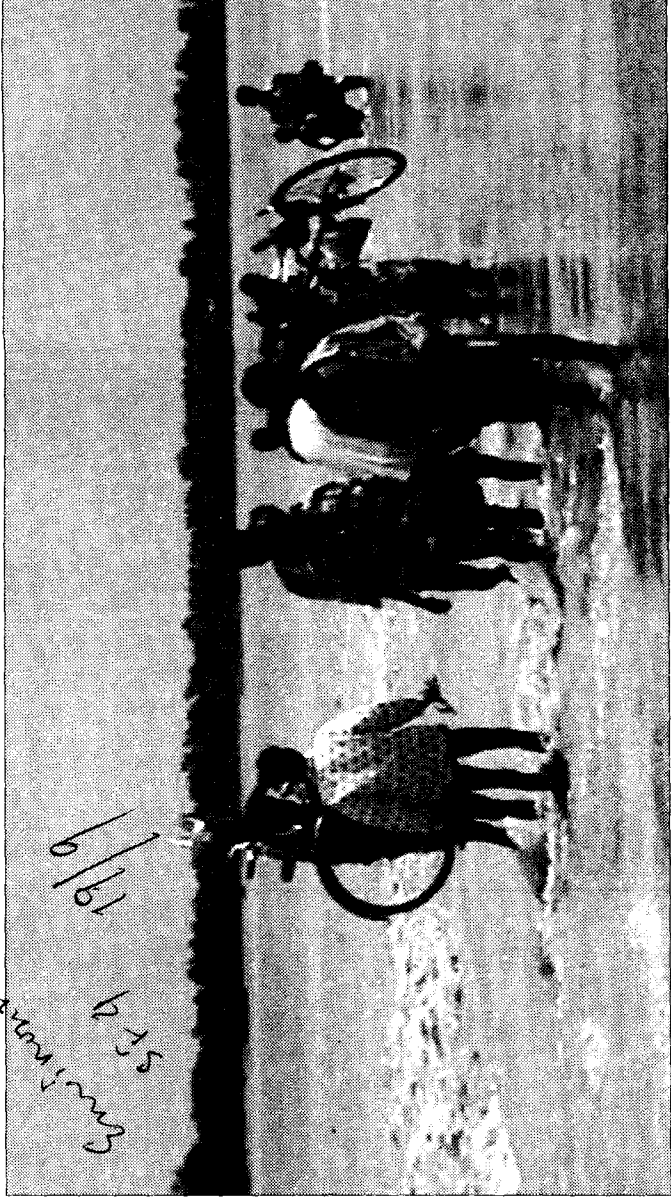
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Sept. 18. — At least seven lakh people in North 24-Parganas, Birbhum, Burdwan, Nadia and Murshidabad have been affected by floods, caused by the incessant rain in Jharkhand and the depression over Gangetic West Bengal. Announcing this, state relief minister Mr Hafiz Alam Sairani said that he will flood-hit areas in North 24-Parganas tomorrow.

At least one lakh people have been affected by floods in Murshidabad, with vast areas of Bharatpur-I and II, Kandi, Nabagram, Khargram and Suti-I blocks inundated after the Mayurakshi, Dwarka and Brahmani rivers release water. With habitations either marooned or encircled by the waters, the homeless took shelter on the elevated stretches of narrow earthen dams with their cattle and belongings. Many of the victims said they have not received relief material. And that government agencies and NGOs are yet to start relief work. Bus services along the Kandi-Bharatpur-Salar-Burdwan state highway were suspended later today.

District officials said the release of water from Mayurakshi, Brahmani and Dwarka rivers were put at 70,000 cusecs yesterday. Today, the Tilpara barrage released an additional 20,000 cusecs, it was learnt. Even though the rains ceased to some extent, villagers expressed concern that the release of more water from the Tilpara, Beocha and Boidhara barrages will breach the earthen dams.

When The Statesman team reached the spot, the homeless vented their ire. "We have nothing more to lose. The paddy crop came a cropper for want of irrigation



A group of people traverse the submerged length of Kandi-Burdwan state highway in Murshidabad on Saturday. — The Statesman

Starvation shadow on camp deaths

KOLKATA, Sept. 18. — Jatul Das (60) and Charubala Biswas (55) died allegedly of starvation in flood relief camps at Bagda and Gaihata in North 24-Parganas. People of the area alleged that food and relief was not reaching all camps in the flood-hit Bongaon and Bagda areas for the last three days. The woman's son said that his mother had been ill for a long time. She was shifted to a relief camp at Bagda, but there was no food in the camp. Bongaon SDO Mr Debojyoti Bhattacharya said: "The death occurred due to illness." Mr Monoj Panth, DM of North 24-Parganas said: "This is an allegation. It's not that relief materials were not being supplied. The road connection is not cut off either. Relief operations were not hit." — SNS

This was followed by floods that marred the aman crop. Now we have to make do without food and shelter", Ibrahimpur resident Rafikul Alam, standing on a narrow earthen elevation, said.



A man wades through a flooded road at Bharatpur in Murshidabad on Saturday. — The Statesman

Though the situation in Nadia has not deteriorated since yesterday, more areas may come under water, given that the Tilpara barrage has discharged about 31,000 cusecs of water. ADM Mr Bipad Bhanjan Biswas said: "Bhagirathi is flowing above the danger mark at Swarupganj while other rivers such as Churni, Icchamati and Jalangi are flowing close to the danger level."

One missing in boat mishap: One child was reported to be missing after a boat tilted to one side while crossing the Haldi river in Midnapore East yesterday. Twenty-three others swam to safety. The SP said that 25 people fell into the river when the boat tilted to one side due to the waves.

Vaiko seeks priority for linking rivers

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 17. The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, Vaiko, today met the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and pleaded for expeditious completion of feasibility studies on interlinking of peninsular rivers.

Mr. Vaiko, who met Dr. Singh to brief him on his Tirunelveli-Chennai renaissance walk from August 5 to September 15, explained the need for giving priority for interlinking rivers.

He also urged nationalisation of inter-State rivers as per the commitment made in the Common Minimum Programme of the United Progressive Alliance Government.

Cauvery issue

Mr. Vaiko presented a memorandum seeking the Prime Minister's intervention to resolve the Cauvery row.

It highlighted the sufferings

of farmers owing to non-availability of water and also the plight of people in several villages in Tamil Nadu who had to walk for several kilometres to get one pot of potable water.

Mr. Vaiko later told *The Hindu* that the Prime Minister had assured him, saying, "We are really committed to it". When he brought to Dr. Singh's notice Karnataka's attempts to "scuttle" the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, the Prime Minister told him "the integrity of India will be jeopardised if this trend is not checked".

Mr. Vaiko said he thanked the Prime Minister for declaring Tamil a classical language as it had been a long pending demand of the party and the people of the State.

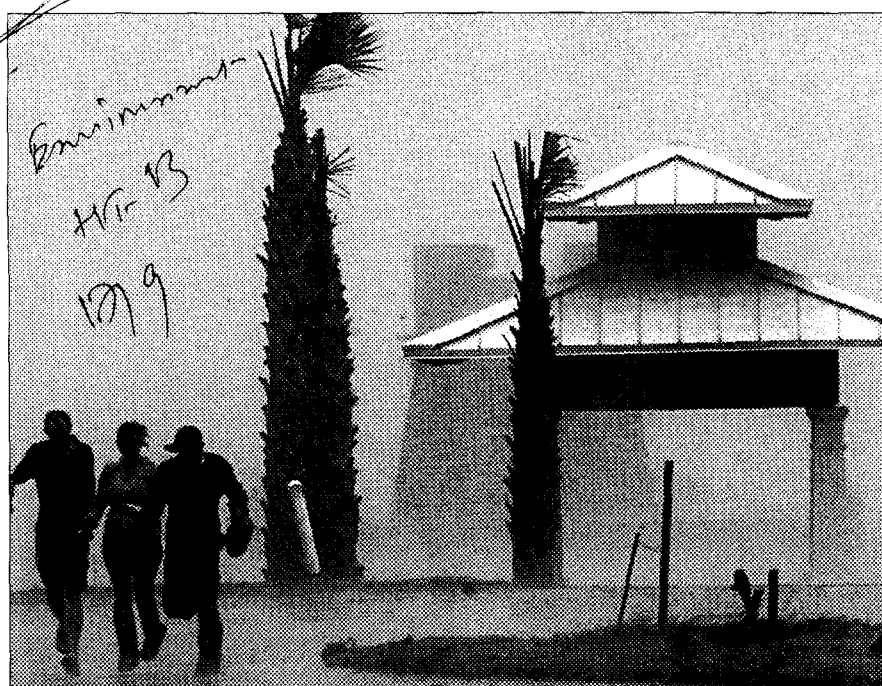
On repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Mr. Vaiko said, "I have to go through the entire ordinance. Unless the Act is repealed with retrospective effect, it will not serve the purpose".



The MDMK leader, Vaiko, calling on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, at his residence in New Delhi on Friday.

THE HINDU

18 SEP 2004



REUTERS

People escape as Hurricane Ivan moves into Pensacola, Florida, on Wednesday.

Ivan leaves Americans powerless: 12 killed

Associated Press
Gulf Shores, September 16

HURRICANE IVAN slammed ashore early on Thursday with winds of 130 mph, packing deadly tornadoes and a powerful punch of waves and rain that threatened to swamp communities from Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle. At least 12 deaths were blamed on the storm.

Many of the millions of Gulf Coast residents who spent a frightening night in shelters and boarded-up homes were emerging on Thursday morning to find that Ivan was not the catastrophe they had feared. Still, forecasters said the worst could be yet to come, as up to 15 inches of rain were expected as the storm moved inland.

At least 260,000 homes and businesses were without power in Alabama, 36,500 in Louisiana, 70,000 in Mississippi. More than 300,000 customers were without power in the four westernmost Florida Panhandle counties. Florida was still trying to restore power to about 160,000 hit by Hurricanes Charley and Frances in recent weeks. Mobile was deserted early on Thursday.

The storm weakened as it moved inland, but remained a Category 1 hurricane with winds of 80 mph more than four hours after landfall.

Ivan knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of people, toppled trees, ripped off roofs and sent street signs hurtling through the night. In the beach resort town of Gulf Shores, where the storm's eye blew ashore, the sky had a bright

green glow as electrical transformers blew. "We have never seen a hurricane of this size come into Alabama," said Gov. Bob Riley, who earlier asked President Bush to declare much of the state a disaster area, a request that was granted.

Two people were killed and more than 200 homes were damaged when at least five tornadoes roared through Florida's Bay County. Five people were killed when another tornado struck homes in Blountstown, Florida, and an 8-year-old girl died after being crushed by a tree that fell onto her mobile home in Milton.

Four ailing evacuees — a terminally ill cancer patient, two nursing home patients and a homebound patient — reportedly died after being taken from their storm-threatened south Louisiana homes to safer parts of the state.

At the Pensacola News Journal building, floodwater seeped into the building about four blocks from Pensacola Bay, barely covering parts of the floor. Workers feared a wall of water would cascade in if they opened the doors to leave.

A hurricane warning for New Orleans was lifted early on Thursday, but one remained in effect from the mouth of the Pearl River to Apalachicola. Hurricane-force winds extended out 105 miles from the Category 3 storm that earlier killed at least 68 people across the Caribbean.

"We're out of lanterns and water purification tablets," said John Thompson, assistant manager of Black Dome Mountain Sports in Asheville, North Carolina.



The pier at Pensacola Beach, Florida, takes a pounding of hurricane *Ivan* on Thursday. — AFP

Hurricane hits US coast

Agencies

NEW YORK/LOS ANGELES, Sept. 16. — Deadly hurricane *Ivan* hit the USA's Gulf Coast from Louisiana to Florida this morning with sustained winds of 210 kmph, driving rain, huge powerful tidal waves and spawning tornadoes, leaving tens of thousands without power.

But within hours, the hurricane lost some strength as it moved inland with wind speeds coming down more than 150 kmph, but it was still strong enough to rip off roofs. Forecasters said it could dump more than 35 cm of rain within short periods, leading to dangerous flooding. At least 12 deaths were reported due to the storm.

Waves as high as 16 feet hit the coastal communities. Reports spoke of roads being ripped off, heavy

flooding, transformers short circuiting with bright flares and street signs flying. Though the storm was losing its strength, it could take several days before it completely disintegrates.

Two people were killed and over 200 homes damaged when at least five tornadoes hit Florida's Bay County. Five persons were killed when another tornado struck Blountstown Florida and a minor girl died after being crushed by a tree in Milton in the same state. Four ailing evacuees reportedly died after being taken from their Louisiana homes to safer parts. Emergency has been declared in all four coastal states and nearly two million evacuated. All ports and airports have been closed. This is the third hurricane to hit the US coast in a month and another tropical storm Jeanne was pounding Puerto Rico causing floods and cutting out power.

10-10
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2004

ENVIRONMENT AND STATE RIGHTS

IT WAS ONLY to be expected that the Environment and Forest Ministers from various States should have opposed the Centre's move to arrogate to itself the power to grant environmental clearance for projects. The Union Ministry for Environment and Forests (MoEF) recently received a lot of flak for expanding, through a notification, the scope of the Centre's regulatory role. For instance, construction projects that cost Rs.50 crores or house 1,000 people or produce 50,000 litres of sewage must obtain clearance from the Centre. This immediately brings several urban projects under the purview of the MoEF. Given this high-handed approach, it is no surprise that the promise of reforms in the environmental monitoring system has failed to enthrone the States. They look at the July 7 order of the MoEF as a deliberate encroachment that will only delay the clearance and implementation of most urban projects. An unfortunate consequence of this discord among policy-makers is that the ongoing debate on a new environmental policy has come under a cloud. The States are surely on constitutionally sound ground when they seek greater authority and opportunity to sanction projects that meet the norms.

Aside from the question whether the MoEF notification has been politically directed against specific projects, the Centre has, wittingly or unwittingly, given the impression that only it is capable of taking care of the environment. Long-term experience in India suggests that Central intervention becomes necessary in certain cases; from time to time, environmental groups want the MoEF to intervene and prevent damage from a particular project to a cause dear to them. The progressive role the Indira Gandhi Government played when the Silent Valley came under serious threat — in the event the entire area was safeguarded as a National Park in 1984 — is indisputable. But Central intervention on sound constitutional lines must necessarily be

14/9
the second line of protection. So long as the Centre and the States ensure that qualified, genuine environmental experts are appointed to the monitoring panels to evaluate the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), there should be no major problem. The recent MoEF order means that any city that undertakes a construction or housing project worth more than Rs.50 crores — which is really modest in today's costs — must clear the proposal with the Centre. This is unacceptable in a federal political system.

The need of the hour now is a clear set of norms or guidelines to secure environmental clearance from State or Central agencies. At a time when the country is supposed to be moving away from 'Inspection Raj' and multiple clearances, a situation where Pollution Control Boards or environmental agencies become instruments of harassment and political vendetta needs to be averted. Reforms must now look at laying down the basic norms to govern all major projects — industrial or otherwise — to secure environmental clearance. The feeling that the clearance process has failed or can be used to veto a particular project on extra-environmental grounds defeats the very purpose of the review. If the collection of primary data, their verification and a fair public hearing can be ensured, there will be enough scope for the people who are affected by any project and environmental experts to voice their concerns. Instead of encroaching on the States' domain, the Centre must focus on putting in place an objective mechanism to ensure compliance with clearance conditions and complete transparency in the system. An independent agency for commissioning EIAs could create the desirable ethical distance between the interested parties and the agencies that evaluate them for damage potential. The MoEF would do well to address this concern, instead of further politicising the environment and stoking up an unnecessary dispute with States.

THE HINDU

14 SEP 2004

Hurricane Ivan ravages Jamaica

Jamaica: Hurricane Ivan strengthened to a rare category 5 storm capable of catastrophic damage as it left Jamaica and aimed for the Cayman Islands with winds reaching 265 kph, the US National Hurricane Centre in Miami has said.

Ivan has already killed ¹³⁹56 people across the Caribbean this week, including 34 in Grenada and 11 in Jamaica. Millions more are in its path, with Ivan projected to go between the Cayman Islands, make a direct hit on Cuba and then either move into the Gulf of Mexico or hit south Florida. The hurricane centre said Ivan's strengthening was measured by a US Air Force reconnaissance plane.

Only three category 5 storms are known to have hit the United States. The last was Hurricane Andrew which hit south Florida in 1992, killing 43 people. The last category 5 to hit the Caribbean was Hurricane David, which devastated the Dominican Republic in 1979.

On Saturday, Hurricane Ivan's 250-kph winds roiled monstrous waves and torrential rains that smashed homes, uprooted trees and killed at least five people in Jamaica. AP

Hurricane Ivan⁷⁻³¹ batters Jamaica^{MP}

Kingston (Jamaica), Sept. 11 (Reuters): Deadly Hurricane Ivan battered Jamaica with powerful winds and torrential rains today but spared the island the worst of its wrath as the eye skirted the shore and headed for the Cayman Islands and Cuba.

The storm felled large trees and poles, flooded streets, swept away houses, and left the island in the dark. Sporadic shooting broke out on the deserted streets of the capital when looters went on the rampage. Ivan, which has already killed 27 people and left a trail of devastation across the Caribbean, veered west just as it approached Jamaica and skirted the southern shore instead of plowing through the island.

At 0900 GMT, Ivan's winds had weakened slightly to 240 kmph but remained a powerful and deadly Category 4 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale of 1-5.

Ivan's eye was about 112 km south of Montego Bay, Jamaica, at latitude 17.5 north and longitude 78 west, the US National Hurricane Center said.

The storm was moving west-northwest or northwest at about 13 kmph and at this rate, Ivan was expected to reach the Cayman Islands, a British territory, in 24 hours before heading for Cuba tomorrow and then to Florida on Monday.

12 SEP 2004

Visit to basin by two members cleared

By J. Venkatesan

taking the visit and issued notice to the Centre, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Pondicherry and the Tribunal.

Jethmalani's plea

When the matter was taken up today, Ram Jethmalani, senior counsel appearing for the petitioner, argued that the two Members, without the Chairman, was no Tribunal. Further, the Tribunal had no jurisdiction to carry out the inspection. In the present atmosphere, there was a possibility of the Members getting prejudiced and there was apprehension that Karnataka would not get a fair deal.

The Bench intervened and asked counsel what was wrong in inspection. Every Tribunal had been doing this. "Why are you prejudging the issue that they will react in a particular manner? Why do you assume that their visit will be prejudicial to the interest of Karnataka? This is a wrong and extreme reaction," it said.

Bias alleged

Karnataka's senior counsel, G.L. Sanghi, argued that the visit by only two Members was contrary to the provisions of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, as they did not constitute the Tribunal; where was the need for inspection after closure of evidence and also the completion of arguments pertaining to availability of water, he asked.

Mr. Sanghi also accused Mr. Rao, a Member of the Tribunal, of bias since he "secretly" visited Tamil Nadu in 1997 and this came to light only during a cross-examination in 2002. Karnataka fully supported the pet-

itioner's contention that "the Tribunal has almost broken down" which could only be remedied by reconstituting it.

Appearing for Tamil Nadu, senior counsel K.K. Venugopal and C.S. Vaidyanathan questioned the petitioner's *locus standi* to file the petition since the court in April 2003 had dismissed a similar petition filed by the same organisation.

'Proxy petition'

Mr. Venugopal said the "proxy petition" at the behest of Karnataka was meant to some how delay and thwart the proceedings of the Tribunal which was to complete its hearing shortly and give its final award.

Pursuant to the orders passed by the Tribunal, both the Members had given their tour programme and the States were making all arrangements when

the court asked the two Members to defer their visit by 10 days. The Tribunal was competent to undertake the inspection, he said and brought to the court's notice how various other Tribunals had carried out such inspections for a proper appreciation of facts.

He said Karnataka had been systematically making every attempt to delay the final award by the Tribunal. To accuse the Tribunal Members of bias after 11 years amounted not only to damaging the Members but also a travesty of justice. He sought dismissal of the petition and to vacate the interim order passed on August 20.

Appearing for Kerala, senior counsel Rajeev Dhavan agreed with Mr. Jethmalani that the two Members of the Tribunal had no jurisdiction to inspect the Cauvery basin.

Chemical unit must pay for waste: SC panel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
VADODARA, SEPTEMBER 6

A COMMITTEE of experts appointed by the Supreme Court has recommended the physical removal of hazardous, carcinogenic chromium waste from Gorwa area of Vadodara. The cost of the effort, pegged at Rs 17 crore, is to be borne by the polluter, Hema Chemicals.

Equating the hazard posed by the hexavalent chromium waste with the toxic waste lying inside Union Carbide complex in Bhopal, the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC) has sent a letter with a list of rec-

ommendations to the Chief Secretary of Gujarat. These recommendations are to be implemented in a time-bound manner.

Set up in October 2003, the committee had a mandate to ensure implementation of the Court's directions on a PIL filed in 1995 that dealt with dumping of hazardous waste across the country. Subsequently, a sub-committee of the SCMC visited the Gorwa site of Hema Chemicals and followed it up with an affidavit in the Supreme Court recently.

The affidavit, a copy of which is available with *The Indian Express*, says "the Hema case needs to be taken up by the apex court as it involves 45,000 tonnes of ex-

ardous chromium 6 waste that has been dumped in the area.

The government has also been asked to get the site physically investigated and quantities of hazardous wastes estimated by an expert body, again at the cost of the owner of the unit, and submit a report within 60 days. The waste is to be moved to a landfill suggested by an expert group.

Cracking down on the owners of the unit, the committee has asked the State Home Department to ensure that he does not leave the country or dispose of any of his assets till the site is completely rehabilitated.

Apart from this, the committee has also called for a medical

study to evaluate the impact of this waste on the health of the people living on the site with a view to awarding damages. The Gorwa industrial area is surrounded by residential societies.

The study, to be conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Health, is to be completed in six months and the cost of the study to be debited to the owner of the unit. Criticising the state government and the Gujarat Pollution Control Board for their failure to halt the "careless, irresponsible and indiscriminate dumping by Hema", the SCMC letter says the continuing existence of the dumps constitutes a violation of the SC order.

How it all started

Set up in 1965 for manufacturing basic chromium sulphate, potassium and sodium-bi-chromate, Hema Chemicals hit headlines in 1997 when city-based Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti raised the matter in a PIL. In 1999, a committee appointed by the Supreme Court came to Gujarat and the issue was co-opted in its report. In 2000, a study found that of the 176 workers of Hema Chemicals examined, 82 had chromium levels in their blood higher than the permissible limit of 5 micro grams per 100 millilitre. Another 52 had nasal septum perforations and 43 had dermatitis. Presently, both units of the plant are shut.

tremely hazardous hexavalent chromium waste in the midst of Vadodara". The affidavit further says "the owner seems to be able to withstand any pressure in this regard placed on him by authorities in Gujarat. So the apex

court's intervention is needed." In a letter to the Chief Secretary recently, the SCMC has asked the government to implement all recommendations of the sub-committee which includes complete removal of the haz-

Security Council role in ICC's working opposed

By Rakesh Bhatnagar
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: That there exists the International Criminal Court (ICC) is not common knowledge, at least in this part of the world. The ICC is located in The Hague. It is vulnerable to the Security Council's commands and is yet designed to adjudicate on crimes against humanity across the world. This is hard to believe.

New Delhi has already expressed its opposition to the role of Security Council in the charter of the ICC. The statute gives to the Security Council a role in terms that violate international law. The charter did not give the council the power to set up international criminal courts. What the council seeks to do through the court is the power to block and the power to bind non-state parties. It is truly unfortunate that a statute drafted for an institution to defend the law should start out straying from established international law. Before it tried its first case, the court claimed its first victim — the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

Would the Security Council ever allow the ICC to prosecute the US or its allies for their

suspected involvement in a variety of crimes in different countries which are hostile to their agenda?

Its answer can't be but in the negative. An Indian delegation of senior legal luminaries such as the Chief Justice of India R C Lahoti, Soli J Sorabjee, R K Jain, Justice Y K Sabharwal, Justice Arun Kumar, C S Vaidyanathan, Justice Sujata Manohar and Justice Vijendra Jain recently participated in crucial deliberations abroad on making the ICC jurisdiction acceptable to every nation having mutual faith and respect for each other's sovereignty and independence.

The discussions, which culminated in a guiding document for the ICC, carries India's opposition to imparting superiority to the Security Council over the ICC.

"How can the victims who may not get justice in their own nation, expect justice — free and fair — from the ICC in the prevailing circumstances?" asks Jain. "Independence from any influence is the basic rule for an independent justice dispensation system," he said, adding: "The will and whims of the Security Council should not be imposed on an international body which has been set up to deal with select cases."

LAW VS JUSTICE

Typhoon lashes Japan

Tokyo, Sept. 5 (Reuters): High winds and heavy rain lashed Japan's southernmost prefecture of Okinawa today, swamping buildings and stranding holidaymakers, as the third powerful typhoon in three weeks neared the country's coast.

Songda, which could be the strongest storm to hit Okinawa since records began in 1972, paralysed transport in the popular tourist destination, as most flights and ferries in and out of the prefecture were cancelled.

Waves engulfed coastal roads and buildings, television pictures showed. One man had been injured, Kyodo news agency reported. Up to 300 mm of rain is forecast to fall in some areas of southern Japan by tomorrow evening.

It was unclear whether the centre of Songda would make landfall on one of Japan's four main islands, the Meteorological Office said. Six typhoons have already done so this year, compared with an annual average of 2.6, the Meteorological Agency said.

"The typhoon season is only just beginning, so it's possible it could get a lot worse," an official at the agency said.

Since May, typhoons have killed hundreds of people in China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

Florida reels in Frances fury

Cocoa, Florida, Sept. 5 Reuters): Hurricane Frances roared into eastern Florida with stinging rains and fierce winds that ripped away roofs, trees and boat moorings and cut power to 1.3 million homes and businesses.

The massive storm crept over Florida's Atlantic coast, where 2.5 million people had been told to flee inland.

Florida evacuees waited nervously while the storm stalled for two days over the Bahamas. Then yesterday, Frances hammered Florida's Atlantic coast with 160 kph wind gusts and promised to dump torrential rain on the peninsula for up to 15 hours in what emergency officials said could be a "marathon" of anxiety and devastation.

In Florida's central Atlantic coast counties, blinding rain squalls drove clouds of sand into the air while huge whitecaps thundered onto the beaches. Palm trees rained coconuts and then toppled over as the eye wall, the most powerful area of the storm bordering the calm eye, moved ashore.

In hard-hit Palm Beach County, boats broke from their moorings and were dragged by the wind until they snagged on bridges or other obstacles. Power lines snapped and sparked while lightning illuminated blacked-out beach towns and flood waters submerged cars in low-lying parking garages.

The Texas-sized storm covered much of the state as its huge eye began to cross the coastline late yesterday, promising a pause in the assault. Forecasters said the eye could take 12 hours to pass, and warned people not to take false comfort in the respite as the brutal second half of the storm approached.

"People do need to be very careful when those winds do slacken off in the eye. We've still got the back side to deal



A resident walks her dog as Hurricane Frances slams into south Florida. (AFP)

with," said National Hurricane Center director Max Mayfield.

President George W. Bush yesterday declared Florida "a major disaster" and ordered federal aid to make grants and loans available in five coastal counties in Central Florida: Brevard, Indian River, Martin, Palm Beach and St. Lucie.

State officials reported some 71,000 people in public shelters, including some left homeless by Hurricane Charley, which caused \$7.4 billion in insured losses and killed more than 20 people when it hit Florida's south-

west coast three weeks ago.

Local television reported one shelter resident died of a heart attack as Frances howled ashore.

At 0300 GMT, the centre of the storm was about 56 km northeast of West Palm Beach, Florida, at latitude 27.1 north and longitude 79.7 west, the US National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The hurricane was moving west-northwest at about 7 kph on a path that could take its eye — some 128 km wide — over central Florida, the Florida Panhandle and then into Alabama by Tuesday.

The storm's top sustained winds were near 170 kph, well down from the devastating 235-kph winds of two days ago but strong enough to uproot trees, down power lines and destroy mobile homes.

Kashmir call freezes morning smile

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Sept. 4: The unpredictability that marks India-Pakistan relations was on display today when the morning's mature and friendly discussions were overshadowed by a sharp Delhi reaction in the evening to Islamabad's call to allow Kashmiris to "determine their own future".

India expressed considerable disappointment over the Pakistan foreign minister's "unifocal" approach.

The sharp response on the eve of Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri's two-day talks with his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh makes it clear that Delhi will not allow Pakistan to continue with the dialogue when it is doing nothing to stop cross-border violence and infiltration across the Line of Control.

The talks between foreign secretaries Shyam Saran and Riaz Khokar began well today, with the neighbours discussing all 72 confidence-building measures India has put on the table for normalising bilateral relations and Islamabad making a formal offer that it wants to be part of an Indo-Iran gas pipeline.

But the optimism generated by the offer, which India said it would "consider seriously" and many felt could ultimately play a vital role in bringing peace to South Asia was short-lived.

Before leaving for Delhi, Kasuri made a four-page statement where he said Kashmiris should have been allowed to determine their future "in Au-

SMOOTH TAKE-OFF, BUMPY LANDING



(Left) Riaz Khokar at Hyderabad House in Delhi on Saturday. Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri arrives at Indira Gandhi International Airport. (PTI)

gust 1947" and gave clear signals that peace talks cannot progress unless India allows it.

Kasuri went on to say the "Kashmir dispute" was responsible for bilateral relations being in a "state of tension and flux"; the minister said this ought to be set right within a reasonable time frame.

The Pakistani foreign minister went on to say India

should take immediate steps to improve its human rights record in the Kashmir Valley and assured Kashmiris he would convince Delhi to include them in talks, without which the dialogue would be meaningless.

India came to know of Kasuri's statement much later in the day; this probably explains its brief, but sharply-

worded rejoinder.

"There is considerable disappointment here at the unifocal statement by the Pakistani foreign minister earlier today about relations with India prior to his departure from Islamabad," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said.

He added: "This is not in consonance with the spirit in which we have conducted the

composite dialogue so far and it also violates Pakistan's own call for rhetoric restraint."

Delhi sees Kasuri's statement that Kashmiris should be given a "choice to determine their own future" as another attempt by Islamabad to iterate that the UN resolution calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir is still relevant.

This goes totally against

the spirit of the agreement between the two sides that Kashmir should be resolved amicably and bilaterally.

There is another reason for India's tough stand. Of late, Delhi has felt that Islamabad is trying to put the onus of peace on India while it glosses over its own commitment to stop cross-border-terrorism from territory under its control.

ST 9
31/8

Crisis of confidence

THE Sutlej saga, now in suspended animation, has exposed many chinks in our system – utter confusion, lack of authenticated and centralised information, and more importantly, the absence of a coordinated decision-making process. The same features are visible in the other unfortunate saga with a Himachali angle – of the three Indians held as hostages in Iraq. Two of them – Tilak Raj and Antaryami – hail from Una district. Their fate too is hanging fire.

Ironically, it is the high profile ministry of external affairs playing the lead role in both the cases. The Central government and the Congress party have already become the butt of public disappointment in the state for being “ineffective”. The state government’s prompt action for minimising damage to life and property in case of a flood and its efforts to pressurise the Centre for rescuing the hostages may not boost the bending graph of the Centre’s image in the state. “We are paying the price,” says a retired top-level bureaucrat, “for being a small state which sends only four MPs... The Sutlej issue would have been handled differently had it been a problem of a ‘big’ state.”

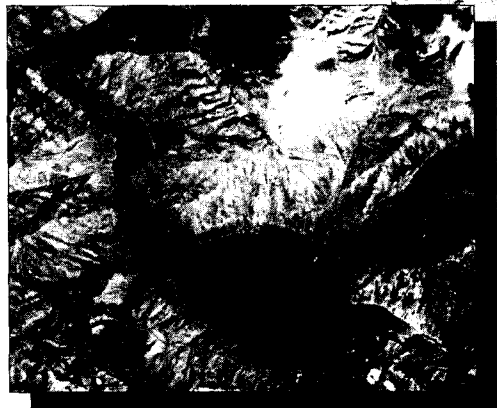
The travails of Tilak Raj and Antaryami began last month. Their families, supported by an actively sympathising public, have been agitating for their release. However, there have been only vague assurances embellished by contradictory pieces of information about their status.

The first warning about the Sutlej came on 5 August with news of a “huge artificial lake” suddenly formed on the river Paree Chu in Tibet region, at a height of 4,000 m above sea-level, about 20 km from the Indian border and nearly 200 km from Rampur town in Himachal Pradesh. The Paree Chu (meaning muddy waters in Tibetan) joins the Spiti river and later merges with the Sutlej. The lake could burst, making the Sutlej flood at least five districts – Kinnaur, Shimla, Kullu, Mandi and Bilaspur. It brought back harrowing memories of the Sutlej flood in 2000 which claimed over 150 lives and destroyed homes and other property worth well over Rs 1,000 crore. Therefore, the state government at once took steps like evacuating people from over 56 villages to safer areas and keeping the relief and rescue mechanism ready for an emergency. The Army, Air Force, ITBP and other agencies were also prepared. So far so good. But then followed confusion which persists even now.

The perceived ineffectiveness of the Central government vis-a-vis the Sutlej-Paree Chu flood threat has shown once more that confusion and misinformation continue to flood officialdom, writes
VEPA RAO



Not-so-quiet flows the Sutlej, and (inset) a satellite picture showing the artificial lake on the Paree Chu river.



About the reported dimensions of the lake, the less said the better – each day the estimates varied drastically, triggering off speculations about its volume of water. The Chinese reportedly said one thing and the satellite pictures of National Remote Sensing Agency, Hyderabad, showed another. Reports of the Chinese “puncturing” the lake with controlled blasting to diffuse a flood situation caused hectic activity along the Sutlej banks – only to be followed by denials. The 1,500MW Nathpa-Jhakri Project officials were in spasms, making their own assessments and statements, and alternating between closing the generation units and restarting them in view of the utterly contradictory reports from Delhi and other sources.

The national and local media

eagerly to get the rarest of pictures – the first flush of a deluge. Excitement produced exaggeration, washing aside the need for a balanced look at the available

The worst of it was that the Chinese government kept the Indian expert team waiting for days before finally denying it permission to visit the artificial lake for an on-the-spot assessment

facts – however skimpy and contradictory. The media, to be fair, felt helpless – many concerned state and Central agencies were speaking in many more voices on an hour-to-hour basis.

The worst of it was that the Chinese government kept the Indian expert team waiting for

days before finally denying them permission to visit the artificial lake for an on-the-spot assessment. The lame excuses of bad weather fostered many interesting speculations. Does China have something serious to hide from Indian eyes on the other side of the border? Strategic roads for opening up another front on this side of India? Is Himachal a special attraction to the Chinese – since it hosts a sizeable Tibetan

refugee settlement, the Buddhist monasteries, the Dalai Lama, Karmapa and the Tibetan government-in-exile? Is this hill state considered an easy ingress point for Punjab, Haryana, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and even Jammu, in a long-term strategic eventuality? Is this Sutlej scare merely a

trial balloon to test the Indian resources and reflexes? These questions gained credence with a theory circulated after the Sutlej flood in 2000 – that the disaster was engineered by the Chinese. It was even suggested that the flood was caused by a “blast” conducted by the Chinese in the Tibetan region.

Interestingly, these doubts are echoed by those closely associated with the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. According to an official, “the roof of the world” is endowed with the greatest river system in the world and accounts for two-thirds of China’s hydro-power potential. Apart from 11 major rivers of which six flow through India, Tibet has more than 2,000 natural lakes, with a combined area of over 35,000 sq km. Advising that the artificial lake formation on the Paree Chu should serve as “a wake-up call to India”, an official of the CTA’s environment desk warns: “A series of dams being set up by China across Tibet will alter the temperature of the Tibet plateau and the monsoon pattern of India.” Perhaps a bit of their own politics too, but the warning merits some attention.

Apart from India’s diplomatic failure in getting its own expert team across to the danger spot, its scientific and technological limitations and gross inadequacies have come to light. The depth of the lake and some other associated details crucial for estimating the possibility and extent of a flood could not be established by the satellite pictures. In fact, there was a whispering campaign for seeking American help, political constraints and inhibitions notwithstanding.

The most demoralising aspect is – here is a calamity that has served a notice in advance, but we seem to be helpless. No concrete action to diffuse nature’s time bomb is on the anvil. The hope lies merely in the walls of the artificial lake holding it out till its water freezes into snow next month. Even then, the frozen lake will continue to hang above Himachal’s head, just like the proverbial Damocles’ Sword.

Most of the evacuated riverside inhabitants are slowly returning to their abodes with a sense of resignation, fatalism and a prayer on their lips. How long can they wait? They are trying to fish out hope from the confusing mass of reports – after all, it may be a false alarm, just a hoax call from across the border! If so, it would easily be the most sensational hoax call of modern times.

(The author is the Shimla-based Correspondent of The Statesman.)

'Dam burst may not be a natural disaster'

China May Take Advantage Of Geophysical And Topographical Parameters: Expert

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad: A leading geo-scientist has expressed suspicions that the possibility of the dam burst in Tibet, which could wreak havoc in downstream villages of Himachal Pradesh, could be the result of "geophysical warfare" and not a natural disaster.

Dr Janardan G Negi, director-general of the Institute of Seismological Research here, says "It is not difficult to imagine that man-made landslides and earthquake triggering can be experimented in such vulnerable areas by geophysical warfare experts".

Stating that it would be difficult to distinguish between natural and man-made catastrophes in Tibet, Dr Negi said, "We must recognise that steep valleys of Himalayan rivers can make our civilians suffer and destroy power projects, if China desires to take strategic advantage of geophysical, geographical and topographical parameters".

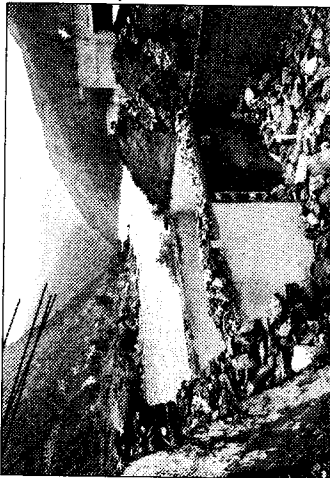
He said the Himalayan belt is vulnerable to various kinds of natural and man-made disasters.

Tibet and Northern Himalayas often suffer from massive landslides and toppling of glaciers. Some of the landslides block river flows and create temporary dams. He said these dams are like time bombs and their burst can generate killer surges in downstream valleys.

Dr Negi said, "Substantial progress within environmental sciences has been made to manipulate triggering of earthquakes, floods, landslides, toppling of glaciers (by remote blasting), lake bursts by using small amounts of energy in critically suitable locations to release huge amount of energy with damaging consequences. He pointed out that in Tibet man-made landslides can remain undetected by remote sens-

ing satellites and floods released at will to cause huge losses of life and property in down-streams of the Brahmaputra, the Ganges, the Sutlej and other Himalayan rivers. "There is a danger that these floods can destabilise fragmentary formations and trigger earthquakes," he warned.

The scientist said about 50 villages in Sutlej are presently threatened by a reported landslide in the Pareechu river, a tributary of the Sutlej, in Tibet. If the dam burst occurs, greatest economic danger is to the six units (each unit productivity 250 MW) of hydro-electric project of Nathpa-Jakhri project of Rs 8,500 crore of Sutlej Jal Vidhyut Nigam. The project provides nearly 30 per cent of northern India's power grid.



The scientist said news updates on August 14, 2004 suggests that, landslide dam burst in Tibet in the Brahmaputra river is threatening villages in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It can also harm ongoing activities of the massive 25,000 MW power project in Arunachal Pradesh.

Dr Negi pointed out that Chinese authorities did not permit the Indian experts to visit the landslide site. Our remote sensing satellites have also failed to locate landslide blocking of the river Pareechu till the Chinese informed us on August 11. Of course, the Chinese could have used controlled tunnelling of the dolomite rocks for early seepage of water before the increase of volume of the temporary lake. Even if the danger is postponed this year, dam stability can not be guaranteed for future.

Dr Negi said this is not for the first time in recent years that natural landslide dams are threatening India. In the year 2000, flash flood killed more than 70 people and damaged around 100 bridges in the Himalayas which is still a mystery for Indian geo-scientists.

500 families flee Orissa floods

HT Correspondent
Bhubaneswar, August 22

INCESSANT RAIN in the past 48 hours has caused floods in several parts of Orissa. Five districts of the state — Balasore, Bhadrak, Keonjhar, Jajpur and Mayurbhanj — are the most-affected.

Nearly 500 families residing on the riverbanks in Bhograi, Jaleswar and Baliapal blocks of Balasore district have been evacuated and brought to safer places. Several villages were completely submerged.

According to Revenue department sources, till Sunday evening, the Baitarani, Suvarnarekha and Budhabalang running through these districts were rising and flowing above the dan-

ger mark at many places.

Due to breaches caused in the river embankments the situation has aggravated further. Revenue minister Manmohan Samal said the collectors of flood-hit districts had been asked to evacuate people from the vulnerable areas to safer places. Rescue teams, along with Orissa Disaster Rapid Action Force personnel, have been rushed to the major flooded areas.

The Revenue Control Room confirmed that, in Balasore district, the Suvarnarekha was flowing at 11.03 m height against the danger level of 10.76 m in the Rajghat area. The Budhabalang was flowing at 7.90 m against the danger level of 8.13 m in the Gobindpur national highway area.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 AUG 2008

Fear of flood cripples life

MANJEET SEHGAL
WARRIOR

Shimla, Aug. 19: The fear of a flash flood has taken its toll of both the people and the economy of Himachal Pradesh.

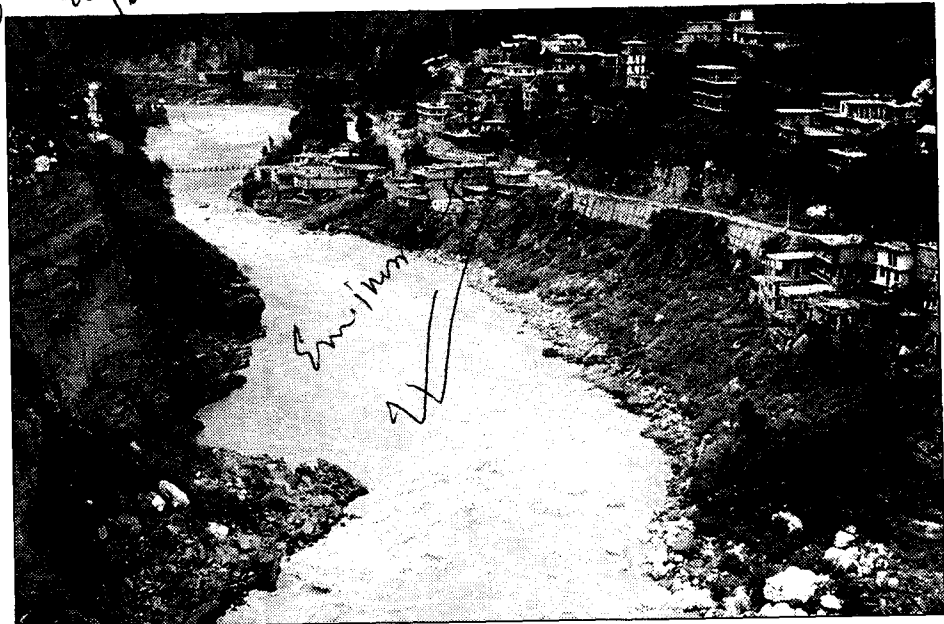
More than 3,500 residents of 56 villages have had to abandon their homes. Most are farmers, who have also had to desert their cattle.

"We are not getting a real picture of the flood threat. We do not know when the fear will leave us. Our life has come to a standstill and the economy has come to a grinding halt. We were forced to abandon our cattle," a displaced villager said.

Parts of Himachal near the India-Tibet border have been on high alert since news reached India that an artificial lake had been formed by a landslide on the Pare Chu river. The lake on the Sutlej tributary in Tibet threatened to burst its banks, flooding some villages in Himachal.

A panel of Indian experts has, however, said there is no immediate danger from the lake. "Their report said an immediate, sudden, complete breach is unlikely," H.K. Sharma, a flood expert, revealed today. China maintains that the risk of flash flood remains high.

The fear has affected the apple season in the state. Truckers are avoiding danger areas, leaving growers uncertain about the fate of their produce.



The Sutlej flows below the danger mark in Rampur, Himachal Pradesh, on Thursday. (PTI)

Tourism, too, has taken a hit. Popular tourist spots of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti are out of favour, as also upper Shimla and Kullu and Manali.

"Tourists are scared following confusing media reports. The occupancy has fallen as low as 25 to 30 per cent. The tourism industry has suffered a lot due to the flash flood threat," Manali-based hotelier C. Thakur said.

The only positive fallout — for the government — has been residents' willingness to vacate villages in the way of the 800 MW Kol Dam Hydel Power

Project in Bilaspur district. They had earlier snubbed the dam management's efforts to relocate them.

Chief minister Veerbhadra Singh has announced a grant of Rs 2 crore for relief measures. Yesterday, he visited Samdoh in Kinnaur district and other danger areas to see the preparations of the civil administration, the military and paramilitary forces to tackle flash floods. Singh talked to army officials, Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel and homeguards.

Commanding Officer Col.

P.M. Vats and other officers told the chief minister about the installation of a communication network that could flash alerts across strategic points within five minutes, and of measures to maintain round-the-clock vigil.

Singh later met at Reckong Peo the officers making the necessary arrangements.

"The water level at Samdoh where the Pare Chu enters Himachal Pradesh is normal. But the alert will have to be continued till it is ensured that there is no threat of flood in the Sutlej," he said.

Takes two to solve a water crisis

8-8 10/8
NIMMI KURIAN

AT a formidable height of more than 4000 metres, the Tibetan plateau is known as the roof of the world. Its commanding presence is making itself felt once again as an artificial lake formed due to a landslide in Tibet is in imminent danger of bursting. In its direct line of furious descent would be scores of villages in Himachal Pradesh.

This crisis raises a flood of questions on how developments in Tibet affect not just Tibetans but also a large section of humanity living downstream. These questions carry larger economic, environmental and social implications that have a direct bearing on the lives of communities living in these border regions.

The Tibetan plateau constitutes the headwaters of many of Asia's mighty rivers including the Brahmaputra, Mekong and Yangtze. Many of these flow into some of the most populous regions of South and Southeast Asia. The manner in which these waters are used upstream will thus decide both the quality and quantity of the flows that are received below. The Tibetan "water bank" is in every sense Asia's water bank and the environmental sustainability of Tibet means the environmental sustainability of Asia.

The import of this dependence becomes immediately evident in the light of China's looming water crisis. The scorching pace of

economic growth, which has led to surging water consumption, has depleted water tables and resulted in huge water shortages. This has led to the browning of China, leaving large tracts of land arid and unfit for use. The measures China takes to alleviate its water crisis are bound to have a broader region-wide impact.

In focus will be the grand South to North Water Transfer Project, an extraordinarily complex project of mammoth proportions that seeks to divert the waters of the Yangtze to supply the water deficient northern region. As per Chinese estimates, the entire project proposes

showing other signs of stress as it copes with the furious pace of economic activity that forms part of China's western development strategy. Many mega projects are transforming the face of Tibet. The "pillar" industries of mining and timber processing have fed the rapid industrialisation of Tibet, bringing in its wake deforestation, soil erosion, landslides, floods, acid rain and pollution especially of the water systems. These are creating ecological imbalances in the form of rising temperatures, retreat of glaciers and droughts caused by indifferent rainfall. Much of these will find

Water management issues need to be placed on the agenda of India-China talks

to divert 44.8 billion cubic metres of water each year to the north. A great deal of concern has been expressed at the viability of the project with even China's State Environmental Protection Agency sounding a cautionary note. One of the three routes for the transfer of water plans to slice through the mountains near Tibet. How will this affect the region and its ecosystem from where such a large body of water is taken out? Little research has been done on how these will affect the water rights of downstream countries and their ecosystems.

The fragile ecosystem of the Tibet-Qinghai plateau is also

their way to parts of the extended region including India.

Water management issues including those relating to management of the ecosystem and biodiversity need to be urgently placed on the agenda of India-China talks. As the present crisis has shown, accurate and timely information is vital for successful disaster management. This calls for evolving a system of regular exchange of data and coordination between the respective national agencies in India and China.

This fact was brought home in a tragic manner during the flash floods caused from a landslide in

Tibet in 2000 that ravaged the Northeast and Himachal Pradesh. The lack of an information sharing agreement between the two countries then resulted in loss of life and extensive damage to property. Both the countries have since signed an MoU on the sharing of hydrological data on the Brahmaputra's flows, which will be vital for timely forecasting and management of floods in the Northeast. This needs to be extended further to cover all the common rivers they share. Early warning systems need to be devised, coordination mechanisms perfected including visits to sites besides putting up permanent monitoring stations to enable quick transmission of information. It is important that these mechanisms are institutionalised so that such crises are not treated in an episodic manner.

For some time now, China has been advocating what it calls the "new security concept" as a component of its foreign policy. Chinese assessments note the need to address non-traditional security issues through cooperative security mechanisms based on the principles of mutual trust, benefit and equality. What could be a better case for advancing the spirit behind the new Chinese concept than regional water resource management issues.

The writer is associate research professor at the Centre for Policy Research

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 AUG 2004

Hurricane Charley claims 15 in Florida

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PAUNTA GORDA, (Florida), Aug. 14. — Hurricane Charley killed at least 15 people in Florida and flattened ocean-front homes, making thousands homeless before it roared north and struck the coast of South Carolina today.

The strongest storm to strike Florida in a dozen years knocked out electrical services to an estimated 2 million homes and businesses as it crossed Florida from the southwest coast at Punta Gorda to the Atlantic at Daytona Beach.

"I could hear the nails coming out of the roof. The walls were shaking violently, back and forth, back and forth. It was just the most amazing and terrifying

thing," said Ms Anne Correia, who spent two hours in a closet in her apartment in Punta Gorda, 120 km south of Tampa.

After tearing across Florida, Charley's generally northward course took it across open ocean, missing Georgia shore, before it made landfall for a second time on South Carolina's Grand Strand resort region. The area was nearly empty after a mandatory evacuation of some of the area's 1,80,000 tourists and residents.

The storm still packed wind of 121 kph, considerably weaker than its sustained speed of 233 kph yesterday, but still enough to classify it as a hurricane.

No exact death toll was available, but 10 deaths had been confirmed in

Charlotte County, where Punta Gorda is located, said Mr Wayne Sallade, the county's director of emergency management. There were five confirmed storm-related deaths elsewhere in the state, bringing the total death toll to 15. Earlier, Charley killed three people in Cuba and one in Jamaica.

President Bush said he would visit Florida tomorrow to see the damage. He had already declared storm-struck counties a major disaster area. His brother, Governor Jeb Bush, who completed a helicopter tour of the region, said: "Our worst fears have come true."

Hundreds of people were unaccounted for in Florida's Charlotte County, and thousands were homeless, Mr Sallade said.



The scene near Havana, over which Charley passed earlier. — AFP

India tense as Tsangpo overflows

Officials Maintain Close Watch At Entry Points

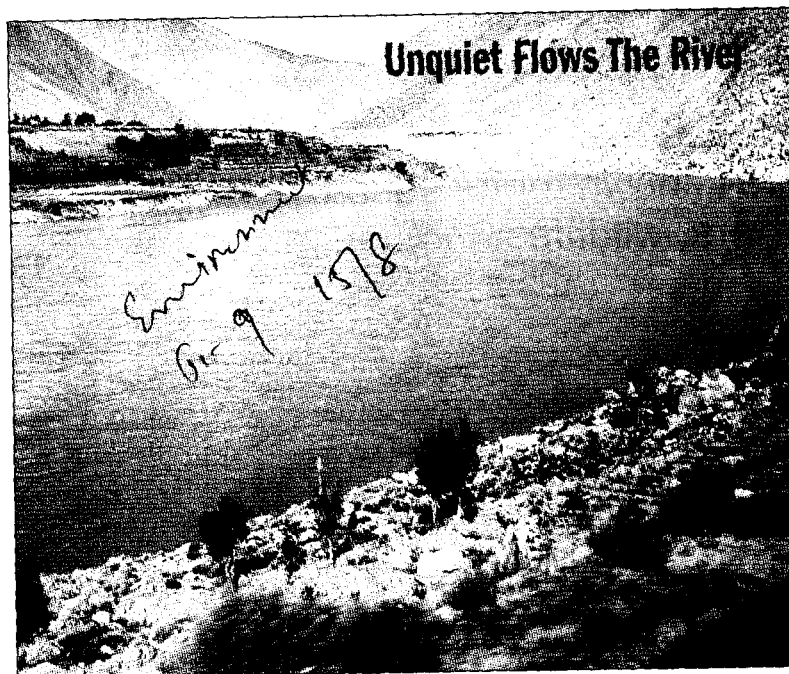
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Guwahati: Twenty-four hours after Indian authorities alerted Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on a possible dam burst on the river Yarlung Tsangpo in China (Tibet), officials from the Central Water Commission (CWC) noticed a rise in water level of the Siang river at Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh on Saturday morning.

However, officials of CWC monitoring the water levels of Siang and Brahmaputra rivers told TOI that the one-metre rise of the water level of Siang river is normal. "We are in constant touch with the Chinese authorities and so far there is no signs of anything going wrong there," the officials said. The Yarlung Tsangpo that flows to India is known as Siang in Arunachal and Brahmaputra in Assam before it merges with Ganges in Bangladesh and enters the Bay of Bengal after traversing 2,900 km.

The CEC officials said that even if the dam bursts it would take at least 36 hours for the surging waters to reach Indian territories. The CWC has two monitoring stations at Pasighat and at Dibrugarh.

Assam's Dhemaji district, the easternmost district of the state which borders Arunachal Pradesh and where the Siang river enters, is high on alert following the government's instructions on Friday.



Deputy commissioner of the district M Sahoo told TOI from Dhemaji that the disaster management contingency plans are ready. "We have alerted every villages in the riverine areas near the embankments of Siang and Brahmaputra rivers. The entry point of Siang at Jonai is also under close watch for any rise in water level," he said.

The district authorities have also issued official notification asking all concerned to remain on high alert. "I have been told that it would take some time for the Chinese river water to reach India, in case the dam bursts, and early warnings would help us avoid any sort of disasters," the deputy commissioner said.

15 AUG 2004

China shifts villagers after quake hits dams

Beijing, Aug. 13 (Reuters): Nearly 50,000 people are in danger after a deadly earthquake struck southwestern China this week and opened cracks in walls of several reservoir dams that could collapse, officials said today.

Four people were killed, nearly 600 people injured and more than 125,000 left homeless in Ludian county in Yunnan province by Tuesday's earthquake, which measured 5.6 on the Richter scale.

The tremor damaged 22 rammed-earth reservoirs about 400 km north of the provincial capital, Kunming. Leaks have already opened in some of the dams, officials said. "About 47,000 residents living downstream of the reservoirs are endangered," the Xinhua news agency said.

"We have found two cracks on the walls of the reservoir, each two metres wide," said an official from the Yongfeng reservoir, the largest of the 22.

The cracks had appeared in the upper part of the 13.5-metre high reservoir wall and no flooding had yet occurred, he said. "But there is still a threat that the wall could collapse." An official with the provincial government said "one or two" of the reservoirs were affected. "All the others are safe," he said, adding that workers had begun to evacuate around 2,000 villagers.

The state relief agency issued a notice "requiring check-ups to all reservoirs within the affected areas and around-the-clock safety patrols", Xinhua said.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 AUG 2004

হ্রদ আরও

বড় হয়েছে,

কেন্দ্র গড়ল

‘কোর গ্রুপ’

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৩
অগস্ট: তিব্বতে কৃত্রিমভাবে তৈরি
হওয়া হ্রদের এলাকা আরও প্রায় পাঁচ
হেক্টর বেড়ে গিয়েছে। উপগ্রহ দিয়ে
তোলা সাম্প্রতিকতম চিত্রে এই অবস্থা
ধরা পড়েছে। এই অবস্থায় কেন্দ্রীয়
সরকার আজ তড়িঘড়ি চার জন
বিশেষজ্ঞকে নিয়ে একটি ‘কোর গ্রুপ’
তৈরি করেছে। এঁরা প্রতিনিয়ত ঘটনার
উপরে নজর রাখবেন, বাঁধ ভাঙার
সম্ভাবনা খতিয়ে দেখবেন ও সংকট
মোকাবিলা গোষ্ঠীকে প্রতিনিয়ত তথ্য
সরবরাহ করবেন। বাঁধ ভেঙে পড়লে
কোথায়, কীভাবে জল আসবে সেটাও
তাঁরা হিসাব করবেন। এখনও পর্যন্ত
বাঁধ ভেঙে পড়েনি। শতক্রু আর স্পিতি
নদীর জলও আর বাড়েনি।

পরিস্থিতি মোকাবেলায় নয়াদিল্লি
ও বেজিং পরস্পরের সঙ্গে ক্রমশঃ
যোগাযোগ রেখে চলেছে। ভারতীয়
বিশেষজ্ঞেরা যাতে হ্রদের অবস্থা
সরেজমিনে দেখে আসতে পারেন,
তার জন্য ভারতের পক্ষ থেকে চিনের
কাছে অনুমতির প্রস্তাব পাঠানো
হয়েছিল। ভারত চেয়েছিল, হঠাৎ বন্যা
রোধ করতে চিন বিস্ফোরকের
সাহায্যে বাঁধটি পরিকল্পিতভাবে, ধীরে
ধীরে ভেঙে দিক। কিন্তু বেজিং কোনও
অনুরোধই এখনও সাড়া দেয়নি।
বেজিংয়ের পক্ষ থেকে বলা হয়েছে,
দুর্গম এলাকায় হ্রদটির কাছে এ পর্যন্ত
কোনও পর্যবেক্ষক দল পৌঁছতে
পারেনি। ভারত বিশেষজ্ঞ কমিটি
পাঠাবে বলেছিল। তাদের সেই
অনুমতিও দেওয়া হয়নি। ফলে
বিস্ফোরণ ঘটানো যাচ্ছে না। এ দিকে
পি টি আই সূত্রের খবর, বাঁধ ভেঙে
পড়তে পারে এই আশঙ্কায় ভারত
সরকার সেনা ও বিমানবাহিনীতে কড়া
সতর্কতা জারি করেছে। পারেচু নদীর
ধার, স্পিতি ও শতক্রু নদীর পাশ্ববর্তী
এলাকা থেকে মানুষজনকে সরিয়ে
নিয়ে যেতে প্রয়োজনীয় পদক্ষেপ
নেওয়া হচ্ছে।

কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার সূত্রে আজ
বিকলে বলা হয়েছে, পারেচু নদীর
মাঝপথে তৈরি হওয়া কৃত্রিম হ্রদের
এলাকা এখন দাঁড়িয়েছে ১৯৩ হেক্টর।
গত ৯ তারিখে উপগ্রহ মারফৎ যে ছবি
নেওয়া হয়েছিল, তাতে দেখা
গিয়েছিল হ্রদের এলাকা ১৮৮ হেক্টর।
এই বাড়তি বোঝা চেপেছে নদীর
ওপরের অংশে। নীচের অংশে এখনও
ধসের ফলে কৃত্রিম বাঁধ তৈরি হয়ে
রয়েছে। সংকট মোকাবেলা গোষ্ঠীর
সঙ্গে যুক্ত এক বিশেষজ্ঞ আজ
জানিয়েছেন, বাঁধের বড় বড়
পাথরগুলির পাশে এখন পলি জমা
পড়ছে। এর ফলে ওই বাঁধ কার্যকর
কিছুক্ষণে আরও মজবুত হওয়ার
আশঙ্কা রয়েছে। তবে চিন জানিয়েছে,
কিছু অংশে বাঁধ দুর্বল হয়ে পড়েছে।
ফলে এই জায়গাগুলি যে কোনও
সময়ে ভেঙে পড়তে পারে।

প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়
জানিয়েছেন, দুর্ঘটনা ঘটলে কোথায়
কেন্দ্রীয় জলস্তর দাঁড়াবে তার একটি
প্রাথমিক হিসাব তিন সরকার
ইতিমধ্যেই কেন্দ্রকে পাঠিয়েছে। সেই
অনুসারে ১৬ ফিট থেকে ২৩ ফিট
পর্যন্ত জলস্তর বাড়তে পারে শতক্রু
এবং স্পিতি নদীতে।

যে হ্রদ তৈরি হয়েছে, তা ছিল
দেড় হাজার মিটার চওড়া ও ৬ কিমি
লম্বা। এবং সেখানে জমা জলের
পরিমাণ ৮ কোটি কিউবিক মিটার।
প্রতিমুহূর্তে সেখানে আরও জল জমা
হচ্ছে এবং জলের উপরিতল দিনে ০.৫
মিটার করে বেড়ে যাচ্ছে।

চিনা কড়পক্ষ জানিয়েছেন, কৃত্রিম
বাঁধ দিয়ে জল চুইয়ে বেরোচ্ছে, তার
দেওয়াল দুর্বল হয়ে পড়ছে এবং যে
কোনও সময়ে ওই দেওয়াল ভেঙে
পড়তে পারে।

এই অবস্থায় কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার আজ
কেন্দ্রীয় দল কমিশনের নেতৃত্বে চার
সদস্যের বিশেষজ্ঞ কমিটি গঠন
করেছে। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ইতিমধ্যেই
৫৬টি গ্রাম থেকে লোকজনকে সরিয়ে
নিয়েছে। সেনাবাহিনীর চারটি কলাম
এবং হেলিকপ্টার উদ্ধারকাজে নামার
জন্য তৈরি রাখা হয়েছে।

ANADADABAZAR PATRIKA

14 AUG 2004

Troubled Waters

Tehri dam mishap raises larger concerns about the project

An executive of Tehri Hydro Development Corporation came up with a curious response to Monday's tragedy of over 20 labourers perishing in a tunnel collapse while working on the controversial dam: "There is no damage to the dam". This sums up the cavalier manner in which the whole project has been managed since it began in 1972. The project has been the subject of controversy from its very inception, as it is built on a major seismic faultline in the Himalayan range. Geophysicists and engineers have come to the conclusion that there has been massive stress building up in the area which could lead to an earthquake that could be as strong as 8.5 on the Richter scale. This is chilling when we compare it with the devastation wreaked by the Kutch earthquake which registered a mere 6.5 on the same scale. The latest mishap was avoidable and is the result of the utter carelessness with which safety standards are handled in these mega projects in India. Across the world, barring China, the concept of the big dam is becoming unfashionable. No less than the World Bank, once a proponent of such mega projects, has been highly critical of India's track record in safety as far as big dams go. If something goes wrong with the dam, the consequences will be devastating in terms of human lives. But it appears that no one in the government is willing to listen.

The recent Tehri tragedy, which brought down a tunnel, should serve as a wake-up call to the comatose authorities. The larger concern is that the dam is being built displacing 30,000 families on a site which cannot be protected by any known technology. There are no safeguards in place to protect either construction workers or those who are ousted by the works. The previous Uttar Pradesh government, which used the dam as a political bargaining chip, confessed in a confidential memo that there was no way the dam's tunnels could be made watertight. Experts have concurred that such is the nature of the terrain that the dam cannot be reinforced by concrete plugging as the unfortunate labourers were attempting to do on Monday. Yet, political compulsions appear to dictate that this ill-fated and dangerous project will stay on course regardless of the consequences.

5 AUG 2004



HELPING HAND: Floods have occurred in the north and north-west where drought conditions prevailed till a week ago. Armymen at work rescuing the marooned at Kishangarh village on the outskirts of Chandigarh on Wednesday. — Reuters (Havoc in Mumbai: Page 12)

Pressure on kidnappers to free hostages

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 4. Amid expectations of an early release of the seven persons, including three Indians held hostage by Iraqi militants, the Kuwaiti transport company, which had employed the hostages, continues to negotiate with the mediator involved in defusing the crisis. Elsewhere, Indian officials in Baghdad were engaged in building local and Arab diplomatic support to dissuade the kidnappers from harming the captives.

Unlike as in the past few days, both the Kuwait and Gulf Link Transport Company (KGL) and the Iraqi negotiator, Shiekh Hisham Al-Dulaimi, have refrained from using the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya television as their channel of communication. Rana Abu Zaineh, KGL

spokesperson, told *The Hindu* today that the company had been in regular contact with Mr. Al-Dulaimi over telephone and "all parties were working with full energy and good intentions."

Representative to Iraq

Indicating that the deal with the kidnappers was about to be wrapped up, she said that KGL would send a representative to Iraq to "finish the matter." Mr. Al-Dulaimi had said that the kidnappers were seeking "compensation" for the people of Fallujah who had suffered in the American attacks.

In New Delhi, an official statement said the "process" of obtaining the safe and early release of the hostages was under way, and a face-to-face meeting between Mr. Al-Dulaimi and KGL was expected tomorrow.

Sources in the security establishment told *The Hindu* that the Indian negotiator, Talmiz Ahmed, together with the Indian embassy officials in Baghdad, had reached out to a wide network of Arab diplomats, religious functionaries and tribal leaders perceived of having an influence on the kidnappers.

These Arab "opinion makers," have, in turn sought to influence the Islamic Secret Army — the parent organisation whose Black Banners Brigade has undertaken the kidnapping. Consequently, with the abduction becoming increasingly "internationalised," considerable pressure has by now been mounted on the kidnappers, and it is highly unlikely that the hostages would now be harmed, the sources said. Sheikh Mohammed Bashar Al-Faisi, the spokesperson of the

Muslim Ulema Board of Iraq has already appealed to the kidnappers to release the hostages as they had "no connection with the occupation forces and have not harmed the Iraqi people."

Sources clarified that the Indian diplomatic exertions were meant to "complement" the efforts by Mr. Al-Dulaimi.

SYL: SC notice to Centre, six states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 2

A GREEING to examine the validity of a controversial Punjab law annulling its water agreements, the Supreme Court on Monday issued notices to the Centre, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and three other states on the Presidential reference on the issue. The Court also issued notices to Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and the national capital territory of Delhi. The Court directed the Chief secretaries of the states and the Centre to file within six weeks their written submissions both on facts and on the questions of law, four of which have been formulated in the Presidential reference.

Attorney General Milon Banerjee, who had already been given notice by the Court, attempted to give a wider picture to the controversy by requesting the Court to issue a public notice as

Questions of the reference:



- Whether the Punjab Termination of Agreement Act, 2004 and the provisions thereof are valid constitutionally?
- Whether the Act and the provisions thereof are in accordance with the provisions of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, section 78 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 and the notification dated March 24, 1976, issued thereunder.
- Whether in view of the provisions of the act, the state of Punjab is discharged from its obligations flowing from the judgement and decree dated 15.01.2002 and the judgement and order dated 04.06.2004 of SC.

'Centre, Capt hand-in-glove'



■ NEW DELHI: Haryana Chief Minister Om Parkash Chautala on Monday accused the Centre of being hand-in-glove with

the Punjab government on the SYL issue. "Such a big decision (Punjab Termination of Agreements Act) could not have been taken by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh alone," he said here after meeting President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. He met the President to invite him to inaugurate the 250 MW power plant at Panipat. "Singh was in Delhi for three days just to get the list of Parliamentary secretaries finalised from the high command. So how can he take such a big decision alone," Chautala said. "However, we have faith in the judiciary...we are confident that justice would be done to us," he said. — P77

was done in the reference pertaining to the Ayodhya controversy.

The Court declined saying, "In this case public notice is not required. Is it necessary to give a public notice keeping in mind the facts of the matter?"

The AG persisted with his request saying the reference has wider ramifications and may even touch upon the Indo-Pak Water Treaty. However, the Court refused saying, "Unless we decide to return the reference without expressing any opinion on the issue, we have to issue notices to the states. All these issues raised at present could be brought up at the time of hearing on the matter."

Banerjee submitted that the main question in the reference was the constitutional validity of the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004 and if the state has been discharged of its obligations under the two judgements of the Court directing it to construct its portion of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal.

He said that under the June 4, 2004, direction of the Supreme Court, the construction work has been entrusted with a Central Government agency and the Union Government has complied with the directions.

On the question of issuance of notices to the states, the Court had initially asked Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan to reply to the references.

However, senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Punjab, requested the Court to also seek responses from Delhi, Himachal Pradesh and J-K as these states had some or the other interest in the sharing of waters of rivers flowing through Punjab.

As the matter snowballed into a political controversy with Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh refusing to climb down from the stated position, the Centre had no option but to refer the matter to the Supreme Court through a Presidential reference under Article 143(1) of the Constitution seeking its opinion on the Punjab law.

Floods and Droughts

A Long-term Farm Strategy for India

By R K Pachauri

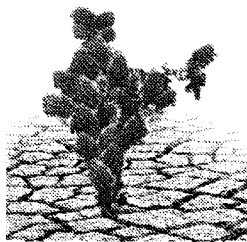
There is considerable concern throughout the country on the paradox of floods in Assam and Bihar, and the drought conditions in other regions. The impact of these occurrences on agriculture could be significant. While relief measures, and assistance to the affected farmers can help minimise losses, some long-term measures for the country's agricultural future are imperative.

During the last decade foodgrain production has registered a compounded annual growth rate of 3%. However, the country has to focus on the possibilities of being able to maintain this rate of growth. The National Commission for Integrated Water Resources has estimated that to meet the requirements of foodgrains alone the net sown area of around 142.2 million hectares will have to be increased to 145 million hectares by 2050 and the cropping intensity to 145%. It is unlikely that the increase in net cultivated area would be possible at all. For instance, a significant area under rice cultivation in Kerala is now producing cash crops like coconut and rubber. At the same time, the yield of foodgrains from the granaries of Punjab, Haryana and west UP has reached a plateau. Growth of foodgrain production can be achieved only through rapid increases in productivity. This would not be possible without adequate attention to the rain-dependent area under agriculture in the country, which constitutes about 60% of the 142.2 million hectares. Any shortfall in monsoon rain renders this large area of rainfed agriculture highly vulnerable to sharp reductions in output. The harsh reality is that these large areas of marginal agriculture have not been touched by the Green Revolution. Nor have they attracted commercial investments in agricultural technology improvement because the market surpluses that could be generated from these areas are small.

This grim picture, unfortunately, is likely to worsen as a result of climate change and its impacts on the Indian subcontinent. The Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that "more intense precipitation events (hence flooding) are very likely over many areas. Increased summer drying and associated risk of drought is likely over most mid-latitude continental interiors. Even with little or no change in El Nino amplitude, an increase in temperatures globally is likely to lead to greater extremes of drying and heavy rainfall, and increase the risk of droughts and floods that occur with El Nino events in many different regions". We are, therefore, likely to see a greater extent and frequency of floods and droughts in the country. A study carried out for India estimates that net loss of revenue at the farm level could range between 9% to 25% for a temperature

increase of 2 to 3.5 degrees centigrade. Another study estimated that a 2 degree centigrade rise in average temperature and a 7% increase in average precipitation would reduce net revenues by 12.3% for the country as a whole.

Hence, adaptation to climate change becomes an essential part of response strategy for Indian agriculture. This strategy must also deal with the reduced availability of water in the country. There is now continuing evidence that most of our glaciers are receding at a rate that should cause alarm. Initially, this rapid melting may increase the flow of water, but once the mass of ice itself is reduced, the rate of flow is likely to decline. All in all, the management of water requires a radically different approach from what we have been pursuing in recent decades. The overwhelming share of water consumed in this country goes essentially for agriculture. Focused and efficient use in those areas where it is available in relative abundance would make it possible to provide larger quantities to those areas that are deficient. Yet we are pursuing, in state after state, the shortsighted policy of providing electricity free of cost, which only results in over-exploitation of groundwater resources and inefficient use in agriculture.



It is time to take a long-term view of agricultural strategy in the country. First, it is important to develop crops that are drought resistant as well as salt tolerant. It would also be useful to carry out biological control of pests, to eliminate the use of pesticides.

The second element involves a totally new approach to the management of water resources in the country. Solutions in this area would include rational pricing of water and electricity for agriculture, more efficient use of water in urban areas and in industry, widespread use of precision agriculture technologies and adequate investments in infrastructure such as irrigation canals, water harvesting and storage facilities. If the management of water continues on a business-as-usual path, conflicts and political problems would multiply, sapping the energy and institutional capacity of governments to handle this challenge.

Given the fact that responses can be implemented effectively only over time, it is urgent to make a beginning now, based on an assessment of what is likely to happen 15 or 20 years in the future. If we are serious about addressing the objectives of food security and the welfare of a large part of our population still dependent on rainfed agriculture, a far more determined and visionary approach to agricultural planning and the management of water resources needs to be taken in hand immediately, because the reality of India's dependence on the monsoons is with us to stay and far more serious impacts of climate change are probably round the corner.

Vaiko meets

By Our Special Correspondent
NEW DELHI, JULY 28. The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, Vaiko, today met the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, at his residence and requested him to give top priority to the inter-linking of rivers to avoid the recurrence of floods in some States and drought in some others.

Talking to *The Hindu* after

the meeting, Mr. Vaiko said: "I told the Prime Minister that the United Progressive Alliance had included in its Common Minimum Programme the issue of inter-linking of rivers. I requested him to speed up the work and he assured that feasibility reports would be speeded up."

He said: "I also told him about my 42-day padayatra, beginning on August 5, to awaken the masses and he evinced keen

interest in it."

Calls on Sonia

Mr. Vaiko also met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, at her residence and later described it as "a courtesy call."

He said that in the morning, he met the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, and expressed displeasure over the deportation of the Sri Lankan Member of Parliament, M.K.

Vaiko wants priority for inter-linking of rivers

Eelavendhan, on July 24 when he arrived in Chennai to attend a conference in Bangalore the next day.

He said: "I drew Mr. Singh's attention to the position that MPs belonging to the SAARC countries do not require visa for going from one country to another, but in the case of Mr. Eelavendhan this was not followed. I wanted his intervention to ensure that such things

did not recur." The Minister assured him that he "would look into the matter."

Mr. Vaiko urged Mr. Singh that India must play a constructive and active role in the Sri Lankan peace process and come out with a clear-cut policy. "I told Mr. Singh not to allow the United States to get a foothold in the island in our own geo-political interest," he

Centre gears up to fight drought

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 27

THE CENTRE got into drought combat mode on a war footing today, with the chief secretaries of eight states most susceptible to drought holding serious parleys and consultations in the Capital.

The meeting discussed contingency measures to meet the drought-like situation in the rain-deficient regions, which included emergency relief and the plantation of drought-resistant crops.

The meeting follows directions from Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to streamline emergency measures and contingency crop planning to meet the threat.

The Centre has assured all assis-

tance to the affected states and promised to consider any demand made for release of funds to deal with the situation.

Central teams may visit the affected states to firm up the action plan. "We are taking all the necessary steps to prepare for the challenges ahead though it's too early to declare 2004 as a drought year," officials told HT.

The Prime Minister is expected to chair the next meeting, which may include chief ministers and several central ministers.

Today's preliminary meeting, chaired by Cabinet Secretary B.K. Chaturvedi, took stock of the situa-

tion with detailed inputs from the states. The meeting was attended by the chief secretaries of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, apart from senior officials of the Union ministry of agriculture and state governments.

In Maharashtra, as many as 22 of the 35 districts have so far been adversely affected by deficient rain. With the monsoon failing for the fourth consecutive year, the CM has already announced a drought-like situation in Vidarbha.

All areas of Rajasthan, meanwhile, are reeling under drought-

like conditions with a mere 80.48 mm rainfall this season as against 300.68 mm in the corresponding period in 2001. The state, where the bulk of the bajra crop is produced along with groundnut in many areas, the overall deficiency is put at 54 per cent in its eastern region and 51 per cent in the western region.

Andhra Pradesh is also facing problems owing to low rainfall.

Though the situation is less alarming in eastern Madhya Pradesh, its western region — known for soya bean cultivation — is reported to have suffered nearly 47 per cent shortfall in rains since January this year.

Similarly, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab are also facing drought-like situation in several parts.

OFFICIALS DISCUSS EMERGENCY MEASURES

Ministry

Centre gears up to tackle drought

By Gargi Parsai 28/7

NEW DELHI, JULY 27. The Centre today assessed the drought preparedness of nine rain-deficient States and promised all help to meet the situation.

The States were asked to remain alert to the developing situation and be ready with contingency plans for drinking

water, food, fodder and alternative kharif crops.

The Cabinet Secretary, B.K. Chaturvedi, held individual consultations with the Chief Secretaries of each of the nine States — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh — to take stock of their requirements to

meet the situation arising from the prolonged lull in the monsoon.

The talks, held at the behest of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, were attended by the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, T.K.A. Nair, and senior officials from several Ministries.

All the States except Uttar Pradesh were represented by their

Chief Secretaries.

Contingency plan

According to sources, Mr. Chaturvedi sought from each State its assessment of the situation, the steps it had initiated to meet it and the support it required from the Centre.

But one thing was common: the States were asked to be ready for any eventuality and be prepared with contingency plans. They were asked to take timely stock of the damage to kharif sown or standing crop so that farmers could be advised with alternatives.

The States demanded uninterrupted supply of power from the northern grid or thermal power stations so that the farmers did not incur heavy costs on diesel to run pumps to irrigate paddy, sugarcane and other water intensive kharif crops.

Others demanded more allocation of foodgrains and fodder

All help to flood-hit Bihar: Manmohan

By Our Special Correspondent

PATNA, JULY 27. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said today that the Centre was committed to extending all possible help to Bihar to cope with the post-flood problems — preventing the outbreak of epidemics, reconstructing houses, reviving agricultural operations and providing relief.

The Prime Minister said he was moved by the devastation he saw for himself today during an aerial survey of the flood-hit areas of Darbhanga, Samastipur, Begusarai and Khagaria districts.

The Centre had provided all assistance sought by Bihar and it would consider the memorandum submitted by the Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, with equal sympathy, he added.

The Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, and the Union Steel Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, were with him. He also conferred with other leaders in the State on the flood havoc.

A Central team would arrive here to take stock of the situation and relief would be given on the basis of its recommendations.

The Centre has so far released Rs. 115 crores from the National Calamity Relief Fund and the National Calamity Contingency Fund.

Rs. 7,200 crores sought

Ms. Rabri Devi has demanded Rs. 7,200 crores, outlining

the damage caused by the floods to infrastructure and the economy, and the loss of over 450 lives.

Dr. Singh said that his government was in constant touch with the State Government to prepare an exigency plan to prevent any possible outbreak of epidemics and provide medicare.

Even as he appealed for help from voluntary organisations, he expressed the hope that the State Government would seek

their cooperation too and work in tandem.

'Improve drainage'

The Prime Minister was confident that a dam would be constructed on the Sapt Kosi river with Nepal's cooperation.

He said he was hopeful that the talks would lead to a solution. He emphasised the need to improve the drainage system in Bihar. He, however, was not sure that inter-linking of rivers would solve the problem of floods.

Opposition urged to give up boycott plan

By Our Staff Correspondent

PATNA, JULY 27. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today appealed to the Opposition to abandon its call for boycott of the Parliamentary Standing Committees and sought its cooperation in solving the serious problems confronting the country.

Responding to a question on the Opposition's boycott over the "tainted" Ministers issue, Dr. Singh denied that the United Progressive Alliance had charted a course of confrontation with the National Democratic Alliance.

"I don't want any confrontation. There are serious issues

needing solutions and this needs the cooperation of all parties." Dr. Singh said he tried to talk to the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani, and the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, for the smooth functioning of Parliament.

"I understand the responsibilities and rights of the Opposition. But it was not right to boycott Parliament and its committees."

Dr. Singh said he would appeal to the Opposition to comprehend the serious issues facing the country and understand it was necessary that these be resolved through consensus.

Punjab water imbroglio

By Ramaswamy R. Iyer

With better management, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan can meet their needs with much less water than they seek.

DURING THE last few days there has been a great deal of discussion, much of it confused, on the Punjab action terminating past agreements and accords over river waters. The present article will try to set forth briefly some of the questions that arise from that action and from the justification offered for it by the Punjab Government through newspaper advertisements. (It must be noted that the President has now made a reference to the Supreme Court for opinions on certain questions.)

First, Punjab has been asserting its ownership of Ravi-Beas waters, but so far as one knows, Punjab has use rights over those waters; it does not own them. This has been clearly stated in the Report of the Ravi-Beas Tribunal.

Secondly, it seems doubtful whether even independent sovereign nations have the power of unilaterally terminating a Treaty or Agreement with other equally sovereign countries. In the present case, is there in fact 'sovereignty' at the State Government level under our Constitution? Further, agreements and accords are entered into by executive governments; can they be terminated by an Act of the Legislature? Doubtless these questions will get conclusively answered when the Supreme Court gives its opinions on the presidential reference.

Thirdly, it has been argued that Rajasthan and Haryana have no riparian rights in relation to the Ravi and the Beas. Taking Haryana first, it was earlier a part of Punjab, and the State as a whole was surely a 'riparian' in relation to the Ravi and the Beas. Does a part of the State lose that riparian character merely because of a division of the State? That is not intended as a rhetorical question but as an expression of a doubt that needs to be resolved. (We shall return to Rajasthan later.)

That leads us to the fourth and most important point, namely, that unlike the Cauvery dispute, which is a straightforward riparian dispute, this is really a dispute relating to allocation of river waters made in pursuance of a reorganisation of States. In 1976, the Central Government issued a notification under Section 78 of the Punjab Reorganization Act 1966, allocating the erstwhile Punjab's share of Ravi-Beas waters to the new States of Punjab and Haryana, with a small allocation to Delhi. Can a State Legisla-

ture nullify an order or notification issued by the Central Government? (This is part of the presidential reference.)

The legality and fairness of the 1981 agreement brought about by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (modifying the 1976 allocations) are being questioned in Punjab. All that one can say is that following the agreement, both Punjab and Haryana withdrew their petitions from the Supreme Court. That seems to indicate that the agreement was then found acceptable; this is also borne out by the White Paper issued by the Punjab Government, hailing the agreement. However, the Punjab Legislature subsequently passed a resolution disowning the agreement.

The next stage in the dispute was the accord between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sant H.S. Longowal on July 24, 1985. It was in pursuance of that accord that the Ravi-Beas Tribunal was set up. Now the opinion in Punjab seems to be that the accord is dead, perhaps because many elements in it remain unimplemented. Be that as it may, the Tribunal was in fact set up. For certain reasons the Tribunal was not set up by a simple notification under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act 1956, but was established following an amendment adding a new and specific Section 14 to the Act. (As a person who was officially associated with these matters at the time, the writer can state that the Punjab Government was consulted before the Tribunal was set up.) That Punjab acquiesced in the whole process was evident from the fact that it duly participated in the proceedings of the Tribunal and presented its case to it. Whether Punjab can now argue that the very establishment of the Tribunal was wrong and illegal is a question that will need to be considered.

The Tribunal is still in existence. When the report of the Tribunal was received early in 1987, it was found politically difficult to notify it. A reference back to the Tribunal was made for clarifications or a supplementary report. For whatever reasons, that clarificatory or supplementary report has not yet been received. As and when it is received, both the original and the supplementary reports will

have to be notified, and will be final and binding. Even if, hypothetically speaking, there is no supplementary report (though that is hard to imagine), the original report will surely become the final report and will have to be notified; it cannot be treated as non-existent.

How does the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal come into the picture? It was mooted as a means of enabling Haryana to utilise the allocation of Ravi-Beas waters made to it. It was envisaged in 1976, reiterated in 1981 and again in 1985. Right from the beginning, Punjab has been opposed to the idea and reluctant to construct the canal. The canal remains incomplete. Haryana has been going to court over this, and recently the Supreme Court asked the Central Government to take over the project and complete it. It was in order to forestall this that Punjab appears to have hastily terminated all past water agreements. This seems to destroy the basis for the SYL Canal and therefore for the Supreme Court's direction. The issue also figures in the presidential reference.

Finally, we come to the question of Rajasthan. Punjab denies that Rajasthan has any right to the Ravi-Beas waters. How then has an allocation been made to it? For an answer to this, we have to go back to 1947. Soon after Partition, talks began between India and Pakistan on the sharing of the Indus system, and after many years of negotiation the Indus Treaty was signed in 1960. The settlement could conceivably have taken the form of a joint integrated management of the entire Indus system by the two countries together, or of a sharing of the waters in each of the six rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) by the two countries. Neither course was followed. What was agreed upon was the allocation of the three western rivers to Pakistan and the three eastern rivers to India. Under this settlement, roughly 75 per cent of the waters went to Pakistan and 25 per cent was given to India. In Pakistan, it is often argued that this represented an act of generosity on its part, as the portion of territory that went to India was historically using only 8 per cent of the

Indus waters. Indian sources put it at a higher figure, but it seems clear that the allocation of Indus waters to India was higher than the level of past use. This was partly because India, in putting forward its claims to the waters, argued for a substantial allocation to the desert State of Rajasthan.

Let us consider what the situation would have been (a) if there had been no Indus Treaty, or (b) if the Treaty had envisaged a sharing between the two countries on each of the six rivers. In either case, India's rights as the upper riparian on the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej would have been circumscribed by Pakistan's rights as the lower riparian. Bhakra-Nangal might have required Pakistan's concurrence. It might not have been built or might have been a smaller project. It was the exclusive allocation of the three eastern rivers to India under the Treaty that removed the constraint of lower-riparian rights on Indian use. Punjab benefited by this. But this would not have come about if Rajasthan's needs had not been added to the arithmetic. It follows then that Rajasthan's claims on these waters are not riparian claims, but derive from the case that was built up for the Indus negotiations. This issue does not specifically figure in the presidential reference but may come up in the course of the examination of the reference by the Court.

Turning finally from rights to needs, Punjab has a strong sense of grievance. That cannot be ignored. It has also been arguing that the availability of water has to be re-assessed; it says that it is less than earlier estimates. Haryana has a sense of grievance at the non-completion of the SYL canal. Rajasthan is worried about its allocation not fully materialising. Delhi is apprehensive not only about losing its small allocation of 0.2 MAF (million acre feet) from Ravi-Beas, but even more about Haryana backing out of the agreement on the Yamuna. The crucial question here is whether the three States really need the quantities of water that they are asking for. That cannot be gone into here, but the writer would venture to suggest that with better water management all the States can meet all their needs with much less water than they project. That is the real answer to this vexed problem.

(The writer is a former Union Water Resources Secretary.)

জল-যুদ্ধে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের মত জানতে চান কালাম

নয়াদিল্লি, ২২ জুলাই: জলবন্টন বিবাদ নিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের মতামত জানতে চাইলেন রাষ্ট্রপতি। পঞ্জাব বিধানসভা যে ভাবে প্রতিবেশী রাজ্যগুলির সঙ্গে অতীতের সবক'টি জলবন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করে একতরফা আইন পাশ করেছে, তা নিয়ে সর্বোচ্চ আদালতের বক্তব্য জানতে চেয়েছেন তিনি।

শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল তৈরিকে কেন্দ্র করে তুঙ্গ ওঠা রাজনৈতিক বিবাদ ধামাচাপা দিতে বিষয়টি রাষ্ট্রপতির দরবারে ঠেলে দিয়েছে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের অনুরোধ পাওয়ার পরেই এ ব্যাপারে আইনি পরামর্শ নেওয়ার কাজ শুরু করেছেন রাষ্ট্রপতি। সংবিধানের ১৪৩ ধারা অনুসারে তিনি সুপ্রিম কোর্টের কাছে জানতে চেয়েছেন জলবন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করে পঞ্জাব বিধানসভায় যে আইন পাশ করা হয়েছে, সে সম্পর্কে তাদের মতামত কী।

পঞ্জাবের কংগ্রেস সরকার শতক্র-যমুনা খাল তৈরি ঠেকাতে একতরফা ভাবে অতীতের সব জলবন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করে দেওয়ায় বিপাকে পড়ে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। জল চুক্তির অন্য তিন শরিক রাজ্য, রাজস্থান, হরিয়ানা ও হিমাচলপ্রদেশ সমস্যা মেটানোর যাবতীয় দায় কেন্দ্রের উপরেই চাপিয়ে দিয়েছে। কেন্দ্রের পরামর্শ মেনে বিতর্কিত আইনকে চ্যালেঞ্জ জানিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টে আবেদন করেনি রাজস্থান ও হরিয়ানা। এই অবস্থায় কেন্দ্র নিজেই ১৫ জুলাই শীর্ষ আদালতের পরবর্তী নির্দেশ চেয়ে আবেদন করেছে। — পি টি আই

ট্রেন বেলাইন, মৃত ১২৮

ইস্তানবুল, ২২ জুলাই: ইস্তানবুল থেকে তুরস্কের রাজধানী আঙ্কারাগামী একটি দ্রুতগামী ট্রেন বেলাইন হলে অন্তত ১২৮ জন যাত্রী প্রাণ হারিয়েছেন। ঠিক কী কারণে দুর্ঘটনা ঘটেছে, তা জানা না গেলেও আজ সরকারি ভাবে জানানো হয়েছে যান্ত্রিক ত্রুটিই এর কারণ। নাশকতার কথা কোনও সূত্রেই বলা হয়নি। দায়ী করা হয়নি দ্রুতগতিকেও। —রয়টার্স

Water row: Presidential reference

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, JULY 22. In his four-point reference to the Supreme Court on the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, the President, Abdul Kalam, has asked the following: Whether the Punjab

Agreement Act, 2004 and the provisions thereof are in accordance with the Constitution of India;

Whether the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004 and the provisions thereof are in accordance with the provisions of Section 14 of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act,

1956, Section 78 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 and the Notification dated 24th March, 1976 issued thereunder.

Whether the State of Punjab has validly terminated the agreement dated 31.12.1981 and all other agreements relating to the Ravi Beas waters and is discharged from its obligation

under the said agreement(s); and

Whether in view of the provisions of the Act, the State of Punjab is discharged from its obligations flowing from the Judgement and Decree dated 15.01.2002 and the Judgment and Order dated 04.06.2004 of the Supreme Court of India.

Eni, Mumbai

Battle of Bhopal

SC judgment is not the end of the affair

The Supreme Court's decision, to finally disburse the Rs 1,503-crore compensation from Union Carbide to victims or kin of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, is a significant milestone, but one *sans* the attributes of a climax. The good news is soured with the knowledge that the BJP government of Madhya Pradesh wishes to use part of the amount for the city of Bhopal. The SC must ensure that the money goes to the victims and not into the grubby paws of local corporators. This sorry case begs an examination of a larger attitudinal issue: The disposition of the powers that be to such victims. From Bhopal to Kumbakonam, we have been repeatedly assaulted by images of abject grief, of victims of largely avoidable man-made disasters. In almost all these cases, the victims' fate is made more tragic by the culpability of the state in not ensuring that proper procedures were being followed. This is further compounded by the cold *sarkari* facade that victims usually encounter. Nothing can substitute the loss of a loved one: A tragic truism which the Indian bureaucracy, and sadly the state too, is apparently yet to understand, let alone learn to be sensitive to. Speedy relief and some clear demonstration of the caring hand of the state are immediate actions necessary to ameliorate grief, but these are rarely found together. It's high time the government pulled up its baggy socks on disaster management policies, strategies and procedures.

In this case, the administration has appeared lackadaisical from the start. Bhopal was the single largest industrial accident in the world that ultimately affected over five lakh people, and the government only got \$470 million as compensation! This is a paltry amount, especially when measured against the billion dollar payouts to American victims of similar accidents. Quite clearly, it isn't over yet. The government must actively push cases against both Warren Anderson and Dow Chemicals, the present owners of Union Carbide, and at least get the firm to thoroughly clean up the abandoned Bhopal complex that is still leaking toxins into the environment. That much is owed to the people of the city. Ultimately, no one doubts the immense value of the compensation that will be paid to the Bhopal survivors. But we must understand that this particular decision is more about the delivery, however delayed, of some justice to a struggling few than any compensatory largesse being doled out to them.

PM okays task force for floods

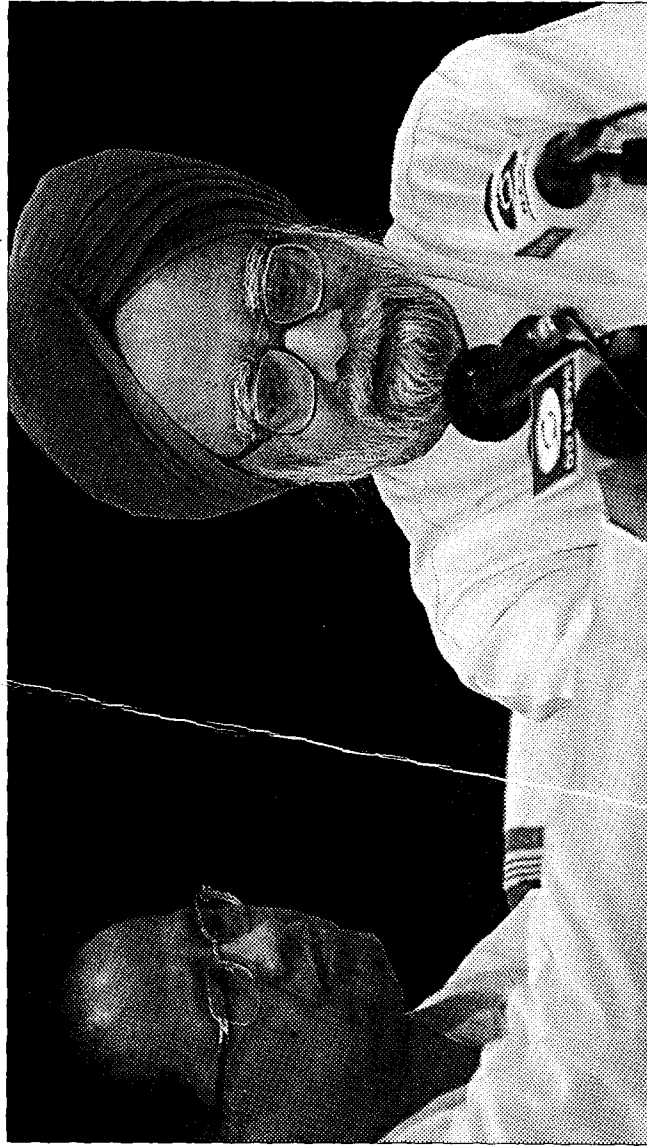
HT Correspondent & Agencies
Guwahati, July 20.

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh today conducted an aerial survey of some districts of flood-hit Assam to assess the damage caused by the worst-ever deluge that has killed 107 people till date and displaced more than 11 million in the state.

Singh arrived here by a special aircraft in the morning and immediately took off in an army helicopter. "I am here for a first-hand account of the floods," he told reporters in Guwahati. Hunger and diseases have been stalking Assam ever since the floods began in mid-June. Three people drowned overnight and two more died of water-borne diseases taking the death toll to 107.

After the inspection, calling the situation as "very serious and grave... I have seen with my own eyes" the Prime Minister announced a high-powered task force to be formed that will report to the Centre within six months on means to find a permanent solution to the recurring flood problem across the country. The task force would evolve a holistic view of the flood problem and suggest short, medium and long-term solutions.

The north-eastern states' dread of being devastated by excess water



FLOOD OF CONCERN Assam CM Tarun Gogoi with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at a press meet in Guwahati. PTI

released by China and Bhutan has prompted Singh to "take up the matter" with Beijing and Thimpu soon. Excess water drained out of reservoirs and river systems in Bhutan and Tibet since July 10 is believed to be the cause for the devastation in Arunachal and the

Brahmaputra Valley. Bhutan later in the day denied the possibility of breaches in its reservoirs having an impact on floods down the valley. He also announced that a Central team would soon visit the state to assess the damage caused by the floods and facilitate further

relief and sanctioned a Rs 46-crore grant from the Calamity Relief Fund and another Rs 55 crore from the Calamity Relief Contingency Fund. An additional Rs 90 crores will be sanctioned in the next half of the Tenth Five Year Plan flood protection measures.

Asked if Assam's floods are being regarded as a national problem, he said: "Whether national or not, the Centre has to take an active interest in the state."

He also praised the role of the army and Air Force in flood relief operations and urged them to continue the good work.

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, who was with the Prime Minister, told reporters: "We expect the PM to announce a liberal grant to help us tide over the crisis."

In neighbouring Arunachal, the situation worsened today with inundation of many fresh areas, mostly in six districts, four of which — Lohit, East Siang, Lower Dibang and Anjaw — remained cut off for more than two weeks following heavy landslides.

Tripura remained cut off from the rest of the country for the 12th day today as prices of essential commodities kept spiralling. In Meghalaya, NH44 is out of reach with continuing heavy rain causing landslides in Sonarpur.

Boat capsizes

A CISF jawan was reported missing when the relief boat in which he was travelling with 18 others capsized in Pagladia river in Nalbari district of Assam today. Eighteen people were rescued by locals.

Court orders relief for Bhopal gas victims

● Rs. 1,503 crores lying with RBI to be disbursed

By J. Venkatesan

Relief for Bhopal Gas Victims in Sight

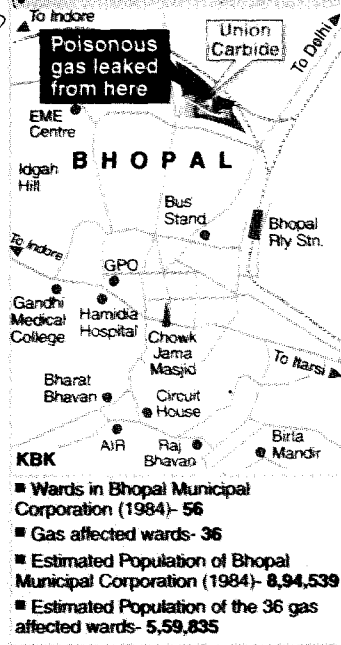
NEW DELHI, JULY 19. The Supreme Court today asked the Centre to disburse among the five lakh Bhopal gas victims the relief amount of Rs. 1,503 crores (with interest) lying with the Reserve Bank of India.

The money, given by Union Carbide, under a settlement with the Government of India, amounts to \$ 470 million.

A Bench of Justices Shivaraj V. Patil and B.N. Srikrishna directed that the money be distributed on a *pro rata* basis among the disaster victims, who include the kith and kin of the dead and the injured. It ordered the Welfare Commissioner of the Bhopal Gas Relief Fund to file a report on the manner in which the money was distributed. It posted the matter for further hearing after two months.

Union Carbide had given \$ 470 million as its liability towards the victims in 1989, and the Supreme Court had directed that the money be put in a dollar account. This amount with interest has now accumulated to Rs. 1,503 crores.

The Bench passed the order after hearing counsel S. Muralidhar appearing for petitioners, Abdul Samad Khan and 35 others of Bhopal. He argued that the compensation was too meagre in comparison with the minimum amounts contemplated to be paid in terms of the settlement. Further, many of the



Night of Dec. 2-3, 1984

- Methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from Union Carbide factory as Bhopal slept
- Immediate toll stood at over 3000 with thousands impaired in various degrees. Toll continued to mount over the coming years
- Union Carbide deposited US \$ 470 million with Reserve Bank of India in settlement of claims in Feb. 1989

Over the years part of the money distributed to victims, but a large amount is held up due to legal complications

July 19, 2004

- Supreme Court orders the full amount, which has grown to Rs 1,503 crores with interest, to be released to victims

claimants had to wait for over 12 to 18 years after the disaster to receive the meagre compensation and without interest.

The petitioners submitted that the present position, according to the records of the office of the Welfare Commissioner, was that a total of 10,29,431 claims were received up to March 31, 2002 of which 10,29,254 were adjudicated. Of these, 5,66,786 cases had been awarded compensation to the tune of Rs. 1151.51 crores and the balance available for

disbursement was about Rs. 1,503 crores. The petition sought a mandamus to the Union of India to distribute the remaining amount out of the compensation money retained by it among the victims and to ensure the payment on interest on the amount of compensation awarded to the victims in individual claims from the date of accident till the date of payment to the claimants at a rate determinable in accordance with the provisions of Interest Act, 1978.

THE HINDU

20 JUL 2004


২০ বছর পরে গ্যাস-দুর্গতদের জন্য ক্ষতিপূরণ

নয়াদিল্লি, ১৯ জুলাই: কুড়ি বছর আগে ডিসেম্বর মাসের এক শীতের রাতে ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইডের বিষ গ্যাসে তাঁদের অনেকেই হারিয়েছিলেন প্রিয়জনকে। আরও অনেকে প্রজন্মের পর প্রজন্ম বয়ে বেড়াচ্ছেন বিকলাঙ্গতার অভিশাপ। কুড়ি বছর ধরে আইনি লড়াই লড়তে লড়তে কালের নিয়মে ক্ষয়ে গিয়েছেন অনেকেই। তবু অভিশপ্ত সেই দিনের স্মৃতি আজও যাঁদের তাড়া করে বেড়ায় তাঁদের আজ 'আনন্দের' দিন।

কুড়ি বছর আগে ভোপাল গ্যাস দুর্ঘটনায় হতাহতদের পরিবারের হাতে ক্ষতিপূরণের টাকা পৌঁছে দেওয়ার নির্দেশ দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। ১৯৮৪ সালের ৩ ডিসেম্বর ভোপালে ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইডের রাসায়নিক কারখানায় বিষাক্ত মিথাইল আইসোসায়ানেট গ্যাস লিক করার ফলে প্রায় হারান ১৫ হাজার মানুষ, গুরুতর অসুস্থ হন প্রায় পাঁচ লক্ষ মানুষ। দুর্ঘটনার ক্ষতিপূরণ হিসেবে ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইড কর্তৃপক্ষ ১৯৮৯ সালে ৪৭ কোটি ডলার জমা দিয়েছিলেন সুপ্রিম কোর্টে। রিজার্ভ ব্যাঙ্কে সেই জমা টাকা সুদে আসলে এখন বেড়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে ১৫০৩ কোটি টাকায়।

বিচারপতি শিবরাজ ভি পাটিল ও বি এন শ্রীকৃষ্ণকে নিয়ে গঠিত সুপ্রিম কোর্টের এক ডিভিশন বেঞ্চ আজ নির্দেশ দিয়েছে অবিলম্বে ওই টাকা নিহত ও অসুস্থদের আত্মীয়-পরিবারবর্গের হাতে তুলে দিতে। প্রত্যেকটি পরিবারে ক্ষতির পরিমাণের আনুপাতিক হার অনুযায়ী এই টাকা ভাগ করে দিতে হবে বলেও জানিয়ে দিয়েছে কোর্ট। এর আগে ওই টাকার থেকে ৮৬ কোটি টাকা হতাহতদের মধ্যে বিতরণ করা হয়েছিল। কিন্তু তা ক্ষতির নিরিখে যথেষ্ট নয় বলে জানিয়ে দিয়েছে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট। ১৯৮৫ সালে তৈরি ভোপাল গ্যাস বিপর্যয় (দাবির প্রক্রিয়াকরণ) আইনে গঠিত ওয়েলফেয়ার কমিশনারকে এই টাকা বিতরণের দায়িত্ব দিয়েছে কোর্ট। ক্ষতিপূরণের টাকা বিতরণের কোনও নির্দিষ্ট সময়সীমা না দিলেও আগামী তিন মাসে

২০ বছর
এক বালকে



**We won't let you
bury justice.**

**EXTRADITE ANDERSON,
THE BUTCHER OF BHOPAL.**

✓ ৩ ডিসেম্বর, ১৯৮৪:
গভীর রাতে ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইডের প্ল্যান্ট থেকে ছড়িয়ে পড়ে বিষাক্ত মিথাইল আইসোসায়ানেট গ্যাস।

✓ চার মাস পরে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার সংসদে বলে, মৃতের সংখ্যা ১৪৩০। বর্তমান হিসাবে মৃত ১৫,০০০, আহত পাঁচ লক্ষাধিক।

✓ ৮৯ সালে আদালতের নির্দেশে ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইড ৪৭ কোটি ডলার ক্ষতিপূরণ হিসেবে জমা দেয় সুপ্রিম কোর্টে।

✓ '০৪ সালে সেই জমা টাকা সুদে আসলে বেড়ে দাঁড়ায় ১৫০৩ কোটি টাকায়।

✓ ১৯ জুলাই, '০৪: পুরো টাকা হতাহতের পরিবারবর্গকে দেওয়ার নির্দেশ সুপ্রিম কোর্টের।

বৃহত্তম শিল্পগোষ্ঠীর অন্যতম ছিল ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইড। ভোপালে তাঁদের কীটনাশক কারখানাটির ৫১ শতাংশ মালিকানা ছিল এই শিল্পগোষ্ঠীর হাতে আর ২৬ শতাংশের মালিকানা ভারত সরকারের হাতে। ১৯৮৪ সালে দুর্ঘটনার বছরেই তাদের লাভের অঙ্ক ছাড়িয়ে গিয়েছিল ৯৫০ কোটি ডলার। কিন্তু ভোপালে কার্বাইডের রাসায়নিক কারখানায় যে নিরাপত্তার যথেষ্ট বন্দোবস্ত নেই তা নিয়ে বারবার রিপোর্ট দেওয়া সত্ত্বেও কোনও ব্যবস্থা নেয়নি ইউনিয়ন কার্বাইড কর্তৃপক্ষ। ১৯৮৪ সালের ৩ ডিসেম্বর রাতে ভোপালের কারখানাটির একটি প্ল্যান্টে বিষাক্ত মিথাইল আইসোসায়ানেট গ্যাস লিক করে। কারখানা সংলগ্ন অঞ্চল ও প্রায় গোটা ভোপাল শহর ঢাকা পড়ে যায় বিষাক্ত গ্যাসের আশ্রয়ণে। কারখানাটির চারপাশে গজিয়ে ওঠা ঘিঞ্জি বস্তির অসংখ্য মানুষ মারা যান ঘুমের মধ্যেই। স্বাসকষ্ট, কাশি ও চোখ জ্বালা করা নিয়ে বহু মানুষ ঘর ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে এলেও মারা যান কিছু ক্ষণের মধ্যেই।

প্রাথমিক ভাবে সংসদে জানানো হয় দুর্ঘটনায় ১৪৩০ জন মারা গিয়েছেন। কিন্তু পরে মৃতের সংখ্যা দাঁড়ায় ১৫ হাজারেরও বেশি। অনেকেই পরবর্তী সময়ে ক্ষতিকারক গ্যাসের রাসায়নিকের প্রতিক্রিয়ায় মারা যান। এ ছাড়াও প্রায় পাঁচ লক্ষ মানুষ অসুস্থ ও বিকলাঙ্গ হয়ে যান। রাসায়নিকের প্রতিক্রিয়ায় পরবর্তী সময় জন্ম হয় বহু বিকলাঙ্গ শিশুর।

মধ্যে কমিশনকে এ ব্যাপারে রিপোর্ট পেশ করতে নির্দেশ দিয়েছে আদালত।

আদালতের রায়কে স্বাগত জানিয়েছেন গ্যাস বিপর্যয়ের শিকার বহু মানুষ। দুর্ঘটনায় ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের স্বার্থরক্ষার জন্য গঠিত বেশ কয়েকটি সংগঠনের নেতারা জানিয়েছেন এই রায়ে প্রকৃত ক্ষতিগ্রস্তরা উপকৃত

হবেন। গ্যাস দুর্ঘটনের একটি সংগঠনের প্রধান রশিদা রাই জানান নির্দেশ কার্যকর হলে গ্যাস দুর্গত বহু মানুষের জীবনই পাল্টে যেতে পারে। পাশাপাশি এই টাকা যাতে নয়ছয় হতে না পারে তার ব্যবস্থা নিতেও অনুরোধ জানিয়েছে সংগঠনগুলি।

আটের দশকে আমেরিকা তথা বিশ্বের

Water dispute at Kalam door

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 19: The Centre is likely to seek Presidential intervention to resolve the inter-state water-sharing dispute that threatens to snowball into a crisis within and outside the government after the Punjab government last week decided to annul all water-sharing agreements with Rajasthan and Haryana.

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) held at the Prime Minister's residence this evening reviewed the situation and the outcome of successive meetings that Manmohan Singh had with the chief ministers of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The official announcement of a Presidential reference has been deferred till the formality of a request to Rashtrapati Bhavan is completed.

Punjab's decision to annul the water-sharing pacts does not mean that it can restrict the existing flow of water from its territory to Haryana and Punjab but it announces the state government's intention not to complete the Sutlej Yamuna Link canal that would take "surplus" water away at the cost of the state's farmers.

A Presidential reference means that the Centre, through the President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, will seek legal opinion from a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court on the validity of the Punjab government's stand. The exact wording of the Centre's request will determine the advice the Centre would be seeking.

After meetings with the Prime Minister last week, Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje and Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala had said the Prime Minister had heard their grievances but they were exploring the option of going to the Supreme Court challenging the Punjab action. However, so far the states have not yet sought legal recourse.

Seeking a Presidential reference can mean a reprieve for the Centre on the political hot potato that the water-sharing dispute has become after Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh said he would not back out despite requests.

In the Rajya Sabha, Union law minister Hans Raj Bhardwaj said the Centre was studying all issues raised by Punjab's annulment of the river water-sharing agreements with neighbouring states. He said Parliament would be taken into confidence.

20 JUL 2004

জলবন্টন বিবাদে রাষ্ট্রপতির দ্বারস্থ হবে কেন্দ্র

সুমন চট্টোপাধ্যায়

পঞ্জাব সরকার এক তরফা ভাবে অতীতের সব জল-বন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করে দেওয়ায় যে সঙ্কটের সৃষ্টি হয়েছে, তার নিরসনে গোটা বিষয়টি রাষ্ট্রপতির বিবেচনার জন্য পাঠাতে চলেছে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। আজ, সোমবার, কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার রাজনৈতিক বিষয়ক কমিটির (সি সি পি এ) বৈঠক ডেকেছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। সম্ভবত সেখানেই এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হচ্ছে। বিষয়টি রাষ্ট্রপতির বিবেচনার জন্য পাঠানো হলে তিনি এ ব্যাপারে একটি সাংবিধানিক বেঞ্চ গঠন করার জন্য সুপ্রিম কোর্টকে অনুরোধ করতে পারেন। জল-যুদ্ধ নিয়ে কংগ্রেসের অভ্যন্তরীণ সঙ্কট তীব্র হওয়ায় কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার রাষ্ট্রপতির মাধ্যমেই তার নিষ্পত্তির চেষ্টা করছে।

অমরিন্দর সিংহের সরকার আহিন করে অতীতের জলবন্টন চুক্তিগুলি বাতিল করার পরে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের তরফে রাজস্থান

এবং হরিয়ানা— দু'টি সরকারকেই অনুরোধ করা হয়েছিল, তারা যেন সুপ্রিম কোর্টে গিয়ে এই সিদ্ধান্তকে চ্যালেঞ্জ জানায়। কিন্তু কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের এই অনুরোধে দু'টি সরকারের কেউই সাড়া দেয়নি। তার প্রথম কারণ, দু'টি রাজ্যের কোনওটিতেই কংগ্রেস সরকার নেই। রাজস্থানে বসুন্ধরা রাজ্যে সিদ্ধিয়ার নেতৃত্বাধীন বি জে পি সরকার আর হরিয়ানায় ওম প্রকাশ চৌটারার ইন্ডিয়ান ন্যাশনাল লোকদলের সরকার। ফলে এদের কারওরই কংগ্রেসকে এই সঙ্কট থেকে বের করার কোনও রকম দায় নেই। বরং অমরিন্দর সিংহদের অনমনীয় মনোভাবের জন্য মনমোহন সিংহ ও তাঁর সরকার যত বিপাকে পড়বে, অস্বস্তিতে পড়বে, নিজেদের রাজ্যে ততই রাজনৈতিক ফয়দা তুলতে পারবে। বসুন্ধরা রাজ্যে কিংবা চৌটারার। এর মধ্যে কিছু দিন পরেই হরিয়ানায় বিধানসভা নির্বাচন। ফলে চৌটারাদের বাড়তি সুবিধা না করে দতে

মরিয়াকে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার রাষ্ট্রপতির হস্তক্ষেপে বিষয়টির দ্রুত নিষ্পত্তি চাইছে।

রাজ্যে নিজের পিঠ বাঁচাতে জলবন্টন চুক্তি নাকচ সংক্রান্ত আইন পাস করে কেন্দ্রে কংগ্রেসের নেতৃত্বাধীন সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল জেটে সরকারকে রাজনৈতিক সঙ্কটের মুখে ঠেলে দিয়েছেন অমরিন্দর। ১৯৮১ সালে স্বাক্ষরিত জলবন্টন চুক্তিতে শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল তৈরির কথা বলা হয়েছিল। হরিয়ানা তাদের অংশে খাল কেটে ফেললেও রাজ্যে প্রবল বিরোধিতার কারণে পঞ্জাব নিজেদের এলাকায় বিন্দুমাত্র কাজ করেনি।

এই অবস্থায় সুপ্রিম কোর্ট কেন্দ্রকে গত ৪ জুন পঞ্জাবে খাল কাটার নির্দেশ দেয়। সেই নির্দেশ পাওয়ার পরে কেন্দ্রীয় পূর্ত দফতরকে কাজ শুরু করতে বলে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। অবস্থা বেগতিক দেখে তড়িঘড়ি আইন পাস করিয়ে ফেলেন অমরিন্দর। কংগ্রেসি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী হওয়া সত্ত্বেও এ ব্যাপারে প্রধানমন্ত্রী তো দূরস্থান,

সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গাঁধীর সঙ্গে পর্যন্ত কথা বলেননি তিনি।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে জলবন্টন বিবাদ মেটানোর লক্ষ্যে সংশ্লিষ্ট সব ক'টি রাজ্য, অর্থাৎ, পঞ্জাব, হরিয়ানা, রাজস্থান ও হিমাচলপ্রদেশের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে ডাকেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। সেখানেও অমরিন্দরকে নমনীয় করা যায়নি। তিনি ফের জানিয়ে দেন, ইরাবতী-বিপাশার জলবন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করার যে সিদ্ধান্ত রাজ্য সরকার নিয়েছে, তা থেকে সরে আসার কোনও প্রস্তাব নেই। তাঁর কথায়, “পঞ্জাব অতীতে এই রাজ্যগুলিকে সঙ্কটের সময় জল দিয়ে সাহায্য করেছে। কিন্তু শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল তৈরি হলে পঞ্জাবের প্রায় ৯ লক্ষ একর জমি নির্জলা হয়ে যাবে। পথে বসবে ১৬ লক্ষ কৃষক পরিবার।” প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পরামর্শের তোয়াক্কা না করার ব্যাখ্যা দিয়ে অমরিন্দর বলেন, রাজ্যের স্বার্থ রক্ষা করার জন্য তিনি শতকরা একশো ভাগ ‘উচিত কাজ’ করেছেন।

Floods wreak havoc in Bihar

Press Trust of India

PATNA, July 16. — The flood situation in 16 north Bihar districts worsened today as swollen rivers inundated fresh areas, overtopped national highways and railway tracks and the death toll rose to 60 with six more deaths reported from Sitamarhi and Muzaffarpur districts since yesterday.

A Muzaffarpur report said flood waters of the Burhi Gandak river, which had breached its embankment at Dardha village yesterday submerging vast cropland and human habitation, today inundated the railway track near Dholi in the district forcing east central railway authorities to divert a number of trains reaching and originating from Hajipur.

Railway minister Mr Lalu Prasad, who made an aerial survey of the flood-ravaged districts, said due to destruction of crops in the current spell of floods, people would be provided with food grains free of cost till the next cropping season. "In view of large-scale destruction of crops due

to flood, people in the flood-hit areas of Bihar will be provided with foodgrains as part of relief till the next cropping season," Mr Prasad told reporters. Mr Prasad said he had a talk with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who assured him of assistance.

Meanwhile, a Central Water Commission Communique press release said that rivers the Burhi Gandak, the Bagmati, the Ganga, the Adhwara group of rivers, the Kosi, the Gandak, the Kamalabalan and the Mahananda were flowing above danger levels.

Assam situation grim: The situation in Assam is grim with the rivers, including the Brahmaputra, flowing above the danger level. The death toll is 52 and affected nearly 75 lakh people while 25 of the 27 districts remained under water.

Meghalaya reeling: With no recession of flood water in Meghalaya's Garo hills region, authorities fear spread of water-borne diseases. West Garo Hills senior official Mr S Jagannathan said flood water has not receded in more than 45 villages.



An IAF helicopter rescue a woman and her daughter. In Darbhanga on Friday. — AFP

D-word puts govt in a fix

NEW DELHI, July 16. — It may already be too late for Rajasthan. Vidarbha and Marathwada in Maharashtra and Telengana in Andhra Pradesh are in danger, too. Grim prognoses are being made for the rest of North, North-West and South India.

Officials in the agriculture ministry aren't using the D-word as yet but drought contingencies are being prepared. Five teams from the ministry sent out to assess rainfall levels have reported back that 122 districts in the country have rainfall deficiency of 40 per cent or above. The benchmark for "severe moisture stress" starts at 40 per cent deficiency. — SNS

জল-যুদ্ধ নিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টেরই দ্বারস্থ কেন্দ্র

নয়াদিল্লি, ১৫ জুলাই: শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল নিয়ে সঙ্কট কাটাতে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের দ্বারস্থ হল কেন্দ্র। অতীতের যাবতীয় জলবন্টন চুক্তি নাকচ করে পঞ্জাব যে আইন তৈরি করেছে, তার প্রেক্ষিতে কী করা উচিত শীর্ষ আদালতের কাছে জানতে চেয়েছে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার। আজই এই সংক্রান্ত আবেদন সুপ্রিম কোর্টে পেশ করা হয়েছে। প্রধানমন্ত্রী অবশ্য জানিয়েছেন সরকার সংবিধান মেনেই এ ব্যাপারে সব রাজ্যের প্রতিই সমান দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি নিয়ে কাজ করবে। এ দিকে, পঞ্জাব যে দৃষ্টান্ত তৈরি করেছে তা দেশের পক্ষে বিপজ্জনক বলে মন্তব্য করেছেন হিমাচলপ্রদেশের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বীরভদ্র সিংহ। তিনি বলেন, সব রাজ্যই যদি এ ভাবে জলবন্টন চুক্তি নাকচ করে দেয় তা হলে দেশ জুড়ে বিশৃঙ্খলা দেখা দেবে। পঞ্জাবের পদক্ষেপের ফলে হিমাচলের স্বার্থ যাতে বিঘ্নিত না হয় সে জন্য সব রকম ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে বলেও আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন তিনি।

নিজের পিঠ বাঁচাতে জলবন্টন চুক্তি নাকচ সংক্রান্ত আইন পাস করে কেন্দ্রের কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন জোট সরকারকে সঙ্কটে ঠেলে দিয়েছেন অমরিন্দর। ১৯৮১ সালে স্বাক্ষরিত জলবন্টন চুক্তিতে শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল তৈরির কথা বলা হয়েছিল। হরিয়ানা তাদের অংশে খাল কেটে ফেললেও রাজ্যে প্রবল বিরোধিতায় পঞ্জাব নিজেদের এলাকায় বিন্দুমাত্র কাজ করেনি। এ দিকে, হরিয়ানা আজ জানিয়েছে কেন্দ্র যদি এ ব্যাপারে ব্যবস্থা নিতে ব্যর্থ হয় তবে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের দ্বারস্থ হবে রাজ্য।

এই অবস্থায় সুপ্রিম কোর্ট কেন্দ্রকে গত ৪ জুন পঞ্জাবে খাল কাটার নির্দেশ দেয়। সেই নির্দেশ পাওয়ার পরে কেন্দ্রীয় পূর্ত দফতরকে কাজ শুরু করতে বলে মনমোহন সরকার। বেগতিক দেখে তড়িঘড়ি আইন পাস করিয়ে ফেলেন অমরিন্দর। কংগ্রেসি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী হওয়া সত্ত্বেও এ ব্যাপারে প্রধানমন্ত্রী তো দূরস্থান, সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গাঁধীর সঙ্গে পর্যন্ত কথা বলেননি তিনি। কাল সঙ্কট নিরসনের লক্ষ্যে দিল্লিতে পঞ্জাব, হরিয়ানা, রাজস্থান ও হিমাচলপ্রদেশ এই চার রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর নিয়ে বৈঠক করেন মনমোহন। কিন্তু নরম করা যায়নি অমরিন্দরকে। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর পরামর্শের তোয়াক্কা না করে তিনি জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন রাজ্যের স্বার্থ রক্ষা করতে তিনি উচিত কাজই করেছেন। — পি টি আই

15 die in Assam landslides

Guwahati
16/7

Statesman News Service

GUWAHATI, July 15. — At least 15 people died and over 20 injured in landslides here late last night following heavy rains that lashed the city and its outskirts for over three hours.

Deputy commissioner Mr AK Absar Hazarika said heavy rain triggered landslides at several hillocks in and around the city, including Nilachal Hills on which the famous Kamakhya shrine is located. The Army has been pressed into operation to rescue those trapped under the debris.

The landslides claimed six persons at Durga Sarovar at the foot of Nilachal Hills, three at Fatasil-Ambari and one at Pubsarania in the heart of the city. Five of the dead have been identified as Biplab Thakuria, Rabin Kalita, Abinash Sharma, Singhson Paswan and Puju Kumari Paswan. Scores of houses along the hill slopes at several places have been buried under mudslides.

The rain also brought flash floods, inundating over 60 per cent of the city and bringing life to a halt in the early hours today. Office-goers and school children were forced to remain indoors, while trading at Guwahati Tea Auction Centre in Dispur drew a blank as buyers and brokers failed to make it to the auction centre. Guwahati Doordarshan Kendra complex was under waist-deep water in the morning.

The flood situation remains grim across the state with the Brahmaputra and the Barak and their tributaries still flowing above the danger level in most parts of the state. The flood has affected more than 50 lakh people.

Most of the 430 sq km-Kaziranga



Army men retrieve a body after the landslide in Guwahati on Thursday. — AFP

National Park, home of the endangered one-horned rhinoceros, is under flood water.

Several animals are feared to be drowned. Six hog deer and two py-

thons were run over by vehicles on National Highway 37 that passes through the sanctuary. Park officials said flood waters had submerged around 50 camps.

Rivers swell in East as toll climbs to 94

Press Trust of India
Patna, July 15

FLOOD FURY in Bihar and Assam continued unabated today with 13 new deaths reported in the last 24 hours. This takes the total death toll to 94.

In Bihar, swollen rivers continued to engulf fresh areas in 16 districts where the death toll mounted to 51, with four deaths reported from Araria district. A report from Muzaffarpur said the Burhi Gandak had breached its embankment at Dardha, inundating habitation and large tracts of cropland in Salaha, Baikatpur, Dardha, Mohammedpur, Musahri, and Prahadpur villages.

Flood water is pounding heavily

against NH-28 and the low-lying areas of Muzaffarpur are under threat. Even as Sitamarhi, Sheohar and Darbhanga remained cut off from the rest of the state for the fifth day in a row, nine Army helicopters and four Army columns with doctors are assisting the administration in relief and rescue operations. Four choppers are on standby for emergency. Several rivers in north Bihar are also flowing above danger level.

The situation is no better in Assam, following incessant rains in the catchment areas. Heavy landslides in Guwahati claimed twelve lives today, taking the toll to 43.

Road communication on NH-31, NH-37 and NH-53 remains disrupted in several places due to over-

topping, while rail links have been disrupted in the north bank of the river due to flooding of tracks. NF Railway GM Shyam Kumar convened a high-level meeting here to review the situation.

Tripura remained cut off from the rest of the country for the sixth day with landslides blocking the Assam-Agartala NH-44 at Sonarpur, Meghalaya, and incessant rainfall delaying repair work, official sources said. Sources said 300 people and five bulldozers have been working round the clock to clear the debris at Sonarpur, but it will take some more time because of the heavy rain.

Rail connectivity has also been partly disrupted at Badarpura and Karimganj, sources said.



NECK DEEP IN TROUBLED WATERS
In Assam's Birsingh village.

46 JUL 2001

Punjab on the rocks: no water, only ice

■ RAMASWAMY R. IYER

THE Punjab Assembly legislation terminating all previous agreements and accords on river waters is a shocking and probably unprecedented development. The noise generated by it will surely reverberate in the media and in the political arena in the coming days and weeks. Before considering the implications of this development, let us take a brief look at the historical background. In the 1950s, while negotiations with Pakistan were still going on over the sharing of the Indus system, planning began towards the full utilisation of the eastern rivers Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.

Through certain links the waters of all three rivers were sought to be pooled together over a period of time. In 1953, the Central Water and Power Commission prepared a preliminary report for a project that eventually became the Rajasthan Canal Project. In 1955 the Union Minister of Works and Power helped in securing an agreement on the allocations to Jammu and Kashmir (0.65 million acre feet or MAF), Pepsu (1.30 MAF), Punjab (5.90 MAF) and Rajasthan (8.0 MAF) of the surplus waters (after excluding the pre-Partition use of 3.13 MAF) of Ravi and Beas, then estimated as 15.85 MAF.

The share of Punjab (7.2 MAF with Pepsu merged) had to be divided between Punjab and Haryana after the reorganisation of States. This ran into difficulty, but in 1976,

the Government of India settled the dispute by a Notification under Section 78 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act 1966, allocating 3.5 MAF to each State, with the remaining 0.2 MAF going to Delhi.

In order to help Haryana to make full use of its allocation, the construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal was proposed. Punjab was not happy with the decision and filed a suit in the Supreme Court, and Haryana too filed a suit to compel Punjab to implement the decision. In 1981, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi brought about an agreement among the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. Under that Agreement the allocations to Punjab and Haryana were 4.22 MAF and 3.5 MAF respectively (out of a total availability which had been revised from 15.85 to 17.17 MAF). Punjab and Haryana withdrew their petitions from the Supreme Court.

However, the dispute continued and figured in the discussions between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sant Longowal. The Accord between them of 24 July 1985 includes a paragraph regarding the sharing of Ravi-Beas Waters, and it was in pursuance of that Accord that The Eradi Tribunal was set up. The Tribunal gave its award in 1987 allocating 5.00 MAF to Punjab and 3.83 MAF to Haryana, thus increasing the shares of both states.

It was able to do this by taking into account some additional availability of waters "below the rim sta-

tion". At that time, it was found politically difficult to gazette the Award because it was unacceptable to Punjab. A reference back to the Tribunal was made as provided for under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act 1956, and the outcome in the form

there are two or more parties can be



Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh after meeting the PM in Delhi

of a clarificatory or supplementary report is still awaited. Moreover, Punjab has all along been stoutly opposed to the construction of the SYL Canal which was meant to enable Haryana to use its share of the waters, and it still remains incomplete. Haryana has been going to court over this, and the Supreme Court has been asking the Central Government to ensure the expeditious completion of the SYL

strike at the heart of federalism. Secondly, the Central Government has been deeply involved in these matters at every stage, and cannot now keep silent when all those agreements are sought to be annulled by the Punjab Govern-

ment. The Chief Minister of Punjab, answering a question on TV, said that this action was intended to strengthen the legal case of the state! That is an extraordinary argument. The Rajasthan and Haryana Governments will now doubtless seek the intervention of the Supreme Court. The Central Government will also have to play its role, both under the ISWD Act and under the Constitution. Thus the recent developments in Punjab have serious implications of diverse kinds. Punjab may have a strong sense of grievance over the sharing of river waters. So has Haryana over the non-completion of the SYL canal. If Punjab asserts its claims to the totality of the Ravi-Beas waters, the large allocation of 8.0 MAF to Rajasthan is at risk, as is the small allocation of 0.2 MAF to Delhi.

These are matters to be resolved by agreement, conciliation, mediation or adjudication and not by unilateral action. We shall doubtless be told that there were strong political compulsions behind the Punjab action, but can we accept the position that those compulsions justify actions that are unlawful, or contrary to the spirit of federalism or in defiance of the Supreme Court?

So far, we have proceeded on

the basis of claims made by the states. Punjab's grievance arises from its conviction that it needs more water, but does it? Already irrigation in Punjab has over the years resulted in a significant incidence of water-logging and salinity. Should they ask for more water or learn to manage water better? One is not necessarily suggesting, as some have done, that Punjab should shift from wheat and rice to other crops.

Such decisions are influenced by a number of economic factors. One can, however, suggest that they should try and grow whatever they want to grow with less water and get the maximum productivity per unit of water. That applies to Haryana too, and to Rajasthan as well: economic development in arid zones and desert areas should surely take forms that are not water-intensive. With proper water management all round, the dispute may disappear or become more manageable.

In the case of the Cauvery dispute, a non-official initiative led by the Madras Institute of Development Studies has managed to bring a number of farmers from the contending states together, promote better mutual understanding, and build friendly, constructive and harmonious relations at that level. This may not immediately provide an answer to the dispute, but it will certainly facilitate that process. Perhaps there is little scope for such an initiative in the Punjab-Haryana case, but should not a group of eminent people respected in both states at least make an attempt?

The author is former Secretary, Water Resources, and a leading expert on water resources issues

অমরিন্দর একরোখা মনমোহনের বৈঠকেও জল-বিবাদ মিটল না

নয়াদিব্লি, ১৪ জুলাই: জলবন্টন নিয়ে সঙ্কট নিরসনের লক্ষ্যে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ পঞ্জাব, হরিয়ানা, রাজস্থান ও হিমাচল প্রদেশের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের রাজধানীতে ডেকে দীর্ঘ সময় বৈঠক করলেও পঞ্জাবের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী অমরিন্দর সিংহকে নমনীয় করা গেল না। বুধবার রাত পর্যন্ত এই সমস্যার কোনও সমাধানসূত্র পাওয়া যায়নি। অমরিন্দর ফের সাফ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, ইরাবতী-বিপাশার জলবন্টন চুক্তি বাতিল করার যে-সিদ্ধান্ত রাজ্য সরকার নিয়েছে, তা থেকে সরে আসার প্রশ্ন নেই। তাঁর কথায়, “পঞ্জাব অতীতে এই রাজ্যগুলিকে সঙ্কটের সময় জল দিয়ে সাহায্য করেছে। কিন্তু শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগ খাল তৈরি হয়ে গেলে পঞ্জাবের প্রায় ন'লক্ষ একর জমি নির্জলা হয়ে যাবে। পথে বসবে ১৬ লক্ষ কৃষক পরিবার।”

পঞ্জাব বিধানসভা বিল পাশ করে একতরফা ভাবে রাজস্থান ও হরিয়ানার সঙ্গে জলবন্টনের সব চুক্তি বাতিল করে দেওয়ায় কেন্দ্রে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার বড় রকমের সঙ্কটে পড়ে গিয়েছে। হরিয়ানা-সহ অন্য প্রতিবেশীদের জলের প্রাপ্য অংশ দিতে নারাজ পঞ্জাব সরকার। ১৯৮১ সালের জলবন্টন চুক্তি অনুযায়ী ৯২ কিলোমিটার লম্বা শতক্র-যমুনা সংযোগকারী খাল (এস ওয়াই এল) খননের কাজ হরিয়ানার এলাকায় আশির দশকেই শেষ হয়ে যায়। কিন্তু পঞ্জাবের মধ্যে এই কাজ করতে গিয়ে উগ্রপন্থীদের রোষের মুখে পড়েছে সরকার। ফলে তার পর থেকে এই খাল খননের কাজ আর এক ছটাকও এগোয়নি। সম্প্রতি সুপ্রিম কোর্ট এই কাজের দায়িত্ব কেন্দ্রের হাতে তুলে দেওয়ার নির্দেশ দেয়। আর কোনও উপায় না দেখে বিধানসভায় বিল পাশ করে জলবন্টনের সব চুক্তি বাতিল করে পঞ্জাব। প্রতিবেশী রাজ্যকে জল দেওয়া রুখতে পঞ্জাব সরকার মরিয়া হয়ে লড়ছে। এ ব্যাপারে পঞ্জাবে বিরোধী অকালি দলও সরকারের পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছে। তা নিয়ে জেটসঙ্গী বিজেপি'র সঙ্গে তাদের মতবিরোধও তীব্র হচ্ছে।

কাবেরী জলবন্টন বিবাদে যেমন কেন্দ্র হস্তক্ষেপ করে থাকে, এস ওয়াই এল খাল বিতর্কের সমাধানসূত্র খুঁজতে তেমনই উদ্যোগী হয়েছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। এই সমস্যায় ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত রাজ্যগুলির পাশে দাঁড়ানোর আশ্বাস দিয়েছে কেন্দ্র। কালই পঞ্জাবের বিতর্কিত বিল নিয়ে উত্তপ্ত হয়ে ওঠে রাজ্যসভা। তার পরেই সংশ্লিষ্ট রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীদের বৈঠকে ডেকেছিলেন মনমোহন সিংহ। আজ দ্বিতীয় দিনেও এই সমাধানসূত্র খুঁজতে রাজধানীতে কর্মব্যস্ততা ছিল তুঙ্গে। এই পরিস্থিতিতে বিজেপি'র প্রতি কংগ্রেসের আর্জি এই স্পর্শকাতর বিষয়টি নিয়ে বিজেপি যেন রাজনীতি না করে। এই ব্যাপারে মনমোহন সিংহের হস্তক্ষেপ একটি সদর্শক প্রয়াস। কিন্তু অমরিন্দর যে মনমোহনদের পরামর্শের তোয়াক্কা করেননি তা তিনি নিজেই পরিষ্কার জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। তিনি কবুল করেছেন, এ বিষয়ে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে মনমোহন সিংহ বা কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সনিয়া গাঁধীর সঙ্গে তিনি কোনও পরামর্শই করেননি। এ ব্যাপারে তাঁর যুক্তি, সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে দলীয় শীর্ষ নেতৃবৃন্দের পরামর্শ নিতে গেলে তাঁদের অস্বস্তি বাড়ত বই কমত না। পাশাপাশি তিনি জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, যে পঞ্জাব বিধানসভায় আনা বিতর্কিত বিলটিকে ইতিমধ্যেই আইনে রূপান্তরিত করা হয়েছে।

পঞ্জাবের এই একরোখা মনোভাবের মুখে অন্য তিনটি রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রীরা তো প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করেইছেন, তা ছাড়া দলমতনির্ভেদে রাজ্যগুলি থেকে কেন্দ্রে দরবার করা শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। যেমন, আজ রাজস্থান কংগ্রেসের একটি প্রতিনিধি দল জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা পর্ষদের চেয়ারপার্সন সনিয়া গাঁধীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে। অমরিন্দরকে এ ব্যাপারে প্রয়োজনীয় নির্দেশ দেওয়া হবে বলে সনিয়া তাঁদের আশ্বস্ত করেছেন। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বসুন্ধরা রাজেককেও আজ একই আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহ। বসুন্ধরা অবশ্য পঞ্জাবের বিরুদ্ধে আইনি ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে বলেও জানিয়েছেন। বসুন্ধরা বলেন, “আইনের পথে যা করার আমরা তো করবই। কিন্তু প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে ধন্যবাদ, তিনি আমাদের কথা মন দিয়ে শুনেছেন এবং আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন, সব রাজ্যের জলের অধিকার রক্ষিত হবে।”

হিমাচল প্রদেশের কংগ্রেসের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বীরভদ্র সিংহও আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে দেখা করে তাঁর আশঙ্কার কথা জানিয়েছেন। তিনিও পঞ্জাব সরকারের একতরফা সিদ্ধান্তের তীব্র

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

জল-বিবাদ

প্রথম পাতার পর

নিন্দা করেছেন। তিনি বলেন, “এই পদ্ধতি যদি সফল হয়, তবে ভবিষ্যতে অনেকেই এমন সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে উৎসাহিত হবেন।” তাই তাঁর মতে, পঞ্জাবের সিদ্ধান্ত অত্যন্ত বিপজ্জনক দৃষ্টান্ত হয়ে দাঁড়াতে পারে।

হরিয়ানা সরকার অবশ্য পঞ্জাবের বিতর্কিত বিল নিয়ে সুপ্রিম কোর্টে যাওয়াই মনস্থ করেছে। প্রয়োজনে রাজ্যের মানুষ জলের জন্য রাস্তায় নামতে দ্বিধা করবেন না বলে রাজ্যের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ওম প্রকাশ চৌটালা আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন। তাঁর বক্তব্য, ১৯৮১ সালের চুক্তি নস্যাৎ করে দেওয়ার এই পরিকল্পনায় পঞ্জাব যদি সফল হয় তবে হরিয়ানার ২ লক্ষ হেক্টর জমি আর চাষযোগ্য থাকবে না।

অকালি-বিজেপি বিরোধ। পঞ্জাব সরকারের জল ভাগাভাগির সিদ্ধান্ত অমান্য করা নিয়ে বিজেপি এবং অকালি দলের মধ্যে মতবিরোধ দেখা দিয়েছে। বিজেপি এই সিদ্ধান্তের তীব্র বিরোধিতা করেছে। তাঁদের মতে, পঞ্জাবের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী অমরিন্দর সিংহের এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়ে আইন, সংবিধান এবং নৈতিক দিক দিয়ে ভুল। কিন্তু অকালি দল এই সিদ্ধান্ত সমর্থন করছে। তাঁরা পরিষ্কার জানিয়ে দিয়েছে, পঞ্জাবের স্বার্থে এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে। এর থেকে পিছিয়ে এলে অকালি দল তা সর্বশক্তি দিয়ে রুখবে।

Centre to seek direction of Supreme Court

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, JULY 14. The Central Government will file an application in the Supreme Court tomorrow to indicate its compliance with the Court's order of June 4 on the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal issue and seek a direction in view of Punjab's latest action of abrogating all accords on sharing the Ravi-Beas waters with Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, convened a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) late tonight to discuss the issue. The meeting endorsed the stand to seek directions of the Supreme Court on the SYL canal issue. The CCPA meeting follows four separate meetings the Prime Minister has held since yesterday with the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

After meeting Dr. Singh, the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, said she would take legal action against the "denial" of Rajasthan's share of the waters. She said Dr. Singh had assured her that the rights of all States would be protected.

The Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Vir Bhadra Singh, said the Punjab Government had taken a "unilateral and hurried decision. It should have consulted all the basin States."

Sources said the Centre would report to the Supreme Court that it had appointed the Central Public Works Depart-

ment to undertake completion of the SYL canal in Punjab. It had also constituted an Empowered Committee with the Chairman of the Central Water Commission as its head. The panel has members from Punjab, Haryana and the Union Ministries of Water Resources and Home. The Punjab Government was originally supposed to hand over the SYL site to CPWD engineers on July 15 but two days ago, it suddenly brought forth the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act abrogating the water accords.

The sources said that even as

Punjab had come up with an Act to prevent the completion of the canal, it had kept in readiness its Chief Engineer, SYL, to hand over the site to the CPWD engineers. Both sides have already discussed details of the works involved and the balance of works that remained.

Experts say that Punjab has created a constitutional crisis which might lead to a full-judge Bench hearing. If that happens the matter may be stretched till the Assembly elections in Haryana, in which the Congress has a high stake.

Haryana's stand: Page 11

'Didn't want to embarrass leaders'

NEW DELHI, JULY 14. The Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, today ruled out restoration of the status quo on sharing of river waters with the neighbouring States and said he had not consulted either the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, or the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, before taking the action.

"There is no question of status quo being restored as there is a law passed by the Assembly," he told reporters here and sought a new commission to settle the issue of river water sharing since the Eradi Commission concerned only the Ravi and Beas rivers.

Asked whether he had consulted the Prime Minister and the Congress president before going ahead with the legisla-



Amarinder Singh

tion in the State Assembly, the Chief Minister said "I didn't consult the Prime Minister or the party president before taking the decision as it would have embarrassed the leadership." — PTI

Lalu announces Godhra probe

By Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 14. The Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, today announced in Parliament that his Ministry had ordered a high-level departmental probe into the Sabarmati Express carnage of February 27, 2002, near Godhra in which 59 persons were burnt alive. The announcement came at the end of his reply to the discussion on the rail budget in the Lok Sabha. Pointing towards the empty Opposition benches, he said the "tainted" campaign against him was an attempt to "save themselves."

Quoting a report by the Forensic Science Laboratory of Gujarat, Mr. Prasad said conclu-

sions drawn indicated that the inflammable liquid spread from inside the S-6 coach. The departmental probe would be completed within three months and all those who acted irresponsibly would be made accountable.

He assured the House that he would not succumb to pressure and suppress facts. Though the report was available for the last two years, the previous National Democratic Alliance Government had kept it under wraps. None of the Union Ministers visited the spot. With the Opposition having walked out as part of its ongoing protest to boycott "tainted" Ministers in the United Progressive Alliance, the Minister's statement was heard with

rapt attention and silence punctuated at times with cries of "shame-shame."

In his brief intervention, the Minister for Science and Technology, Kapil Sibal, said since the report was ready three months after the incident and had kept it under wraps, it could not have been done without the connivance of the Gujarat Government and the Centre. This aspect should be investigated.

The House later passed by voice vote the appropriation bill to provide for the withdrawal of certain sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of a part of the financial year 2004-2005.

See also Page 11

New law to prevent groundwater abuse

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, July 13

WEST BENGAL will have a new law to restrict over-exploitation of groundwater and for creation of new water bodies as well as preservation of the existing ones. Water investigation minister Nandagopal Bhattacharya announced in the state assembly that the department is framing a bill for this.

The department's move comes in the wake of a groundwater survey's alarming revelations. The survey, conducted jointly by the Central Groundwater Board and the State Water Investigation Department over the past two years, has revealed that groundwater levels in 54 blocks of the state have fallen to critical levels.

The survey, that started two years ago, has covered 269 of the state's 341 blocks so far. "The groundwater levels in the entire stretch of 52 blocks and major areas of two blocks is critical," Bhattacharya said.

Only 188 blocks have been declared as 'safe'. "Groundwater levels in these blocks are at normal levels. In another 24 blocks, the levels fall under the semi-critical level," the minister added. Of the 72 blocks where survey is on, 13 are in the hill areas and 59 in the plains. The sur-



Groundwater levels have sunk in at least 54 blocks.

vey in these blocks will be completed soon. Over-exploitation of groundwater by pumping it out through deep tube wells is the primary reason for the alarming situation in the blocks. "We are thus bringing in legislation to prevent this over-exploitation. Strict standards will be laid down, taking into consideration ground realities and availability of surface water.

Since the groundwater table has to be re-charged, the new law will also provide for creation of new water bodies like lakes, ponds and canals, in both urban and rural areas," the Bhattacharya told *Hindustan Times*.

The minister said that the bill would facilitate involve-

ment of private parties for creating and maintaining the new water bodies as well as renovation of existing water bodies, including their de-silting.

"We've seen that the existing water bodies, especially ponds and lakes, are in a bad state because of silting." Creation of new water bodies, the minister said, would not only recharge the groundwater table, but could also be used for irrigation and fisheries. The groundwater table in Kolkata, too, is in a critical state.

"There's the added problem here of increasing salinity of groundwater due to seepage of groundwater from South 24 Parganas," the Minister said.

19/7

Water woes

Submitted
Hr 6

THE PUNJAB government is once again resorting to legal gimmickry, even while playing to the political galleries, to avoid completing the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal. This time it has gone through the dubious exercise of obtaining a unanimous resolution in the state assembly to terminate the 1981 agreement between the Union government and the Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan chief ministers, on sharing the waters of the Ravi-Beas system. The implementation of the agreement required the creation of the SYL canal, something that was the basis of a recent Supreme Court order to the Centre to complete the canal's construction in the face of resistance from Punjab. Clearly, Punjab CM Amarinder Singh is walking a constitutional tight-rope by trying to override the apex court's verdict by pressing the Punjab Termination of Agreements Bill, 2004.

There are enough precedents that set down that a state can't take such sovereign rights upon itself, especially when the interests of other states are involved. A case in point is a similar ordinance on the Cauvery water dispute passed by the Karnataka government 13 years ago. The Supreme Court, while summarily rejecting the ordinance, had criticised the state for "assuming the

role of a judge in its own cause". Though non-riparian states, Haryana and Rajasthan too have some rights to the water of Ravi-Beas. In any case, no state or country can claim exclusive rights over a river that flows through other states and countries. During the division of Punjab in 1966, the Reorganisation Act had laid down that the Sutlej and Beas waters be divided between Punjab and the new state of Haryana. The state should adhere to its commitments, instead of politicising the issue.

Punjab claims that the sharing of water would leave it facing a crisis situation. But the situation could be disastrous for Haryana and Rajasthan. India is a Union of its states, big and small, rich and poor. But what makes the nation one are policies that will help all the states to move up the escalator of economic growth. Perhaps Punjab and Haryana need to take another look at their water-use policies and plug some gaps such as the high distribution losses because of unrepaired canals. There's a ready-made crisis arising from their preference for growing water-consuming paddy and sugarcane. Perhaps the governments in question could divert the crores being spent on legal battles towards implementing more viable irrigation methods.

Rs 181 crore for Assam

SNS & PTI

GUWAHATI, July 12. — The Centre today released Rs 181 crore immediate relief fund in three different heads to Assam government to tackle floods that has so far affected over 20 lakh people in 2,800 villages in the state besides claiming over 20 lives.

Union minister of state for defence Mr Bijoy Krishna Handique today made an aerial survey of flood-affected areas of Nalbari, Mangaldai and Barpeta districts along with chief minister Mr Tarun Gogoi. Talking to reporters at Guwahati airport, Mr Handique informed that out of the total Rs 181 crore released by the Centre, Rs 54 crore was from the Calamity Relief Fund, Rs 46 crore under the National Contingency Fund and another Rs 81 crore was released by the ministry of water resource for short-term flood control measures. Mr Gogoi stated



A jawan shifts two children to a safe place. In Rangia village, Kamrup on Monday. — AFP

that seepage in an artificial lake called Dzsaistsm atop Kirishu dam in Bhutan had compounded the flood problem in lower Assam.

Landslides: Landslides caused by incessant rains have blocked Assam-Agartala NH-44 at Sonarpur in Meghalaya and Guwahati-Imphal National Highway, cutting off Tripura and Manipur from the rest of the country. Alliance Air and Jet Airways, however, operated its flights between Imphal and Guwahati.

Bihar toll

The flood situation in Bihar aggravated further today with swollen rivers inundating fresh areas in the state hitting about 60 lakh people in 11 districts as 25 people were reported to have lost their lives so far. Darbhanga, Sitamarhi and Sheohar were cut off from the rest of the state with menacingly rising rivers submerging fresh areas in these three districts.

Medha Patkar launches satyagraha

By Our Special Correspondent

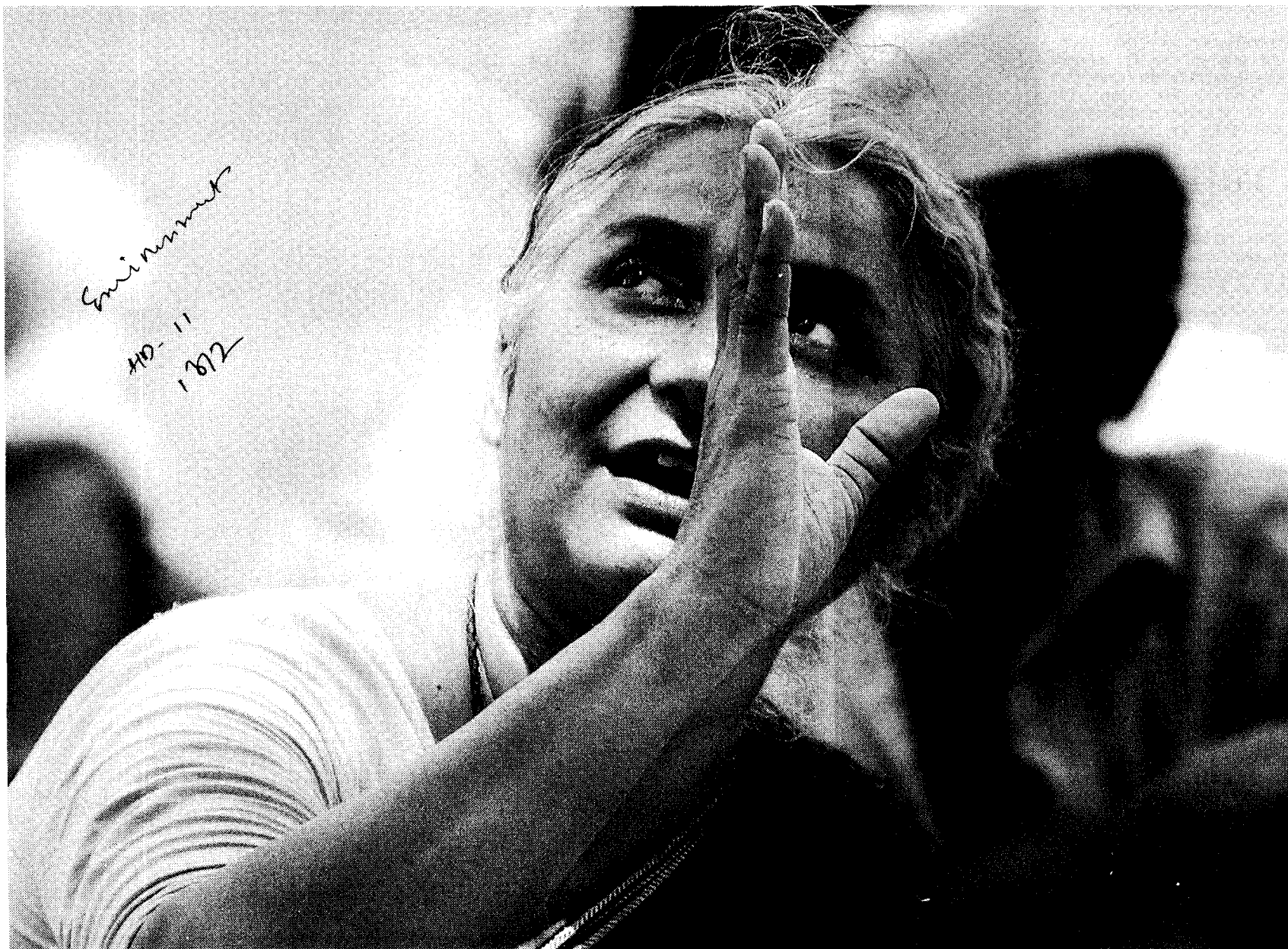
MUMBAI, JULY 12. The Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar today announced an indefinite satyagraha near the State secretariat to highlight the Maharashtra Government's neglect in resettling the families affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP).

A delegation of the NBA met the State Home Minister, R.R. Patil, who assured them that the issue of resettling hundreds of families would be completed in one-and-a-half months. However, Ms. Patkar and her supporters were not satisfied with this assurance.

She told reporters that 33 villages were affected by the SSP in Maharashtra and two-thirds of the affected families who were awaiting rehabilitation were not even declared as project-affected. Besides, the State Cabinet's decision in January not to allow work on the dam unless rehabilitation was completed was not adhered to, she said.

The Maharashtra Government is not even certain how many people would be displaced by the SSP and so where is the question of deciding how much land is required to rehabilitate them, she asked. Even though people had been notified as project affected, their adult sons and daughters were not entitled to compensation, she said.

So far in the State, 1500 families had been resettled, though about 400 families were yet to receive land, Ms. Patkar said. About 3000 families await rehabilitation and of this, only 568 families were recognised as project-affected. The State did not take a tough stand on the question of rehabilitation and about 1500-2000 families would face submergence this monsoon, while the Gujarat Government celebrated raising the project's height to 110 metres. Even though private land was available, the State did not buy it,



RELENTLESS STRUGGLE: The Narmada Bachao Andolan leader, Medha Patkar, at a protest meet in Mumbai on Monday. — AFP

she said.

Maharashtra had earlier opposed raising the height of the dam to 110.64 metres, according to the State relief and reha-

bilitation secretary, Krishna S. Vatsa. He told *The Hindu* that the SSP would displace 3400 families from 33 villages, according to initial estimates. So

far, in Maharashtra, 2851 families had been resettled. Of this, 2075 families were resettled in Maharashtra and 776 families in Gujarat. "We expect that about

173 families who are declared as project-affected already, will be affected if the dam height goes up to 110.64 metres. However, a process of verification of claims

is on and the figure of those affected at 110.64 metres could well go up to 600 families," he said.

Only have-nots move to unprepared New Harsud

Santosh Singh in New Harsud

July 11. — Mr Padmapeet Singh has moved to New Harsud with a heavy heart. He had a 11-room house in Old Harsud but has now just a hutment on a 40 by 60 feet land to accommodate his seven-member family.

Though he has got compensation, he is yet to get accustomed to the new place. His children may miss out on education this academic year. And even his cow is not giving milk — the dearth of green pastures near New Harsud has hit hard her grazing habits.

This is almost the same story of about 1,500 families who have shifted here. The

new settlement, 19 km from the submerged Harsud, is sprawled over four-five km now. Most families could manage only makeshift houses. *Pucca* constructions have been delayed in view of the rains and the non-availability of sand and the steep cost of transportation of building materials. Oustees have been getting tank water here. Permanent water supply connections have not yet been started from the main connection. Power supply to villages is the only immediate consolation.

Despite the state government's efforts and claims of providing rehabilitation on a war-footing, turmoil and confusion is all around. A Harsud Nagar panchayat employee had been loitering to locate her

plot of land. Lesser-informed oustees looked clueless about everything. Though four primary school and a higher secondary school building have been coming up and admission is open, there are a few takers for education amidst the chaos.

A teacher requesting anonymity said most of the women teachers had to walk down five km daily to attend schools only to see a handful of students present.

The richer lot of Harsud have for now found better places to stay at Khandwa, Harda and Khirkiya. They can afford rent that has gone up two to five times in all livable places near Old Harsud.

But even the rich have to come back at New Harsud some day as they are not en-

titled to sell or transfer their lands for 10 years. Mr Alok Agarwal, who has shifted to Khandwa, said he did not imagine a good life at New Harsud where basic infrastructure is absent. "We have no emotional attachment to this place. Our original home and hearth is ready to go under water," he rued.

Ms Manorama said that only fear of submergence and greed for extra compensation had made many people leave Old Harsud and stay in the barren land of New Harsud. They are also apprehensive of government efforts slackening after the rains and the exit of the media from the scene.

(To be concluded)

11 JUL 2004

14 feared drowned as floods worsen in Bihar

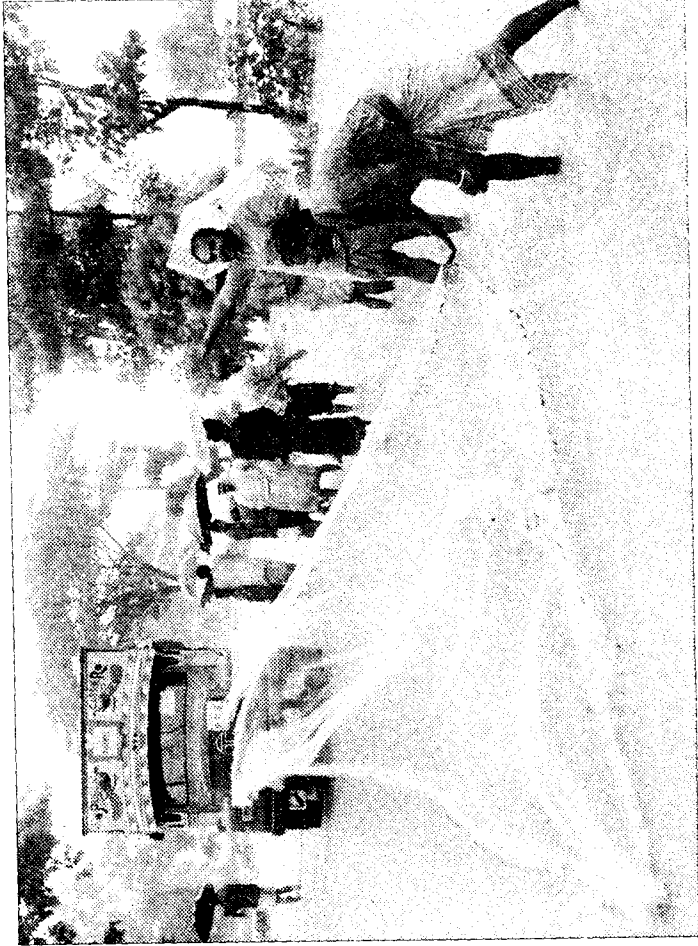
PATNA, July 10. — At least 14 people were feared drowned in the swollen Bagmati river in Bihar's Sitamarhi district today while trying to escape flood fury even as the armed forces stepped in to augment relief and rescue operations with rain-fed rivers wreaking havoc in eight flood-ravaged districts, officials said. Fourteen people were feared drowned in two incidents of boat capsizing in the worst-hit Sitamarhi district while crossing the turbulent Bagmati, district magistrate Mr ABP Sinha said.

While 10 persons were feared to have been killed at Athri village under Runnisaipur block of the district, four others were said to have drowned near Jhumma village, also in the same block, he said. Though efforts were on to locate the bodies, none was recovered so far due to strong currents, Mr Sinha said. According to relief department sources, 11 people had perished so far in the floods in the state.

With rain-fed rivers causing devastation in eight flood-ravaged districts of Bihar, one LAF chopper and a column of the army comprising around 60 men with 7-8 motor boats were pressed into service to evacuate people and provide relief material to those affected, deputy secretary (relief) Mr Upendra Sharm said.

Around five lakh people have been hit by the floods in Sitamarhi, Banka, Supaul, Sheohar, Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, West Champaran and Khagaria districts.

Meanwhile, the weatherman has forecast moderate rain in the catchment areas of the North Bihar rivers over the next 24 hours. — PTI



Fishing in what is the National Highway 31. In Deuduar village, 40 km east of Guwahati on Saturday. — AFP

Assam: NH 31 cut off

PM-Gogoi meet

GUWAHATI, July 10. — Flood situation in Assam was critical today with road links Dr Mamohan Singh today severed and the Army discussed the flood situation deployed in rescuing with Assam chief minister Mr the marooned as the Tarun Gogoi over telephone. Brahmaputra and its Dr Singh expressed grave contributions continued concern over the situation and to rise alarmingly, off- assured Mr Gogoi of all help cial sources said here. to tide over the crisis, sources The water has over- said. Mr Gogoi today released topped the National Rs 60 crore for relief and res- Highway 31 thereby cue operations after a special severing road link with Cabinet meeting to discuss the rest of the country the flood scenario. — PTI

while the army is air- lifting marooned people in the Lower Assam districts of Nalbari, Darrang and Kamrup. Floods have claimed 12 lives till now and affected more than 16 lakh people in 16 districts. In Rangiya, the Army, along with the IAF, rescued 300 students, marooned for more than 24 hours.

Miraculous escape: Forty passengers today had a miraculous escape when a mechanised boat in which they were travelling was swept away but later moored to safety at Sadiya in Tinsukia district of Assam, officials said in Guwahati. — PTI

Breach in Bhutan

GUWAHATI, July 10. — An alert has been sounded in Assam following a breach in the reservoir of Kurisho Hydel Project in Bhutan which was likely to inundate lower Assam districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Nalbari, officials said here today.

The breach occurred this evening and water from the reservoir was likely to reach Assam by tomorrow morning or mid-day, they said. The districts have been alerted and measures are being taken to shift the people to safer places, the sources said. The authorities have been directed to take all possible steps to ensure the people's safety. — PTI

Cooch Behar worst affected by floods

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

COOCH BEHAR, July 10. —

The water level of the Mansai at Mathabhanga and the Raidak-I and Sankosh at Tufanganj is still flowing above the danger mark. The yellow signal is still over these rivers. 212.20 mm of rainfall has been recorded at Cooch Behar 140.00 mm at Mathabhanga and 99.20 mm at Tufanganj in the last 24 hours. The total rainfall for this season at Cooch Behar is 1662.00 mm, at Mathabhanga 1728.80 mm and at Tufanganj 1561.80 mm. A heavy rainfall warning in the next forty-eight hours, reached the district headquarter today.

Due to continuous downpour in the upper catchment areas and on the plains for the last five days, the water-levels of almost all the rivers in Cooch Behar district, especially that of the Torsa, Sankosh, Mansai, Dharala,

Sutunga and Raidak-I, have been raised, adding to the worries of the residents in the nearby villages. Due to rise in the water level people had to take shelter in nearby school buildings and on the embankments at Cooch Behar-I, Tufanganj and Mathabhanga. Residents near the Torsa have taken shelter on the embankment adjacent to Cooch Behar town.

A wooden bridge was washed away at Damodarpur under Cooch Behar-II block. River water has entered the BSF border out-posts at Gachhtala and Chhoto Madhusudan in Sitalkuchi in Mathabhanga sub-division. Thirty families have been sheltered from waterlogged areas of Ambari. Many from Kamranguri-Baldihati and Putimari-Fuleswari are staying on the Torsa embankment.

The Kaljani, Garam, Dima, Paro and Basra of Kalchini

have already overflowed and is causing much concern to the people of Alipurduar. About 20,000 people were affected by the flood situation in Alipurduar, according to official sources.

Apprehending a high flood this year, the Cooch Behar district authorities have already taken precautionary measures. A Flood Control Room has been functioning round the clock at the district relief office, Cooch Behar. All SDOs, BDOs and others concerned have been alerted by the administration to keep strict watch on the situation. They were asked to be ready with rescue facilities and relief materials including tarpaulin sheets and dry food. Villages adjacent to the rivers have also been alerted. Divisional commissioner (Jalpaiguri) Mr Balbir Ram, district magistrate Dr Ravi Indar Singh and Cooch Behar ADM Mr Ozkar

Singh Meena visited some affected areas yesterday.

Cooch Behar (North) MLA Mr Dipak Sarkar and Cooch Behar (West) MLA Mr Akshoy Thakur visited some waterlogged areas today. Mr Sarkar alleged that no relief was reached to the marooned people of Khapaidanga, Ambari, Madhupur, Patlakhaoa, and Putimari. Baxirbos areas till this afternoon. The MLA urged the district administration and the Cooch Behar Sadar SDO to extend relief to the affected. He claimed that not less than 10,000 people were affected in Cooch Behar Sadar sub-division. They also faxed a message to the state relief minister requesting him to arrange for relief for the affected people of the district.

Alipurduar MLA Mr Nirmal Das, who is now in Kolkata, has appealed to the relief and irrigation minister to visit the flo-

od and erosion affected areas of Alipurduar and Cooch Behar. He said, it is time for the central water resources development minister Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munsri to prove that he was elected from North Bengal.

Kurseong landslides: After a series of landslides in the past couple of days, Kurseong subdivision was today silent till reports last received. Meanwhile, efforts are already underway to repair the NH55 which had been closed due to heavy landslides on Thursday night. According to official sources, the repair works are likely to be completed within the next four to five days. A major portion of NH 55 near Paghla Jhora at 14th mile had gone down 15 meters due to torrential rains which lasted for almost a couple of days. According to the latest reports, heavy trucks and buses did not ply on the roads.

Floods wreak havoc in Assam, Bihar

GUWAHATI/PATNA, JULY 10. Floods continued to ravage the eastern and northeastern States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar and North Bengal today with 25 million people falling prey to nature's fury and property worth crores of rupees damaged.

The situation in lower Assam worsened, snapping rail and road links and forcing the Air Force and the Army to carry out rescue operations on a war footing. The toll in the State has gone up to 20.

In neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, all the major rivers and their tributaries were in spate following the week-long torrential rains. Five people have died so far in the State.

In Bihar, the Army was called in to help civil authorities in rescue and relief operations in the flood-affected northern parts. Air Force helicopters dropped food packets as the situation turned grim in eight districts.

In North Bengal, more than 20,000 people were marooned in Alipurduar and adjoining areas of the Coochbehar district following torrential rains and spate in rivers.

The extent of damage caused by floods in Assam was yet to be assessed since most of the areas of lower Assam have become in-

accessible. Uninterrupted rain in the last six days caused the Brahmaputra to cross its all-time high. More than two million people had been affected and about 1,200 villages were under water since yesterday, official sources said.

The State Government was yet to send officials to the affected areas because of continuous rain. The National Highway 31 has been submerged at Kamalpur, Nalbari, Pathasala and Bijni. The metre gauge train services

have been suspended. The Army Brigade headquarters at Rangiya is also under water. The Army has pressed into service speedboats to rescue marooned people, who are using every possible means to reach safer places.

Reports from Rangiya, Nalbari and Pathasala said the towns were inundated and the National Highway at Kamalpur in Rangia district was submerged. Many areas in Guwahati have also been inundated.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the toll rose to five after two Border Road Task Force labourers were in the East Siang district. According to official sources, the labourers were washed away yesterday by the Siku river in Mebo circle, while 35 others, including women and children, were stranded since Thursday on an under-construction bridge. Sources said that Tezu, the headquarters of Lohit district remained cut off with the waters of the Digaru and the Lohit submerging adjacent areas.

The National Highway 77 between Muzaffarpur and Sitamarhi has been washed away at several points and was under six feet water in some stretches. The movement of trains in six sections of the Samastipur division has been crippled with the tracks having been washed away or coming under several feet of water. More than a dozen trains were stranded at numerous stations.

Our Special Correspondent writes from Patna:

With the flood situation worsening in several parts of north Bihar, the Army and the Air Force were pressed into service today to assist the civil authorities in carrying out rescue and relief operations.

While an IAF chopper dropped food and relief material in the Sitamarhi, Sheohar and Darbhanga districts, Army personnel were deployed on motorboats to rescue those marooned. Breaches in the embankments of the Kamla Balan and the Bagmati wreaked havoc and forced the State Government to seek help from the Army. The situation worsened

with waters entering parts of the Madhubani district headquarters. Over five lakh people in the Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur and East and West Champaran districts have been affected.

The National Highway 77 between Muzaffarpur and Sitamarhi has been washed away at several points and was under six feet water in some stretches. The movement of trains in six sections of the Samastipur division has been crippled with the tracks having been washed away or coming under several feet of water. More than a dozen trains were stranded at numerous stations.

14 feared drowned

PTI reports: At least 14 persons were feared drowned in two incidents of boat capsizing in the Sitamarhi district while crossing the turbulent Bagmati, the District Magistrate, A.B.P. Sinha, said. While 10 persons were feared killed at Athri village, four others were said to have drowned near Jhumma village.

Moderate rain has been forecast in the catchment areas of the north Bihar rivers over the next 24 hours.

Manmohan assures all help to Gogoi

deal with the situation," an aide of the Chief Minister said. He said that Mr. Gogoi, after reviewing the flood situation, had directed the release of Rs. 50 crore for relief and rehabilitation of those affected.

A meeting of the Council of Ministers this evening decided that all Ministers would contribute a month's salary for the flood-affected people. Mr. Gogoi has directed all Ministers to rush to the affected districts to supervise the relief operations.

By Our Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI, JULY 10. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today assured the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, of all help in dealing with the flood situation, which turned grave affecting as many as 14 districts and more than 20 lakh people.

"The Prime Minister expressed concern over the flood situation and assured the Chief Minister of all help by the Centre to the State Government to

CHILD WASHED AWAY; TOY TRAIN COMES TO A HALT

Flooded N Bengal flounders



IN UNSPLENDID ISOLATION: With the Torsa in spate, a boy leaves for a safer place. Near Cooch Behar on Friday. — The Statesman

Statesman News Service

SILIGURI, July 9. — At least 5,000 people have been rendered homeless in North Bengal following torrential rain over the past three days. Many villagers have been forced to shift to safer areas.

(According to PTI, a child was washed away at Khaprail in Siliguri sub-division).

The swirling rivers also inundated Champasari, Karaibari, Gulma, Sukna, Rajib Nagar, Sitlapara, Shib Nagar and Nouka Ghat. The toy train service has come to a halt on the New Jalpaiguri-Kurseong section.

According to North East Frontier Railway sources, the tracks at Sukna and Teendharia are under water and have been damaged at certain places. In the last 24 hours, Siliguri recorded 78.20 mm rainfall.

In Malda the Fulohar river, which is flowing above danger level, has

'Mini tornado'

BEHRAMPURE, July 9. — A villager was killed and 150 huts were damaged in a "mini tornado" which swept through two villages in Murshidabad last evening, sources said. A villager was killed when the wall of his hut collapsed at Joranpur in Domkal, sources said. — PTI

breached its embankment at Bilaimari areas in Ratua I block. While the district administration claims that only 25 families have been forced to shift to safer places, unofficial reports have put the figure at 100.

In Raiganj more than 72 hours of incessant rainfall has left over 2,000 people homeless. At Malbazar in Jalpaiguri heavy rainfall partially broke open the Lish river embankment leaving over 300 people homeless. Two villages in Oashabari tea estate have been washed away.

In Cooch Behar the water level of the Mansai river is slowly receding

but it is still flowing above the danger mark. A wooden bridge was washed away at Damodarpur under Cooch Behar-II block.

Assam situation grim

The flood situation in Assam has deteriorated with the Brahmaputra and its tributaries rising alarmingly, adds PTI from Guwahati. As many as 400 marooned students of Navodaya Vidyalaya were rescued from the rooftop of their school in Kamrup by IAF choppers, an IAF spokesman said here.

In Arunachal flood situation is no better as Tezu was cut-off from the rest of the country even as all the major rivers are in spate. The flood has so far claimed three lives. The flood situation in Bihar turned grim today with the water of the Bagmati entering Sheohar town as rain-fed rivers inundated fresh areas in Sheohar, Sitamarhi and Darbhanga.

Rains trigger landslips in Hills

Five killed in road mishap near Siliguri

Pramod Giri
Sevoke, July 7

THE ACCIDENT on Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway 31-A, which claimed five lives including that of a student, was the result of apathy of the state government and highway authorities who, time and again, have failed to keep the promise of better road conditions and safety measures. At least 55 people lost their lives since September 2000 on the highway that passes through the tortuous terrain along the Teesta.

The road is not only the lifeline of Sikkim, it is also the only track that finally reaches Nathula near Indo-China border where the army has vital installations. The entire stretch is prone to landslides. Last night's accident happened due to landslide that was triggered off by incessant rains throughout the day. It was 9.50 pm when a Renok-bound Tata Sumo, with four passengers, crossed Coronation Bridge 22 kms from Siliguri. The driver, a resident of Tadong near Gangtok was caught unawares when he suddenly came across a big boulder on the road barely 250 metres ahead of the bridge. The driver applied emergency brakes but it was too late.

The vehicle slipped on the mud and plunged 250 metres below the road near Teesta. Fifty-



Rescue workers take a look at the car that met with an accident on NH-31A

year old Debendra Puri, an assistant director with the department of education, Sikkim government who was rescued last night died at Siliguri Sadar hospital. Four more bodies including that of Puri's son Amit Puri, who was returning from Kolkata, after appearing in a M.Tech interview were recov-

ered from the site on Wednesday morning, Mohamed Kaimuddin, the driver of the vehicle, also died.

The National Highway 31-A is maintained by Border Road Organisation. Experts are of the view that the stretch inside West Bengal is an accident-prone area. The reasons have been at-

tributed to narrow road conditions, lack of parapet along the road. Three major accidents had occurred at this place on September 10, 2000 (32 died), July 7, 2001 (six died) and December 28, 2003 (at least eight died) but the state government has not done much to improve the condition of the highway.

Mirik residents live in fear of losing homes

Amitava Banerjee
Darjeeling, July 7

THE RESIDENTS of Mirik will never forget this day, when their homes came crashing down due to landslides. True, the affected families have been rehabilitated but the nightmare is still afresh in their memories.

On the black nights of July 8 and 10, 2003, landslides and flash floods had wreaked havoc, in which approximately 1,052 people were affected in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling. More than 100 houses had been destroyed, while the number of dead was 24. Pakhagaon, Nayakaman, Chota Tingling and Lambaray villages of the Gayabari and Puttung tea estate along with some villages of Phuguri tea estate near Mirik, were the worst affected. This was the worst-ever natural calamity in Darjeeling Hills after the land slides and flash floods of 1968.

Houses were built for the victims in Mandirgaon and below the Jhayabari tea factory by the state government, Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, panchayat and a NGO, Anugalay as well as the citizens of Kurseong. But the victim's families are still living with a mental trauma and the constant fear of having to face a similar situation. The fear haunts them as the monsoons knock on the doors.

10-10
2/2

HOW ABOUT RESETTLEMENT?

WHEN A TOWN with over 6,000 households is about to be submerged, the cruel reality of displacement and disruption caused by large dams comes home to most people. For while the imminent drowning of the town of Harsud in Madhya Pradesh, located on the banks of the Chhota Tawa River, a tributary of the Narmada, is making front page news, a tragedy has been unfolding over several years in the villages around Harsud. Thousands of families in these villages have been forced to move out as their lands disappeared under the waters of the Narmada. These are the unseen and unheard oustees of the Indira Sagar dam, one of the three large dams being constructed on the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh and upstream of the better-known Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in Gujarat. But while the trials of the oustees of the Sardar Sarovar dam have caught the attention of the media thanks to the relentless campaign by the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the problems faced by the people affected by the Indira Sagar dam have gone virtually unnoticed. As a result, the public scrutiny of such projects and policies for resettlement, of the people likely to be uprooted by them, so essential to ensure justice for the most vulnerable, has been missing.

Away from the media spotlight, the Indira Sagar dam, which will eventually generate 1000 MW of power and irrigate 1,23,000 hectares of land, has climbed steadily higher. It stands today at a height of 245 metres and by the time it is completed in 2005, it will have submerged 248 settlements, including Harsud. Last year, between March and July, 8,000 families were forced to relocate. The oustees were given cash amounts that cannot buy them land that is equivalent to what they possessed, either in quantity or quality. Instead of being moved as

village units, they were scattered over many different locations. And even where they were given land, it was rocky and uncultivable. Such resettlement flies in the face of the commitments made by the Madhya Pradesh Government. In line with the terms of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal's award, the Government has assured that all families displaced by the SSP and the Indira Sagar will, after their relocation and resettlement, "improve, or at least regain, their previous standard of living within a reasonable time". Yet from reports about the people already forced to move out, it is evident that this promise has not materialised.

It is ironic that while every metre of the Sardar Sarovar dam is being fought over, with the Supreme Court allowing the dam authorities to construct only after it is satisfied that the resettlement and rehabilitation of oustees is complete, no such scrutiny has taken place in the case of the Indira Sagar dam. When completed, this Rs. 6,000-crore joint venture between the Madhya Pradesh Government and the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation will have submerged 40,332 hectares of forest land and 44,345 hectares of agricultural land and displaced 30,739 families. Chief Minister Uma Bharti speaks of the people of Harsud "sacrificing their all" for the larger good. But the people who are being forced to move can legitimately ask who really benefits from their sacrifice. They certainly do not. In 1989, Harsud was the place where over 40,000 people gathered to protest 'destructive development'. Their focus was the environmental and social destruction caused by large dams. Fourteen years later they have fallen victims to the very pattern of development that they opposed.

ভূটানে প্রবল বর্ষণ, বন্যার আশঙ্কা উঃবঙ্গে

স্টক রিপোর্টার কলকাতা ও শিলিগুড়ি: ভূটানে প্রবল বর্ষণের জেরে উত্তরবঙ্গে আকস্মিক বন্যার আশঙ্কা দেখা দিয়েছে। গত ২১ মে-র অবিশ্রান্ত বর্ষণে ভূটানের পাহাড়ে ধস লোমোছে। পাথর ক্ষয়ে তৈরি হয়েছে দু'টি কৃত্রিম জনাশয়। জনপদ বাঁচাতে ওই দু'টি জনাশয় থেকে জল ছাড়তে শুরু করেছে ভূটান। অগভীর পাহাড়ি নদী সেই প্রবল জলরাশি ঠেকাতে পারবে না। ওই জল মানস ও কুরিচু নদী দিয়ে এসে জলপাইগুড়ি জেলার বিস্তীর্ণ এলাকা ভাসিয়ে দিতে পারে বলে সতর্কতা জারি করা হয়েছে মহকরণ থেকে। শুক্রবার বিকালে ভূটানের দুতাবাস থেকে এই মর্মে বার্তা পেরে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বৃদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য আণমন্ত্রী হাফিজ আলি সৈয়দকে ডেকে পাঠান। মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর নির্দেশ পেয়ে উত্তরবঙ্গের জেলাগুলিকে বিশেষ করে জলপাইগুড়ি ও দার্জিলিং জেলা প্রশাসনকে সজ্জা প্রকৃতিক দুর্বোপের জন্য প্রস্তুতি চান্নানোর নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন আণমন্ত্রী।

ভূটানের পাহাড়ে ফের প্রবল বৃষ্টি নামলে বিপদের আশঙ্কা যে বাড়বে, উত্তরবঙ্গের ওই দুই জেলা প্রশাসনকে তা-ও জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। আগে ভূটানের দিকে প্রবল বৃষ্টি হলে কিংবা ধস নামলে তা জানতেই পারত না পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার। তার ফলে আকস্মিক বন্যায় ব্যাপক জীবন ও সম্পত্তিহানি ঘটত। এ ব্যাপারে আণমন্ত্রী ১৯৬৮ সালের পূজোর সময়ের ভয়াবহ বন্যার কথা স্মরণ করিয়ে

দিয়েছেন ওই দুই জেলা প্রশাসনকে। সে-বার ভূটান থেকে তিস্তা বাঁধের অতিরিক্ত জল চলে আসায় জলপাইগুড়িতে প্রায় এক হাজার মানুষের মৃত্যু হয়েছিল। তার মধ্যে জলপাইগুড়ি জেলাই মারা যান পাঁচশোর বেশি মানুষ। কারণ, জলের তোড় এত বেশি ছিল যে, জেলের তালি খোলারও সময় পাওয়া যায়নি। '৯৩ সালে একই ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি হয় আলিপুরদুয়ারে। সে-বার সম্পত্তি ও গবাদি পশুর ব্যাপক ক্ষতি হয়েছিল।

দার্জিলিং, জলপাইগুড়ি, কোচবিহার, উত্তর দিনাজপুর, দক্ষিণ দিনাজপুর ও মালদহের জেলাশাসকদের কাছে পাঠানো সতর্কবার্তায় রাজ্য সরকারের যুগ্মসচিব বি বি সিদ্দিকী জানিয়েছেন, ২১ মে-র প্রবল বর্ষণের ফলে ভূটানের দু'টি কৃত্রিম বাঁধে প্রায় এক কোটি ৩৫ লক্ষ ঘনমিটার জল জমে যাওয়ায় ওই দু'টি বাঁধ যে-কোনও সময় ভেঙে যাওয়ার মুখে। ইতিমধ্যেই ওই দুই বাঁধ থেকে নিরামিত ভাবে কুরিচু ও মানস নদীতে জল ছাড়া হচ্ছে বলে ভূটানের শিষ্মিতে অবস্থিত ভারতীয় দুতাবাস থেকে সতর্কবার্তা পাঠানো হয়েছে। আশঙ্কা করা হচ্ছে, ওই বাঁধ সতর্কবার্তা পাঠানো হয়েছে। দক্ষিণ দিনাজপুর, উত্তর কোচবিহার, জলপাইগুড়ি, দক্ষিণ দিনাজপুর, উত্তর দিনাজপুর ও মালদহ সেই জলের তোড়ে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হবে। বিশেষ করে জলপাইগুড়ির কামাখ্যাগুড়ি, কুমারগ্রামের

মতো ডুমার্স অঞ্চলের প্রবিত হওয়ার আশঙ্কা আছে। মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর কথা বলে এসে আণমন্ত্রী মহাকরণে বলেন, এখন পরিস্থিতি এমনই দাঁড়িয়েছে যে, যে-কোনও সময় ওই ধরনের বিপদ দেখা দিতে পারে। তাই ত্রাণ দফতরের পক্ষ থেকে সব জেলাশাসক, মুখ্যসচিবকে বিষয়টি জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। কারণ, ভূটানের ভারতীয় দুতাবাস থেকে জানানো হয়েছে, ২১ মে থেকে সে-দেশে ব্যাপক বৃষ্টিপাত এবং সেই সঙ্গে ধস নামার ফলেই ওই দুই নদীবাঁধে প্রচুর জল জমে গিয়েছে। এখনও সেখানে বৃষ্টি হচ্ছে। তাই বিপদের সম্ভাবনাও বেড়ে যাচ্ছে।

জলপাইগুড়ি জেলা প্রশাসন সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, ধনের ফলে ভূটানের মানস নদীর উপরে যেখানে রাতারাতি বিশাল হ্রদ তৈরি হয়েছে, সেই জায়গাটি জলপাইগুড়ির ভূটান সীমান্ত থেকে অন্তত ১০০ কিলোমিটার উঁচুতে অবস্থিত। সেখানে কমপক্ষে ১০ লক্ষ ঘনমিটার জল জমে আছে। ফের জোর বৃষ্টি হলে ওই জলাধার থেকে যাওয়ার কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যে ভূটান সীমান্ত এলাকায় ঢুকে যাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে। মানসের গতিপথ অসমমুখী বলে জলের মূল স্রোত গোয়ালপাড়া ও লাগোয়া এলাকার দিকে যাওয়ার কথা। সে-ক্ষেত্রে অসমমুখী বন্যা পরিস্থিতির আশঙ্কা করা হচ্ছে। তবে ভারত-ভূটান সীমান্তে কাপীখোলা এলাকায় এর পর পড়ের পাতায়

বন্যার আশঙ্কা

প্রথম পাতার পর
একাধিক ছোট নদী রয়েছে, যেগুলির সঙ্গে প্রত্যক্ষ ও অপ্রত্যক্ষ ভাবে মানসের সংযোগ আছে। হ্রদের জল হ্রু করে নামতে শুরু করলে ওই ছোট নদীগুলিতেও জলক্ষীতির সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে। সেই কারণেই কুমারগ্রাম, বারবিশা ও লাগোয়া এলাকায় বন্যার মতো পরিস্থিতির সৃষ্টি হতে পারে।
উত্তরবঙ্গের জলপাইগুড়ি বিভাগের কমিশনার বলবীর রাম জানান, "মানসে যে-হ্রদের সৃষ্টি হয়েছে, তা নিয়ে উত্তরবঙ্গের বাসিন্দাদের খুব বেশি উদ্বেগ হওয়ার কিছু নেই। কেননা, মানসের গতিপথ অসমের মধ্যে দিয়ে। তা সত্ত্বেও প্রশাসনিক ভাবে সতর্কতামূলক ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছে।" কুমারগ্রাম ও লাগোয়া এলাকার বাসিন্দাদের সতর্ক করেছে প্রশাসন। বন্যার মতো পরিস্থিতি হলে যাতে দ্রুত অবস্থা আয়ত্তে আনা যায়, সে-জন্য সামরিক বাহিনীর সঙ্গেও যোগাযোগ রাখছে তারা। উত্তরবঙ্গ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের আবহ বিভাগ সূত্রের খবর, ভূটানে যে-দু'টি জায়গায় হ্রদের সৃষ্টি হয়েছে, তার একটিতে এক লক্ষ ঘনমিটার জল আছে, যা নিয়ে তিস্তার কিছু নেই। অন্যটি অর্থাৎ মানসে বেশি জল রয়েছে। সে-জন্য কিছুটা উদ্বেগ আবহ বিভাগও।

Tripura toll rises to 4

AGARTALA: The floodwaters began to recede in Tripura on Friday even as the toll rose to four. The rains have stopped since last night but rehabilitation of the homeless will take some time.

Subodh Devnath (48), a school teacher, drowned in the Bijoy river at Jangalia in Bishalgarh subdivision of West Tripura district last night, taking the toll to four. Earlier, two children drowned in a pond while another person was washed away by the Khowai river at Teliamura in West Tripura.

About four lakh people of 80,000 families lost their homes. Around 50,000 of them are from Sadar in West Tripura.

Work is on at the Assam-Agartala National Highway (NH-44), cut off from the rest of the country for the past three days due to landslides.

—PII



A girl with her brother on a raft to reach a house in a flooded village in Agartala district of Assam on Friday. PII

INDIAN EXPRESS 26 JUN 2014

Swim A toxic trap *95 8/22/6*

The Union Carbide factory remains a grave threat to Bhopal's residents. Get rid of it

IT is unclear why the Union government is dragging its feet on the matter. As the *Express* has just reported, a New York court gave an unprecedented ruling that the Union Carbide can be ordered to clean up its abandoned factory and its contaminated environs, provided the Government of India or the Madhya Pradesh — which owns the land on which the factory is situated — urges the court to order such a relief. The state government has had no hesitation in giving its assent to such a step, but New Delhi, for some reason, is displaying a remarkable apathy on the issue, with the law ministry claiming it is a matter for the environment ministry to settle, and the environment ministry appearing totally clueless on the matter.

In the process, time is running out on an opportunity — the court had set a deadline of June 30 — to get Union Carbide to clean up the toxic trap that is the Bhopal factory today. Neither the Madhya Pradesh government, nor indeed the Government of India, is in any position to effect such a massive clean up given the technology and funds entailed. If the Union government's prevarication is caused by the perception that such a go-head could jeopardise any claims arising out of the gas leak, then it seems to be a

case of misplaced anxiety. As a battery of Indian legal luminaries have opined, the contamination in and around the Union Carbide factory is an issue quite distinct from that of compensation for the victims of the gas leak and the court sees it as such.

Today, the gargantuan shell of the former factory has become a reminder, not just of the tragic gas leak of 1984, but of the threat it continues to pose for local residents. Its toxins have permeated local aquifers and the land on which it is situated has been rendered contaminated by enormous amounts of toxic wastes — like bags of hexachlorocyclohexane that are still strewn around. Removing this serious health hazard should have been an imperative for the authorities but little was done about it through all these years of activism. In fact, Madhya Pradesh's principal secretary — in a letter to the Union government urging it to move on the matter — has underlined that it is in "public interest that the toxic waste on the site is removed and disposed at the earliest". It is now only to be hoped that the Union law minister heeds this call and seizes the historic opportunity to undo some of the damage that the tragic event of 20 years ago perpetrated on the hapless citizens of Bhopal.

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2004

Handwritten: *Cauvery*
#12-10

DISSOLVING CAUVERY TENSIONS

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18/6

THERE IS A *déjà vu* to the Southwest monsoon turning out to be the saviour in the running dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the sharing of the Cauvery waters. Thanks to a wonderful increase in the rainfall over the Coorg-Mercara region during the past week, the storage at Kabini has swelled dramatically. With the Kabini dam able to impound water only up to a capacity of 19.5 tmc ft., the authorities there do not hold water beyond 16.5 tmc ft. As the inflows have been copious over the past three days, water has been released from the dam and should reach Mettur in a couple of days. This is the natural solution farmers in Tamil Nadu have been looking for. There is a growing realisation that scarce water in the hands of politicians becomes a political commodity. Tamil Nadu's recurrent charge against Karnataka has been that the upper riparian State uses the Cauvery only as a 'drainage system', releasing surplus water when it cannot impound it anymore, and that the State has failed to honour either the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal or the directions of the Supreme Court. Karnataka, on the other hand, has faulted Tamil Nadu for living in the past with respect to the Cauvery. Until last week, the upper riparian State contended that with poor rainfall it had no surplus to give its neighbour.

Not surprisingly, given the current political circumstances, there has been hyper-activity in Tamil Nadu over the Cauvery issue. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led opposition alliance, which has 12 representatives in the Union Council of Ministers, seized the initiative by taking an all-party delegation to meet first the Prime Minister and then the Karnataka Chief Minister. The ruling All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam joined the delegation to New Delhi but sent a separate Ministerial team

to Bangalore. Happily, the political build-up this year was cordial, in contrast to last year when legal battles and heated exchanges failed to secure any water from Karnataka. If the monsoon remains active, the four reservoirs in Karnataka should pick up enough storage by the end of the month to reach their full capacity of 114.5 tmc ft. Three successive drought years made the problem acute and a token release by Karnataka would make virtually no impact in the field. Over the past three years, farmers in the Delta districts of Tamil Nadu have not been able to raise a single crop.

Finding a lasting solution to the problem of equitably sharing Cauvery waters, which have been almost fully utilised, poses a complex challenge. The only thing extreme positions and competitive chauvinism can achieve is to make an acute problem malignant. Political parties and State Governments tend to be more concerned about protecting their constituencies than finding a lasting solution based on give and take. In 1991, the Cauvery Waters Dispute Tribunal came up with an interim award that allotted 205 tmc ft to Tamil Nadu as an entitlement but did not look at concrete provision for serious rainfall deficits. It has taken an inordinate amount of time conceiving and crafting a final award, which is nowhere in sight. Will the adjudication produce an equitable and viable distress-sharing formula? The State Governments, on their part, would do well to depoliticise the dispute. The recent effort of the "Cauvery family" of farmers drawn from the two States to create a congenial climate and an understanding of each other's problems has been extremely worthwhile. The Centre and the two States would do well to back the farmers in their progressive attempt to create a friendly climate for the implementation of any sustainable solution that is arrived at.

Cabinet panel apprised of Cauvery dispute

146/6
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17. Senior officials of the Ministry of Water Resources today apprised the Cabinet Committee of Political Affairs (CCPA), chaired by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, of the Cauvery dispute between the basin States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry. The 45-minute meeting was attended, among others, by the Union Ministers, Pranab Mukherjee (Defence), Arjun Singh (Human Resource Development), Shivraj Patil (Home), Sharad Pawar (Agriculture), P. Chidambaram (Finance), and Dayanidhi Maran (Communication and IT).

The Union Minister of State for Planning and Programme Implementation, Oscar Fer-

nandes, who is from Karnataka, was a special invitee.

The only official word after the meeting was a brief statement by Mr. Mukherjee, who said that the CCPA was apprised of the Cauvery dispute and that the Prime Minister "will speak today to the Karnataka Chief Minister for releasing water to Tamil Nadu."

On Wednesday night, the DMK Ministers, T.R. Baalu, Dayanidhi Maran and A. Raja, and the Tamil Nadu Congress

Committee president, G.K. Vasan, met the United Progressive Alliance president, Sonia Gandhi, and sought her intervention in resolving the Cauvery crisis. They met her after the DMK president, M. Karunanidhi, had written to her seeking her intervention.

Earlier, a Ministerial delegation from the Tamil Nadu Government and a delegation of DPA leaders also met Mr. Dharam Singh to request him to release water to Tamil Nadu.

কাবেরী সমস্যাও চিন্তায় ফেলছে মনমোহনকে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৮ জুন: পঞ্জাব ও হরিয়ানার মধ্যে শতক্র-যমুনা খালের জল ভাগ নিয়ে সমস্যার পরে এ বার তামিলনাড়ু-কর্ণাটকের মধ্যে কাবেরী নদীর জলবন্টন নিয়েও একইরকম রাজনৈতিক উত্তাপ পেতে শুরু করল মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার!

আজ কাবেরীর জলের প্রাপ্য ভাগ চেয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে তামিলনাড়ুর সর্বদলীয় বৈঠকের মাধ্যমে যার শুরু। সাধারণত বাকি সমস্ত বিষয়ে যে দুই দল বিপরীত মেরুতে থাকে, জয়ললিতার সেই এডিএমকে এবং করুণানিধির ডিএমকে এই একটি বিষয়ে এককাত্তা। সকালে প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে দেখা করেন তামিলনাড়ুর সব দলের ৫৯ সাংসদের প্রতিনিধিদল। সেখানে ডিএমকে, এডিএমকে তো ছিলই, কংগ্রেস, পিএমকে, এমডিএমকে, সিপিআই, সিপিএমও ছিল। সর্বদলীয় প্রতিনিধি দলের দাবি, কর্ণাটকের কাছ থেকে তামিলনাড়ুর প্রাপ্য কাবেরীর জল আদায় করে দিক সরকার। কাবেরীর জল নিয়ে দুই প্রতিবেশী রাজ্যের বিবাদ নতুন কোনও ব্যাপার নয়। এই নিয়ে ইতিমধ্যেই সুপ্রিম কোর্ট পর্যন্ত জল গড়িয়েছে। কিন্তু বর্তমান রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতিতে কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন জোট সরকারের কাছে এই পুরনো সমস্যা এখন নতুন মোড়কে আর্বিভূত হয়েছে।

তার প্রধান কারণ, তামিলনাড়ুতে এ বার লোকসভার ভোটে কংগ্রেস, ডিএমকে প্রভৃতি দলের জোট ৩৯টি আসনের সবক'টিতেই জিতেছে। সাধারণ মানুষ জয়ললিতাকে ছেড়ে ডিএমকে কংগ্রেস, প্রভৃতি দলকেই আঁকড়ে ধরেছে, এই অবস্থায় কাবেরী নিয়ে ন্যায্য কারণেই ফের সরব হয়েছে এই জোট। রাজ্য কংগ্রেসের পক্ষ থেকেও যে এই বিষয়ে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের উপরে চাপ রয়েছে, তা স্পষ্ট আজকের প্রতিনিধিদলে মণিশঙ্কর আইয়ার, পি চিদম্বরমের মতো মন্ত্রীদের উপস্থিতিতে। সবচেয়ে বড় কথা, এতদিন কেন্দ্রে বিজেপি শাসন ছিল। ফলে কাবেরী সমস্যার সমাধান না হওয়ার দায় সহজেই সরকারের ঘাড়ে ঠেলে দিতে পারত বিরোধীপক্ষ। এখন সেই সুযোগও নেই।

তা ছাড়া, তামিলনাড়ুর বিধানসভা নির্বাচন রয়েছে ২০০৬ সালের প্রথম দিকে। এই অবস্থায় সমস্যার সমাধান না হলে কংগ্রেসের পক্ষে তা অবশ্যই চিন্তার কারণ হয়ে থাকবে। অন্যদিকে, কর্ণাটকে কংগ্রেসের একক সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা হারালেও ফের জোট সরকারের শরিক হিসাবে ক্ষমতায় আসছে কংগ্রেস। এবং বিষয়টির সঙ্গে এতটাই স্পর্শকাতরতা জড়িয়ে যে চট করে তার সমাধান সম্ভবও নয়।

Prime Minister holds meeting on Cauvery

By Gargi Parsai

ND 1 2/6
NEW DELHI, JUNE 7. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, tonight held a meeting with the Minister of Water Resources, Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, and senior officials of the Union Cabinet and the Law Ministry to discuss the Cauvery water dispute and the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal issue.

The two subjects have assumed significance as an all-party delegation of Members of Parliament from Tamil Nadu is meeting the Prime Minister tomorrow morning to seek Cauvery water for the State as per an interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. At the same time, the Government is faced with the Supreme Court order on the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal. The apex court has asked the Centre to complete construction of the canal which will carry waters to Haryana. Punjab had challenged the apportionment of the waters to Haryana and declined to construct the canal on its side despite the fact that it is financed by the Centre.

The Centre has to decide on convening a meeting of the Cauvery River Authority (CRA), which is chaired by the Prime Minister, to facilitate implementation of the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal which enjoins Karnataka to ensure 205 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft) of water at Mettur in Tamil Nadu in a water year beginning June. Before that an official-level meeting of the Cauvery Monitoring Committee (CMC) has to be convened by the Water Resources Secretary.

THE HINDU

8 JUN 2004

কাবেরী নিয়ে একজোট হল ডিএমকে ও এডিএমকে

১১/৬ চেন্নাই, ৬ জুন: ধানের মরসুমে চাষীদের সেচের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় জলের জোগান দিতে তামিলনাড়ুতে একজোট হয়েছে প্রবল প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী ডি এম কে-এ ডি এম কে। কাল ডি এম কে জোটের বৈঠকে কাবেরীর জল নিয়ে কনটিকের উপর চাপ সৃষ্টির জন্য প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে তামিলনাড়ুর সব সাংসদের প্রতিনিধি দল পাঠানোর সিদ্ধান্ত হয়েছিল।

আজ ডি এম কে নেতা ও বিধানসভায় বিরোধীদের উপপ্রধান দুর্গাই মুকুগান ওই দলে এ ডি এম কে সাংসদের প্রতিনিধিত্ব চেয়ে জয়ললিতাকে চিঠি দিয়েছিলেন। প্রাথমিক ভাবে কংগ্রেসের শরিক হিসেবে ডি এম কে নেতা করুণানিধি, কংগ্রেস নেত্রী সনিয়া গাধী ও কনটিকে সদানির্বাচিত কংগ্রেসের জোট সরকারের উপর সমাধানের দ্বায় চাপিয়ে দিলেও 'কৃষকদের স্বার্থে' শ্রেম পর্যন্ত জয়ললিতা এ ব্যাপারে মত দিয়েছেন। এর ফলে নজিরবিহীন ভাবে এই প্রথম ডি এম কে ও এ ডি এম কে কাবেরীর জলবন্টন নিয়ে কোনও যৌথ প্রতিনিধি দল পাঠাচ্ছে। ৮ জুন ওই প্রতিনিধি দল মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে দেখা করবে।

প্রতি বছর জুনের বারো তারিখে মেতুরে কাবেরীর প্রধান জলাধার থেকে চাষীদের জন্য জল ছাড়ার কথা। কিন্তু কনটিক জল না দেওয়ায় গত দু'বছর সেচের জল জোগান দেওয়া সম্ভব হয়নি। এ বার এই ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি রুখতে কাল থেকে তামিলনাড়ুতে রাজনৈতিক তৎপরতা তুঙ্গে উঠেছে।

এ দিকে, কনটিকও তামিলনাড়ুর তৎপরতায় নড়ে চড়ে বসেছে। জোট সরকারের নতুন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী ধর্ম সিংহের কাছেও একটি প্রতিনিধি দল পাঠানো হবে বলে ডি এম কে বৈঠকে স্থির হয়েছিল। ১০ জুন ওই প্রতিনিধি দল তাঁর সঙ্গে দেখা করবেন বলে ধর্ম সিংহকে আজই ফোনে জানিয়েছেন ডি এম কে সাংসদ ও কেন্দ্রীয় সড়কমন্ত্রী টি আর বালু। এই পরিস্থিতিতে তামিলনাড়ুর চাপ ঠেকাতে পদস্থ অফিসারদের বৈঠক ডেকেছেন সিংহ।

তাঁরাও প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে দরবার করতে যাবেন কি না, তাও বৈঠকেই ঠিক করা হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন ধর্ম সিংহ। তবে, অন্তর্বর্তী আদেশ কার্যকর করা নিয়ে কনটিকের গাফিলতির অভিযোগে প্রধানমন্ত্রীকে লেখা চিঠিতে জয়ললিতার নালিশ নিয়ে তিনি মন্তব্য করতে চাননি।

কাবেরী জলবিবাদে তামিলনাড়ুর সঙ্গে ডি এম কে জোট বিশ্বাসঘাতকতা করে আসছে বলে মানুষকে বার বার জানানো হয়েছে এ বার লোকসভা ভোটে ডি এম কে নেতা এ ডি এম কে হটিয়ে দেওয়া হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন জয়ললিতা।

Bwinum
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Convene CRA, Jayalalithaa urges Manmohan Singh

By Our Special
Correspondent

CHENNAI, JUNE 5. The Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, has written to the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, urging him to "convene a meeting of the Cauvery River Authority forthwith to review the overall situation of the implementation of the interim orders of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal" by Karnataka.

In Friday's letter, she said the meeting was also necessary to finalise a distress-sharing formula. "If the formula is finalised, it



will enable Tamil Nadu to get at least the benefit of releases as per the formula if a distress situation arises during the current irrigation year."

The Chief Minister recalled that as early as 1991, the tribunal ordered that Karnataka ensure that 205 tmcft (thousand million cubic feet) of water was made available in the Mettur dam from its reservoirs in an irrigation year from June to May in a monthly stipulated pattern. The deficit in one week had to be made good the following week. Out of 205 tmcft, Tamil Nadu was to release six tmcft to Pondicherry. Karnataka had not implemented the award.

Ms. Jayalalithaa said that in the past two years, Tamil Nadu was not able to open the Mettur dam on the scheduled date (June 12), leading to loss of the kuruvai crop. "This year also, we will not be in a position to throw open the Mettur dam on the scheduled date for the kuruvai crop as the available utilisable storage as on June 4, 2004 is only about 4.5 tmcft at Mettur dam."

Cauvery crisis: Jaya tests new waters

Jaya writes to PM, DMK MPs to press demand

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI | JUNE 5

WITH the water year starting, Cauvery politics has resumed again in Tamil Nadu. Even as the main Opposition, the DMK, today announced that state MPs would meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to urge

him to persuade Karnataka to release Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa called for an immediate meeting of the Cauvery River Authority.

DMK president M. Karunanidhi, who convened a meeting this morning of its allies, including the Congress and Left parties, to discuss the Cauvery crisis, told the media that a delegation of MPs from the state would call on the Prime Minister on June 7 or 8. Besides, a seven-member delegation of DMK

and its allies led by DMK MLA, M. Durai Murugan would call on Karnataka Chief Minister Dharam Singh on June 10 to impress upon him the urgent need to release Cauvery water due to Tamil Nadu.

Just as the meeting of the DMK and its allies was under way, the Tamil Nadu government released copies of the letter written by the

Chief Minister to the Prime Minister, who heads the Cauvery River Authority.

In her letter, Jayalalithaa said a meeting of the CRA should be convened to review the overall situation for implementing the Tribunal's interim award and finalising a "distress sharing" formula be-

tween the two states. With the present storage level in Mettur dam (4.5 TMC feet), it would be impossible to meet the water needs of the delta region. For the last two years, the dam could not be opened on the scheduled date of June 12, thus affecting the first paddy crop (Kuruvai), the Chief Minister said.

Reacting to Jayalalithaa's fax to the Prime Minister, Karunanidhi said he was happy that the meeting he had convened had "awakened the Tamil Nadu

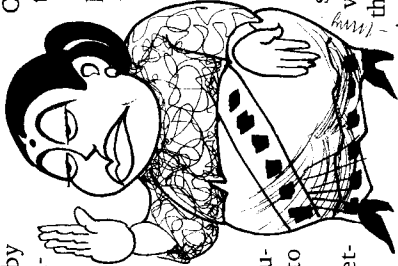
government". Asked whether the DMK will invite the AIADMK Rajya Sabha members to join the MPs' delegation to meet the Prime Minister, Karunanidhi said: "Since all our MPs are in Delhi, it will be possible to speak to the AIADMK Rajya Sabha MPs also over the phone and invite them to join the delegation."

He said the DMK and its allies were taking steps to avoid a repeat of the "terrible scenario" of farmers "dying of starvation" due to crops withering away in recent

years following inadequate water for irrigation in the delta areas.

On whether the DMK would demand the convening of the CRA, he said: "The objective of our deliberations is to get immediate relief for the Cauvery delta farmers."

Asked if he was hopeful of persuading a Congress-led coalition government in Karnataka now, Karunanidhi said: "That, only the presiding deity at the Goddess Chamundeeshwari Temple (in Karnataka) can say."



ঝড়বৃষ্টিতে রেল ও সড়কে বিপর্যয়, বজ্রপাতে মৃত ৫

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: প্রাক-বর্ষার বৃষ্টি বৃহস্পতিবার সন্ধ্যায় দক্ষিণবঙ্গের রেল ও সড়ক ব্যবস্থা লণ্ডভণ্ড করে দিল। বাজ পড়ে মৃত্যু হয়েছে পাঁচ জনের। বজ্রপাতে পানাগড়ের ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের টার্মিনালে তেলের ট্যাঙ্কে আগুন ধরে যায়।

বিদ্যুৎ-বিভাট, বিকল সিগন্যালিং এবং লাইন বসে যাওয়ায় সন্ধ্যার মুখে হাওড়া-শিয়ালদহে ট্রেন চলাচল বিপর্যস্ত হয়ে পড়ে। টালিগঞ্জ মেট্রোর সুড়ঙ্গের মুখে গাছ পড়ে বিপর্যস্ত হয় মেট্রো চলাচলও। আধ ঘণ্টার ঝড়বৃষ্টিতে গাছ উপড়ে পড়ে কলকাতার বিভিন্ন রাস্তায়। থমকে যায় যান চলাচল। তার ছিড়ে অন্ধকার নেমে আসে বিভিন্ন এলাকায়। বর্ধমানের মস্তেশ্বর ও পাণ্ডবেশ্বরে বাজ পড়ে মৃত্যু হয় চার জনের।

হাওড়া ও শিয়ালদহে বৃহস্পতিবার সন্ধ্যা থেকেই ট্রেন চলাচল ব্যাহত হয়। কয়েক ঘণ্টার মধ্যে ট্রেন চলাচল শুরু করা গেলেও রাতে আর তা স্বাভাবিক হয়নি। টালিগঞ্জ স্টেশন থেকে সুড়ঙ্গে ঢোকান মুখে একটি গাছ পড়ে এক ঘণ্টারও বেশি মেট্রো বন্ধ থাকে। শিয়ালদহ ও হাওড়ায় ওভারহেড তারে বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহ বন্ধ, লাইন বসে যাওয়া, সর্বোপরি সিগন্যাল লাল হয়ে যাওয়ায় সমস্যা দেখা দেয়। ট্রেনের গোলমালে অফিস-ফেরত হাজার হাজার ঘরমুখে মানুষ আটকে পড়েন। কয়েকটি ট্রেন চালানোর চেষ্টা করা হলেও মাঝপথে বিভিন্ন বাধায় আটকে পড়ে সেগুলি শমুকগতিতে চলায় বেশি রাতে বিয়্য আরও বেড়ে যায়। দুই বিভাগেই বেশ কিছু লোকাল ট্রেন বাতিল করতে হয়েছে বলে রেল সূত্রের খবর।

রেল সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, ৭টা থেকে ঝড়বৃষ্টিতে ওভারহেডে বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহে বিঘ্ন ঘটে। পূর্ব রেলের চিফ অপারেশন্স ম্যানেজার সুভাষ ঠাকুর বলেন, “টিটাগড় ও সোনারপুর খিড়ে বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহে গোলমালের ফলেই এই বিপত্তি।” খিড়ে বিদ্যুৎ না-থাকায় লোকাল ট্রেনগুলি মাঝপথে থেমে যায়। তার পরেই বৃষ্টির জলে বেশ কিছু সিগন্যালে ত্রুটি ধরা পড়ে। রেল সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, সিগন্যালে জল পড়লে তড়িৎস্পর্শে তা লাল হয়ে যায়। এর ফলেও বেশ কিছু ট্রেন মাঝপথে আটকে পড়ে। একই অবস্থা হয়েছে হাওড়ার দিকে। ওভারহেডে বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহ বন্ধ এবং লাইন বসে যাওয়ায় ট্রেন চলাচল ব্যাহত হয়। সব মিলিয়ে সাড়ে ৭টা থেকে ৯টা পর্যন্ত ব্যাহত হয় ট্রেন চলাচল। গভীর রাত পর্যন্ত ট্রেনগুলি চলেছে অনেক দেরিতে।

রাতে টালিগঞ্জ স্টেশন থেকে সুড়ঙ্গে ঢোকান মুখে একটি গাছ ঝড়ে লাইনের উপরে পড়ে গেলে মেট্রো চলাচল বন্ধ হয়ে যায়। সন্ধ্যা ৭টা ২০ মিনিটের পর থেকে রাত সাড়ে ৮টা পর্যন্ত দমদমমুখী মেট্রো পুরোপুরি বন্ধ ছিল। মেট্রো সূত্রের খবর, আপ ও ডাউন লাইনে মোট নটি ট্রেন বাতিল করতে হয়েছে। সাময়িক ভাবে দমদম থেকে ময়দান স্টেশন পর্যন্ত মেট্রো চালু রাখা হয়েছিল। গাড়ি আর দক্ষিণের দিকে এগোতে পারেনি। মেট্রোকর্মীদের দিয়ে গাছ সরিয়ে পরে ট্রেন চালানো হয়।

বিদ্যুৎ দফতর সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, ধরমপুর, টিটাগড় ১৩২ কেভি সরবরাহ লাইনটি সন্ধ্যা পৌনে ৭টা নাগাদ বসে যায়। বাজ পড়ার ফলেই এই বিপত্তি বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। রাজ্য বিদ্যুৎ পর্যদের টিটাগড় সাব-স্টেশন থেকে ওই সরবরাহ লাইনে ১৫ মেগাওয়াট বিদ্যুৎ দেওয়া হয় রেল ট্রাকশনের জন্য। রাত সাড়ে ৮টায় মেরামতি শেষ হয়। তার আগেই অবশ্য অন্য পথে বিদ্যুৎ নিয়ে আসে রেল। তার ফলে মানুষের বিপত্তি বেশি বাড়েনি। তবে ব্যারাকপুর শিল্পাঞ্চলে গভীর রাত পর্যন্ত বিদ্যুৎ ফেরেনি।

কলকাতা ও শহরতলি জুড়ে তাণ্ডব চালিয়েছে সন্ধ্যার ঝড়। গাছ পড়ে যাওয়ায় দক্ষিণের ডি এল খান রোড বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয় সাময়িক ভাবে। সেখানে রাস্তার ওভারহেড তারে গাছ পড়ে গিয়েছিল। গাছ পড়েছে বিজয় বসু রোড, ফেয়ারলি গ্লোস, অবিনাশ কবিরাজ স্ট্রিট, রাজা নবকৃষ্ণ স্ট্রিটে। ওই সব রাস্তায় যান চলাচল নিয়ন্ত্রণ করা হয়। বিদ্যুৎ-বিভাটের জেরে সন্ধ্যা থেকেই নিষ্পদীপ ছিল ব্যারাকপুর শিল্পাঞ্চল। অনেক রাত পর্যন্ত সেখানে বিদ্যুৎ ফিরে আসেনি।

ঝড়বৃষ্টিতে বর্ধমানের মস্তেশ্বর ও পাণ্ডবেশ্বরে বাজ পড়ে চার জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। নদিয়ার মায়াপুরে বাজ পড়ে মৃত্যু হয়েছে এক জনের। বর্ধমানে মৃতদের মধ্যে আছে এক স্কুলছাত্রীও। পুলিশ জানিয়েছে, মস্তেশ্বরের ভাগরা বাজারের কাছে আয়েশা সিদ্দিকা বালিকা মাদ্রাসায় বাজ পড়ে রবিন খাতুন (১৬) মারা যায়। আহত হন এক শিক্ষিকা-সহ ১২ জন। ন'জনকে বর্ধমান মেডিক্যাল কলেজ হাসপাতালে ভর্তি করানো হয়েছে। ওই থানারই দীর্ঘনগর গ্রামে মুন্না মণ্ডল (১৩) নামে এক কিশোরী বাড়ির বাইরে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল। বাজ পড়ে সেখানেই তার মৃত্যু হয়। ওই থানার রাই গ্রামে মারা যান জয়নাল শেখ (৫১) নামে এক শ্রীচ। পাণ্ডবেশ্বরের শ্যামলা গ্রামে বজ্রাঘাতে মৃত্যু হয় আশিস বাদ্যকর (১৮) নামে এক যুবকের। আহত হন এক জন। বাজ পড়ে নবদ্বীপের মায়াপুরের ঘোষপাড়ায় মারা গিয়েছেন শীতল ঘোষ (৫২) নামে এক ব্যক্তি। তিনি তখন মাঠে গরু চরাচ্ছিলেন।

নামানো হল ফৌজকেও

তেল টার্মিনালে বাজ, পানাগড়ে ভয়াল আগুন

গৌতম বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় • পানাগড়

বৃহস্পতিবার বিকালে বাজ পড়ে পানাগড়ের ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের টার্মিনালে ভয়াল আগুন লাগে। নিমেষের মধ্যে আগুনের লেলিহান শিখা লাফিয়ে ওঠে ছ'তলা উচ্চতায়। তবে আগুন টার্মিনালের বাইরে না ছড়ানোর খুব একটা আতঙ্কের সৃষ্টি হয়নি। সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই এলাকায় চূড়ান্ত সতর্কতা জারি করে আগুন নেভানোর কাজে নামে ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের নিজস্ব বাহিনী। গোটা এলাকা ঘিরে ফেলা হয়। অবস্থা আয়ত্তে আনতে গোটা রাজ্য থেকে দমকলের গাড়ি পাঠানো হয়েছে পানাগড়ে। নামানো হয়েছে সেনাবাহিনীকেও। দমকলের মতে, এত বড় অগ্নিকাণ্ড এর আগে রাজ্যে সম্ভবত ঘটেনি। দমকলমন্ত্রী প্রতিম চট্টোপাধ্যায় রাত সওয়া ১২টা নাগাদ ঘটনাস্থলে পৌঁছেছেন।

অগ্নিকাণ্ডের পরে দমকলের সঙ্গেই ফৌজের একটি দল ডিপোয় ঢোকে। রাত পর্যন্ত ওই ঘটনায় হতাহতের কোনও খবর পাওয়া যায়নি। কিন্তু দাঁড় দাঁড় করে আগুন জ্বলছেই। প্রচুর 'ফোম' ঢেলে আগুন নেভানোর চেষ্টা চলছে। প্রশাসনের আশঙ্কা, যে-ট্যাঙ্কটিতে আগুন ধরেছে, আগুন আয়ত্তে আনতে না-পারলে সেটি গলে যাবে। তার জেরে পাশের ট্যাঙ্কগুলিতেও আগুন ছড়িয়ে পড়তে পারে। দাঁড় দাঁড় করে তেল জ্বলতে থাকায় কালো ধোঁয়ায় আকাশ ঢেকে গিয়েছে। তেল পোড়ার কটু গন্ধে ভারী হয়ে গিয়েছে বাতাস। দমকলের বক্তব্য, প্রাণপণ চেষ্টা করেও শুক্রবার ভোরের আগে অবস্থা আয়ত্তে আনা সম্ভব নয়। রাত ২টার খবর, পরিস্থিতির অবনতি হয়েছে। ফুরিয়ে গিয়েছে দমকলের সব গাড়ির জল। ভূগর্ভস্থ জল তোলার পাম্পটিও বিকল।

ডিপোর বাইরে থেকে অগ্নিকাণ্ডের ভয়াবহতা বিশেষ বোঝা যাচ্ছে না। মাঝেমধ্যে শুধু আগুনের শিখা লাফিয়ে উঠতে দেখা যাচ্ছে। তা-ও সব সময় নয়। খানিকটা দূরের বাড়ির ছাদে উঠেও জ্বলন্ত ট্যাঙ্কটিকে তেমন ভাবে দেখা যাচ্ছে না। তবে এলাকার আকাশ কালো ধোঁয়ায় ঢেকে গিয়েছে। দমকলবাহিনী যখনই জ্বলন্ত তেলের উপরে জল ঢালছে, চড়চড় শব্দ করে আগুনের শিখা মিলিয়ে যাচ্ছে। কিন্তু পরমহুঁতেরই আবার তা লকলক করে উঠছে।

ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের রাজবাড়ি টার্মিনালটি পানাগড় সেনা ছাউনির কাছেই। সেখানে আছে পরপর ২০টি ট্যাঙ্ক। আই ও সি-র বক্তব্য: ওই ট্যাঙ্কগুলিতে মোট ৮৮,০০০ কিলোলিটার তেল ধরে। এ দিন বিকাল ৫টার কিছু পরে ১২ নম্বর ট্যাঙ্কে বাজ পড়ে। সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই আগুন ধরে যায়। টার্মিনালের নিরাপত্তাকর্মী শহিদুল ইসলাম ঘটনাস্থলের কাছাকাছিই ছিলেন। তিনি বলেন, “দেখলাম, একটা বিদ্যুতের বলক নেমে আসছে। প্রায় সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই দেখলাম, আগুন ধরে গেল ১২ নম্বর ট্যাঙ্কে।” ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েল সূত্রের খবর, শুধু ওই ট্যাঙ্কেই ৭,৩০০ কিলোলিটার তেল ধরে। ঘটনার সময় ওই ট্যাঙ্কে ছিল ৪,০০০ কিলোলিটারের বেশি তেল। একটি রাজ্যে তিন দিনের তেলের যা চাহিদা, ওই ট্যাঙ্কে ততটা তেল ছিল বলে জানান আসানসোল-দুর্গাপুর উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের চিফ এগজিকিউটিভ অফিসার মঞ্জুনাথ প্রসাদ।

ট্যাঙ্কটির মধ্যে তিনটি ছোট প্রকোষ্ঠ আছে। প্রথম প্রকোষ্ঠে বাজ পড়ে। দাঁড় দাঁড় করে সেটি জ্বলে উঠতেই আই ও সি-কর্তৃপক্ষ দুই ও তিন নম্বর প্রকোষ্ঠের তেল বার করতে শুরু করেন। দুর্গাপুরে দমকলের 'জি' ডিভিশনের ডিভিশনাল অফিসার শিবনারায়ণ রায়চৌধুরী রাতে বলেন, “ওই ট্যাঙ্কটিতে ৪৫ লক্ষ লিটার তেল ছিল। তার অর্ধেক ইতিমধ্যেই পুড়ে গিয়েছে। বাকি তেল বার করে আনার চেষ্টা চলছে।” তিনি আরও জানান, আপাতত তাঁদের কাজ দুটি। ১) আগুন আয়ত্তে আনা। ২) তাপমাত্রা কমানো। তা না-হলে আশপাশের

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

তেল টার্মিনালে বাজ, পানাগড়ে ভয়াল আগুন

প্রথম পাতার পর

ট্যাঙ্কগুলিতেও বিস্ফোরণ হওয়ার আশঙ্কা থাকছে। ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েল সূত্রের খবর, যতটা তেল জ্বলতে বাকি আছে, তা সরাসরি বার করে আনার কাজ শুরু হলেও শেষ পর্যন্ত সমস্ত তেল বার করা যাবে না। ফলে ট্যাঙ্কের একেবারে তলায় থাকা কিছুটা তেল জ্বলতে দিতেই হবে।

অগ্নিকাণ্ডের পরে ইন্ডিয়ান অয়েলের লোকেরা নিজেরাই তা আয়ত্তে আনার চেষ্টা করছিলেন। কিন্তু প্রাথমিক ভাবে বিফল হওয়ায় তাঁরা দমকলে খবর দেন। খবর দেওয়ার ৪০ মিনিটের মধ্যে দমকলের প্রথম গাড়িটি টার্মিনালে ঢোকে। প্রথম বিপদজ্ঞাপক সাইরেনটি বাজে রাত ৮টার কয়েক মিনিট আগে। তত ক্ষণে দুর্গাপুরের মহকুমা পুলিশ অফিসার কাঁকসা, কোক-ওভেন, দুর্গাপুর, নিউ টাউনশিপ ইত্যাদি থানার প্রায় সমস্ত পুলিশকে নিয়ে ঘটনাস্থলে চলে আসেন। পুলিশ পুরো এলাকাটি ঘিরে ফেলে বহিরাগতদের প্রবেশ নিষিদ্ধ করে দেয়। ভিতরে শুরু হয় আগুন আয়ত্তে আনার কাজ এবং তার পরে চলে আগুন নেভানোর লড়াই।

কলকাতায় দমকলের সদর দফতর থেকে বলা হয়, এত বড় আগুন পশ্চিমবঙ্গে কখনও লেগেছে কি না, তা তাঁরা মনে করতে পারছেন না। কলকাতা থেকেই পানাগড়ে পাঠানো হয়েছে ২০টি গাড়ি। আশপাশে যত দমকল কেন্দ্র রয়েছে, নবাইকেই গাড়ি পাঠাতে বলা হয়। সংস্থা নূত্রের খবর, আগুন নেভানোর কাজটা তুলত করা হচ্ছে 'ফোম' দিয়ে। তবে সেই নঙ্গ তীব্র বেগে জল ঢালায় ফোম উড়ে যায়। দমকল বাহিনী দূর থেকে জল ছিটিয়ে গপমাত্রা কমানোর চেষ্টা চালাতে থাকে। গরণ, দমকলের আশঙ্কা, কোনও মতে

তাপমাত্রা বেড়ে ট্যাঙ্কটিতে বিস্ফোরণ ঘটলে অবস্থা আয়ত্তের বাইরে চলে যাবে। আবার জলের তোড়ে ফোম উড়ে গেলে আগুন নেভানো যাবে না। কলকাতায় আই ও সি-কর্তৃপক্ষ জানিয়েছেন, আগুন যাতে সর্বত্র ছড়িয়ে না-পড়ে, সেই জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছে। অগ্নি নির্বাপক ব্যবস্থা নিয়ে পানাগড়ের সেনা ও বিমানবাহিনীর বিশেষজ্ঞেরাও ঘটনাস্থলে পৌঁছে গিয়েছেন।

ফোমের সাহায্যে জ্বলন্ত ট্যাঙ্কারটির আগুন নিয়ন্ত্রণে আনার চেষ্টা তো চলছেই। সেই সঙ্গে ওই ট্যাঙ্কের আশপাশের ট্যাঙ্কগুলি থেকেও তেল সরানোর কাজ চলছে জোর কদমে। ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত ট্যাঙ্কের তেলও বার করার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছেন সংস্থার কর্মীরা। পেটোল নিয়ে এসেছিল, রেলের এমন কয়েকটি রেকও সঙ্গে সঙ্গে নিরাপদ দূরত্বে সরিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

সন্ধ্যায় ঘটনাস্থলে গিয়ে দেখা যায়, ডিপোর গেট দিয়ে একের পর এক দমকলের গাড়ি ঢুকছে। দমকলের গাড়ি যাতে বাধা না-পায়, সেই জন্য গেটের সামনের এলাকা একেবারে ফাঁকা করে দেওয়া হয়েছে। অনবরত ঢুকছে পুলিশের গাড়িও। ঢুকছে অগ্নি নির্বাপক ফোম-বাহী গাড়ি। পানাগড়ের বিমানবাহিনী ও ফৌজের তরফে ওই ফোম পাঠানো হয়। ফোম আসে ডি পি এল থেকেও। সংস্থা-কর্তৃপক্ষের দাবি: প্রতি ঘণ্টায় তাঁরা ৪০০ কিলোলিটার তেল বার করে আনছেন। ওই তেল রাখা হচ্ছে পাশের একটি খালি ট্যাঙ্কে।

১৯৯৩ সালেও একই টার্মিনালে বাজ পড়ে বিমানে ব্যবহার করার দামি জ্বালানির ট্যাঙ্কে আগুন লেগেছিল। ট্যাঙ্কার্স ওনার্স অ্যাসোসিয়েশন-এর সম্পাদক সমরেশ দত্ত এ দিন ওই কথা জানান।

সংরক্ষণের পক্ষে বিমানও

জলাশয় বিল নিয়ে বুদ্ধের বৈঠক আজ

শ্যামলেন্দু মিত্র ও প্রসূন আচার্য

জলাশয় সংরক্ষণের নামে তা বোজানোর অনুমতি দেওয়ার জন্য বিল আনার অধিকার পরিবেশ দফতরের আছে কি না, সেই বিষয়টি খতিয়ে দেখতে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী বুদ্ধদেব ভট্টাচার্য আজ, বৃহস্পতিবার বৈঠকে বসছেন। এ দিকে, জলাশয় সংরক্ষণের ব্যাপারে এগিয়ে এসেছেন বামফ্রন্টের চেয়ারম্যান বিমান বসুও। বৃহবার তিনি বলেন, “আমি প্রথম থেকেই বলে আসছি, জলাশয় সংরক্ষণ করতে হবে। নইলে পরিবেশ ও মানুষ বাঁচবে না।” জলাশয়ের প্রয়োজনীয়তা বোঝাতে বিমানবাবু বলেন, “পুরুলিয়ার মতো রক্ষ পাথুরে এলাকাতেও যে জল সংরক্ষণ করা যায়, মানুষকে তা বোঝাতে সেখানকার মহিলা আবাসিক বিদ্যালয় প্রাঙ্গণে জলাশয় তৈরি করেছি।”

মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর বৈঠকে উপস্থিত থাকতে বলা হয়েছে আইনমন্ত্রী নিশীথ অধিকারী ও পরিবেশমন্ত্রী মানব মুখোপাধ্যায়কে। আইন দফতর জলাশয় ভরাতের মতো বিতর্কিত বিষয় নিয়ে পরিবেশ দফতরের বিলের খসড়া কী ভাবে অনুমোদন করল, সেই বিষয়ে খোদ মুখ্যমন্ত্রীই সংশয় প্রকাশ করেছেন। তাঁর বক্তব্য: আমরা কি পাগল যে, জলাশয় ভরাতের নিয়ে বিল আনব! বুদ্ধবাবুকে সমর্থন করে বিমানবাবু বলেন, “মুখ্যমন্ত্রী তো ঠিকই বলেছেন। আমরা, সি পি এমের নেতারা কেউ পাগল হয়ে যাইনি যে, প্রোমোটারদের স্বার্থে জলাশয় বুজিয়ে দেব। এ কাজ করলে ভবিষ্যৎ প্রজন্মের কাছে আমরা কী জবাব দেব?” এর আগে দলের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাসও জানিয়েছিলেন, জলাশয় সংরক্ষণের নীতিগত সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে বামফ্রন্ট সরছে না। ভূমি সংস্কার মন্ত্রী আব্দুর রেজ্জাক মোল্লাও তাঁর আপত্তি তুলেছেন পরিবেশ দফতরের ওই খসড়া বিল নিয়ে।

জলাশয় ভরাত নিয়ে প্রবল বিতর্ক শুরু হওয়ায় আইন দফতর এখন বলতে চাইছে, তারা পরিবেশ দফতরের চাপে ওই বিলে অনুমোদন দিয়েছে। দেহিতে হলেও কেন্দ্রীয় পরিবেশ মন্ত্রকের নির্দেশিকা পরীক্ষা করতে গিয়ে আইন দফতর জানতে পেরেছে, পরিবেশ দফতরের এই ধরনের বিল তৈরির অধিকার নেই। জলাশয় সংরক্ষণ সংক্রান্ত মৎস্য দফতরের যে-আইন রয়েছে, সেই বিষয়ে পরিবেশ দফতর কেবল সহযোগিতা করবে। পরিবেশ দফতর প্রয়োজনে মৎস্য দফতরের জলাশয় সংরক্ষণ আইন সংশোধনের প্রস্তাব দিতে পারে। মৎস্য দফতর আলোচনা-সাপেক্ষে সংশোধনী বিল আনবে। রাজ্যের আইন দফতর থেকে কেন্দ্রীয় পরিবেশ মন্ত্রকের ওই নির্দেশনামার কথা আইনমন্ত্রী নিশীথ অধিকারীকে জানানো হয়েছে। সেই অনুযায়ী আইনমন্ত্রী প্রাথমিক ভাবে মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে আলোচনাও করেছেন।

পরিবেশ দফতরের জলাশয় ভরাত বিল নিয়ে আইন দফতর কার্যত দু'ভাগ। আইন দফতরের এক মুখপাত্র বলেন, এই সংক্রান্ত বিলে অনুমোদন দেওয়ার জন্য পরিবেশ দফতর ২০০১ সাল থেকে তাঁদের উপরে চাপ সৃষ্টি করে আসছে। প্রথমে পরিবেশ দফতর শহরের জলাশয় আর গ্রামাঞ্চলের জলাশয় পৃথক করার জন্য বিলের খসড়া পাঠায়। পরিবেশ দফতরের বিলে বলা হয়, মৎস্য দফতরের হাতে থাকুক গ্রামাঞ্চলের জলাশয়। শহরাঞ্চল অর্থাৎ পুরসভা এলাকার জলাশয়ের নিয়ন্ত্রণ থাকবে পরিবেশ দফতরের হাতে। এই নিয়ে মৎস্য দফতর প্রবল আপত্তি জানায়। বিষয়টি যায় মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর কাছে। তখনকার মতো পরিবেশ দফতরের জলাশয় ভাগের বিল আটকে যায়। তখনকার বিলের নাম ছিল ‘ওয়েস্টবেঙ্গল লার্জ পান্ডস কন্ট্রোল বিল-২০০২’।

এর পরে চলতি বছরের প্রথম দিকে পরিবেশ দফতর আবার জলাশয় নিয়ন্ত্রণ নিয়ে বিল তৈরিতে উদ্যোগী হয়। সেই বিলের নাম দেওয়া হয় ‘পশ্চিমবঙ্গ জলাশয় সংরক্ষণ বিল-২০০৪’। কিন্তু বিলটির ছত্রে ছত্রে জলাশয় বোজানোর সংস্থান রাখা হয়। রাজ্যের আইন দফতরের এক মুখপাত্র বলেন, তাঁরা পরিবেশ দফতরের ওই বিল নিয়ে প্রথম থেকেই প্রশ্ন তুলেছিলেন। কিন্তু উপর মহল থেকে চাপ সৃষ্টি করে বিলটি আইন দফতরকে দিয়ে অনুমোদন করানো হয়েছে। আইন দফতর থেকে প্রথম থেকেই বলা হয়েছিল, কেন্দ্রীয় পরিবেশ মন্ত্রকের নির্দেশিকায় স্পষ্ট ভাষায় বলা আছে যে, কোনও রাজ্যের পরিবেশ দফতর এই ধরনের বিল আনতে পারে না। পরিবেশ দফতর অন্য দফতরের সহযোগী হিসাবে কাজ করবে।

বিমানবাবু বলেন, “রামসার কনভেনশন অনুযায়ী বছরে ছ’মাস জল দাঁড়ায়, এমন
এর পর সাতের পাতায়

জলাশয় বিল

প্রথম পাতার পর

জায়গা সংরক্ষণ করা সরকারের দায়িত্ব। রাজ্য সরকার সেই কাজই করে চলেছে। উন্নয়নের স্বার্থে রাজারহাট উপনগরীর মতো ক্ষেত্রে সরকার নিচু জমি ভরাতের অনুমতি দিয়েছে। সে-ক্ষেত্রেও বিকল্প জলাশয় তৈরির কথা বলা হয়েছে।” পরিবেশ দফতরের ওই বিল প্রসঙ্গে তিনি বলেন, “উন্নয়নের জন্য ওই বিলে কিছু কথা থাকতে পারে। তবে নীতিগত ভাবে আমরা জলাশয় ভরাতের বিরুদ্ধে।” আইন দফতর জানিয়েছে, পরিবেশ মন্ত্রকের নির্দেশিকার প্রথম খণ্ডের ৩১ নম্বর উপ-ধারায় বলা আছে, রাজ্যের পরিবেশ দফতরের ‘রুলস অব বিজনেস’ করা হল, তাতে ওই দফতর পরিবেশ রক্ষায় বিভিন্ন দফতরের সঙ্গে সহযোগিতা করবে। মৎস্য দফতর এই ব্যাপারে আইন দফতরকে আগেভাগেই সতর্ক করেছিল।

ইরানে ভূমিকম্প, মৃত ২৫, আহত ২০০, তেহরানে আতঙ্ক

তেহরান, ২৯ মে— গত ছ'মাসের মধ্যে দ্বিতীয়বার ভূমিকম্পের কবলে পড়ল ইরান। গত কালের ওই ভূমিকম্পে এখনও পর্যন্ত ২৫ জনের মৃত্যুর খবর পাওয়া গিয়েছে। অভ্যন্তরীণ মন্ত্রক সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, মাজানদারান প্রদেশে মারা গিয়েছেন ২১ জন, ৪ জন কাজভিন প্রদেশে। আহতের সংখ্যা প্রায় ২০০। এ দিকে, অকুস্থলে যাওয়ার সময় বিমান দুর্ঘটনায় কাজভিন প্রদেশের গভর্নরমাসুদ ইমামি, ডেপুটি গভর্নর এবং পুলিশ প্রধান-সহ ছ'জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। রেড ক্রসের খবর অনুযায়ী, ভূমিকম্পে মৃতের সংখ্যা ৪৫ জনেরও বেশি। কম্পিয়ান অঞ্চলে বহু গ্রাম প্রায় মাটির সঙ্গে মিশে গিয়েছে। রাজধানীতেও ক্ষয়ক্ষতির পরিমাণ যথেষ্ট। অনেক বাড়ির জানলার কাঁচ ভেঙেছে। বেশ কিছু বহুতলে ফাটল ধরেছে। ভূমিকম্প বিশেষজ্ঞেরা জানিয়েছেন, এখান থেকে ৭০ কিলোমিটার উত্তরে, মাজানদারান প্রদেশে ভূমিকম্পের কেন্দ্রস্থল ছিল। রিখটার স্কেলে কম্পনের তীব্রতার মাপা হয়েছে ছয় দশমিক এক।

কেন্দ্রস্থল থেকে বেশ কিছুটা দূরে হলেও কাল ভূমিকম্পের ধাক্কায় কেঁপে উঠেছিল রাজধানী শহর। তবে কম্পনের

আঘাত খত না বেশি ছিল, তার চেয়ে দ্বিগুণ ছিল আতঙ্ক। কারণ এখানে যে কোনও দিন ভয়াবহ ভূকম্পের আশঙ্কায় দীর্ঘ দিন ধরেই মানুষ আশঙ্কিত ছিলেন। ভূবিজ্ঞানীরা নানা তথ্য প্রমাণ দিয়ে জানিয়েছিলেন, দেড়শো বছর অন্তর এখানে একটা ভয়াল ভূমিকম্প হয়। শেষবার এমন হয়েছিল ১৮৩০ সালে। ফলে কাল যখন গোটা শহর কাঁপতে শুরু করে, তখন ৯৯ শতাংশ শহরবাসী ভেবেছিলেন, 'শেষের সে দিন ঘনিয়ে এসেছে।' যে যে অবস্থায় ছিলেন, উদ্ভয়ের মতো রাস্তায় বের হয়ে এসেছিলেন। কম্পন থামার পরেও মানুষ ভয়ে বাড়িতে ঢুকতে পারেননি। প্রচণ্ড ঠাণ্ডার মধ্যে তাঁরা পার্কে বা খোলা ময়দানে বস্তু পেতে কোনওরকমে রাত কাটিয়েছেন।

ভূমিকম্পপ্রবণ এই শহরে আদৌ নিয়ম-কানুন মেনে বাড়িঘর তৈরি করা হয়েছে কিনা, সেই প্রশ্ন এখন তুলতে শুরু করেছে দেশের প্রায় সব সংবাদপত্র। কয়েক মাস আগে বামে ভয়াবহ ভূমিকম্পে প্রায় ২০ হাজার মানুষ মারা যাওয়ার পরেই তেহরানে ব্যাপক আতঙ্ক ছড়িয়েছিল। তখন এখান থেকে রাজধানী সরিয়ে নেওয়ার কথাও ওঠে।

— রয়টার্স



A woman salvages some belongings from her house which was destroyed in floods in the Dominican border town of Jimani on Friday. — AFP

Caribbean flood toll mounts to 900

SAN DOMINGO (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC), MAY 27. Rescuers clawed through rivers of mud and debris in ruined settlements in the Dominican Republic and Haiti yesterday, searching for survivors of floods which have now killed at least 900 people and left hundreds missing.

The border region between the two Caribbean countries, which share the island of Hispaniola, has been devastated by water and mud flows which have swept the area after 10 days of heavy rain.

Entire villages have been swept away and in their place is a swath of mud several hundred metres wide.

In Haiti, 358 bodies were recovered from several border towns, while in the Dominican Republic officials said that at least 250 bodies had been found, most around the town of Jimani, about 160 km west of the

capital, Santo Domingo. Another 375 people have been reported missing on the Dominican side and presumed buried under the layers of mud. One man, Jude Joseph, who had gone to Jimani from Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, to sell rice at a border market and visit family members in Bobmita, La Cuarenta and Barrio El Tanque, found all those neighbourhoods swept away. "I've been left with nothing," said the 30-year-old, whose nine relatives were still missing.

Another resident, Norma Cuevas, was desperately looking for her 63-year-old mother among dozens of other families searching for signs of life. "We can't find her anywhere," she said. Jose Luis German, a spokesman for the Dominican Republic's National Emergency Commission, said relief workers were continuing to dig through

the mud, aided in the search by sniffer dogs.

Although many of the bodies in Jimani have been identified, dozens of unidentified victims have been buried in mass graves. "Some of them are Haitians who may have been here illegally and no one has come to claim them," Mr German said during a telephone interview. "In some cases, entire families were killed and there is no one left to identify them."

The heavy rains caused the Silie river to burst its banks, sending thousands of tonnes of rocks and sediment rushing into villages along the countries' border before dawn on Monday, sweeping residents from their beds. The death tolls have been particularly high because Haiti is 90 per cent deforested, and poor people on both sides of the border mostly live in wooden shacks.

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THE HINDU

2004

Caribbean flood toll rises to

2000

Port-au-Prince (Haiti), May 27 (Reuters): Rescue workers rushed to fly in drinking water, chlorine tablets and first-aid kits today to a remote Haitian town submerged by floods that killed an estimated 2,000 people on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola.

The discovery of more than 1,000 bodies in Mapou, a village southeast of the capital, dramatically raised the death toll from flash floods and mudslides triggered by torrential rains in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Foreign troops sent to Haiti after a rebellion in February, turned to relief efforts. They provided helicopter flights to aid agencies trying to reach survivors who were isolated when floods washed out roads across southeastern Haiti.

"Mapou is in the middle of a valley and the village is practically under water," said Lieutenant Colonel David Lapan, spokesman for the multinational force. "It is like a lake when you look at it from the air."

Heavy rains last weekend sent rivers of mud and debris through villages, sweeping away shanties and burying residents on both sides of the Haiti-Dominican Republic border.

The toll in Haiti stood at about 1,660, while 329 bodies have been recovered in the Dominican Republic, mostly in the town of Jimani near the Haitian border.

Haiti confronted its worst natural disaster in years less than three months after a rebellion killed more than 200 people and helped oust President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The 3,500-member peacekeeping force sent to Haiti by the UN pitched in to help the relief effort.

Three helicopter flights left Port-au-Prince early today in a race against thunderstorms threatening more misery. They carried chlorine tablets to purify drinking water, shovels and other emergency supplies to Mapou and hard-hit areas around Fond Verettes, where at least 158 were killed.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and four out of five of its 8 million people live in poverty. The countryside is vulnerable to floods and landslides because inhabitants have virtually stripped it of trees to make charcoal cooking fuel.

Prime Minister Gerard Lartoutue said his government would make hard decisions to relocate people who have built shanties on riverbanks and in other areas prone to flooding.

Even in the best of conditions, remote Mapou can take three or four hours to reach from Jacmel, the nearest city on the southeast coast, said Sheyla Bi-amby, a spokeswoman for Catholic Relief Services in Haiti.

"It is difficult to access this town. It is a small town, there is no road access," she said. "It is very alarming, not many people can reach it to bring food and water."

28 MAY 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

UN body to ban chemical poisons

DOWN WITH THE DIRTY DOZEN

The 12 persistent organic pollutants (POPs), among the most dangerous of all man-made products or wastes, to be banned from Monday are:

Aldrin: A pesticide applied to soils to kill termites, grasshoppers and other pests. It can also kill birds, fish and humans.

Chlordane: Used extensively to control termites, it is also a broad insecticide. Tests show it can kill birds and fish, may affect the human immune system and could be a carcinogen.

DDT: Widely used during World War II to protect soldiers and civilians from malaria. Long-term exposure to DDT has been associated with chronic ailments in humans.

Dieldrin: Used to control termites and textile pests, it is highly toxic to fish and other aquatic animals, especially frogs. In a US survey, dieldrin was the second most common pesticide found in pasteurised milk.

Dioxins: These chemicals are produced due to incomplete combustion, as well as manufacture of pesticides and other chlorinated substances. They are emitted mostly by burning hospital waste, municipal waste and hazardous waste and have been linked to a number of adverse effects in humans, including immune and enzyme disorders.

Endrin: An insecticide sprayed on the leaves of crops such as cotton and grains, it is also used to control mice and other rodents. It can persist in the soil for up to 12 years and find its way to water, where it is highly toxic to fish.

Furans: Compounds created unintentionally from many processes that produce dioxins, they have been found in emissions from waste

incinerators and automobiles. Their toxic effects are similar to dioxins.

Heptachlor: Mostly used to kill soil insects and termites, it is believed to be responsible for the decline of many wild bird populations. High doses are also fatal to mink, rats and rabbits. It is classified as a possible human carcinogen.

Hexachlorobenzene

(HCB): Introduced in 1945 to treat weeds, it kills fungi that affect food crops. When people in eastern Turkey ate HCB-treated seed grain between 1954 and 1959, they developed several symptoms, including colic. Many had a metabolic disorder called porphyria turcica and 14 per cent died.

Mirex: An insecticide mainly used to combat fire ants, it has also been used as a fire retardant in plastics.

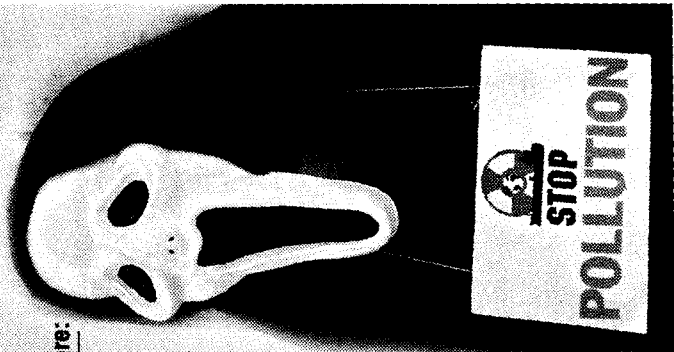
rubber and electrical goods. Direct exposure does not seem to cause injury to humans but has been classified as a possible human carcinogen.

Polychlorinated

Biphenyls (PCBs): These compounds used in industry are toxic to fish and have been linked to reproductive failure and immune system suppression in a number of wild animals including seals and mink. Consumption of PCB-contaminated rice oil in Japan in 1968 and Taiwan in 1979 caused pigmentation of nails and fatigue, nausea and vomiting.

Toxaphene: This insecticide is used on cotton, cereal grains, fruits, nuts and vegetables. It is highly toxic to fish and listed as a possible cause for cancer among humans.

(Source: UN Environment Programme)



Oslo, May 16 (Reuters): A "dirty dozen" of industrial chemicals blamed for causing deaths and birth defects will be outlawed from tomorrow by a UN pact with many experts wanting other poisons added to the blacklist.

Inuit hunters in Canada, among those most exposed because many toxins are swept to the Arctic by ocean and air currents, plan to celebrate the ban with a feast of whale, seal stew, fish and caribou in Iqaluit, Baffin Island.

The 2001 Stockholm convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) enters into force on May 17 after ratification by 50 states, ending use of a range of pesticides, dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

"The convention will save

brominated flame retardants are increasing." Flame retardants are used for example in sofas, clothing or television sets.

Some are restricting their use because of worries about their environmental impact.

"Brominated flame retardants are a possibility (for addition to the list) as are many other chemicals," Jim Willis, head of UNEP's chemicals division, said. Canadian environmentalists also want the pesticide lindane outlawed.

POPs can cause cancer and damage the nervous, reproductive and immune systems of people and animals, UNEP says.

High levels of POPs have been found in Inuit breast milk and POPs have even been blamed for deforming the sexual

organs of female polar bears and making them look like hermaphrodites.

POPs like the pesticides DDT, aldrin or dieldrin have been long banned in many nations. Even so, anyone scraping off old paint from a window frame, for instance, may release PCBs.

POPs build up in fatty tissues — the world's whale population is probably swimming around with tens of tonnes of POPs lodged in blubber.

The Stockholm convention will unlock spending of about \$500 million, partly to help destroy stockpiles and seek alternatives to POPs.

About 25 nations, including South Africa and Ethiopia, will be allowed to keep using DDT to spray malarial mosquitoes.

GM in the future

By Sue Mayer

THE BIOTECHNOLOGY industry needs to find other uses for its (genetically modified) GM crops — uses it hopes will not upset the public. Billions of dollars have been invested in developing crops, and intellectual property rights have been put in place that should allow the profits to roll in, but the resistance of people in Europe and many other parts of the world has upset the industrial dream of a GM future.

Prime targets for GM are the so-called "non-food" uses: grasses, flowers, trees, cotton, and a range of different crops being modified to provide the raw materials for the industrial production of biofuels, oils, starches and plastics.

So, if you do not have to eat them, are there any real reasons to worry? In a word, plenty. Non-food uses are likely to bring in contamination of non-GM crops and nature by the back door. This much is clear if you consider what may be on the market soon. Perhaps the most alarming development is GM herbicide-tolerant amenity grasses. Monsanto, in partnership with Scotts, a lawn and garden products company, is seeking to commercialise a GM herbicide-tolerant creeping bent grass in the U.S. The problem is that grasses are difficult to contain. They are freely wind-pollinating, perennial and often reproduce via underground shoots. Grasses spread internationally on wool, and in lawn and birdseed mix-

es, so attempts to isolate GM grasses will probably prove futile over time. Golf courses and gardens are often close to natural habitats and farmland.

No one, it seems, has considered the international implications of this development. Britain has worried about GM forage grasses for animals, but not amenity grasses. GM herbicide-tolerant grasses could pose weed problems for farmers and

be used to improve production efficiency. This would open a new market for crops that have been rejected for food use. However, the contamination threat to non-GM food crops will be very real, especially with rapeseed. And both rapeseed and sugar beet have wild relatives in Britain with which they can hybridise.

Rather unsuccessful attempts have been made to turn rapeseed and other oil crops into producers of

sites. There has, for example, been leakage, with the new fatty acid being found in cell membranes, where it can be destabilising and can adversely affect their function.

Another approach could be to make efforts to improve agronomic performance of plants like jojoba or evening primrose, but this is patentable and so is not a profitable avenue for the biotech industry to explore.

Producing plastics has been similarly problematic, with adverse effects on growth being common. All GM approaches are dogged by yields that are not economically viable. And the prospect of having industrial oils and plastics in your food as a result of contamination is not appetising.

It is the apparent success of GM cotton, however, that encourages the application of GM to non-food uses. It has attracted little consumer interest and is grown internationally on many millions of hectares. GM insect-resistant cotton has reduced the use of some insecticides in a system that is highly intensive and environmentally damaging. However, the selling of GM cotton as a cure for the ills of pesticide use is eerily familiar to the way in which the pesticides themselves have been sold.

Short-term benefits and high-cost inputs are being promoted by industry salesmen. Loans for seed purchase and second-generation GM crops, if the first-generation cotton fails, are part of the plan. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

Consumers do not want to eat genetically modified products, so researchers are looking for non-food ways to use the crops. But cottons, golf courses and plastics are not safe either.

lawn-keepers alike, as well as having a very real potential to establish themselves as an alien invader.

Trees, while less advanced commercially, pose similar kinds of problems in terms of international contamination, and herbicide tolerance is another favourite of GM tree producers. It makes economic sense for the owners of the genes to use them as widely as possible, which is why Monsanto also has a toe in the GM tree water.

But there are also more familiar GM crops looking for a new role in life. The interest in biofuels to replace fossil fuels has led to the suggestion that GM herbicide-tolerant rapeseed and sugar beet could both

specialist oils and plastics for industrial uses. The idea is that a particular oil produced by plants such as jojoba and coriander could be produced more efficiently in a domesticated crop. However, problems have arisen because producing the fatty acids that make up oil is much more complex than was once thought.

Fatty acids have at least three roles in plants — as a constituent of membranes, in cell signalling, and for energy storage. Unfortunately, these are not controlled by separate pathways and when novel fatty acid synthesis has been induced by GM it has not been possible to restrict the presence of the acid to the seed storage

El Nino & the Indian Ocean Dipole

By N. Gopal Raj

Scientists are beginning to suspect the hand of another seesaw ocean-atmosphere system, this time in the equatorial Indian Ocean, in influencing the Indian monsoon.

IN THE early years of the 20th century, Sir Gilbert Walker, Director-General of Observatories in India, was looking at ways to predict the outcome of the Indian monsoon. His interest was more than academic as a poor monsoon in those days could easily precipitate famine. Sir Gilbert noticed that when atmospheric pressure was abnormally high in Darwin in northern Australia, it would be unusually low at the Pacific island of Tahiti, and vice versa. More importantly, he found that the "Southern Oscillation," as he named the seesaw pressure changes, correlated well with the monsoon. The monsoon often failed in years of high pressure at Darwin (and low pressure in Tahiti). Conversely, the monsoon was likely to be good in years of unusually low atmospheric pressure at Darwin.

Many decades later, scientists discovered that the Southern Oscillation was linked to periodic changes in the Pacific Ocean. During an El Nino, the warm surface waters at the Asian end of the Pacific gradually spread eastwards towards South America. As a result, the central and eastern Pacific becomes warm and rainy, while the western Pacific turns drier and cooler. During a La Nina, the opposite happens, with the western Pacific becoming warmer and wetter than usual. As the Southern Oscillation and El Nino (or La Nina) are closely connected, they are often referred to jointly as El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). Over India, the El Nino has usually been the harbinger of drought and the La Nina of rain.

Since ENSO events have a profound impact on climate all over the world, predicting them became a scientific challenge of considerable importance.

The United States and Japan established an array of ocean buoys in the Pacific to continually monitor ocean and atmospheric parameters. Scientists have developed statistical techniques and computer simulation models that use this data to predict ENSO events with tolerable accuracy some months in advance. This ought to have significantly improved the ability to predict the Indian monsoon. Unfortunately, it appeared that the link between ENSO and the Indian monsoon had weakened in recent decades. So much so, the strongest El Nino of the 20th century occurred in 1997 and yet the monsoon was normal. K. Krishna Kumar of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) at Pune and U.S.-based researchers argued in a paper published in *Science* in 1999 that the weakening link between ENSO and

the Indian monsoon could be the result of global warming.

Now, however, scientists are beginning to suspect the hand of another seesaw ocean-atmosphere system, this time in the equatorial Indian Ocean. It is called the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD). When a dipole is forming, wind patterns change in the equatorial Indian Ocean from April-May and the dipole peaks in October. When a positive dipole is developing, the winds in the equatorial Indian Ocean blow from east to west. These anomalous winds drive changes in the ocean currents, making the Arabian Sea off the Somali coast in Africa unusually warm, enhancing cloud formation, while the eastern Indian Ocean around Indonesia becomes colder than normal and more dry. In a negative dipole year, the reverse happens, and the Arabian Sea near Africa becomes cooler and less cloudy while the Indian Ocean is warmer and more rainy around Indonesia.

"Initially when we looked at the dipole, we did not find a strong correlation with the Indian monsoon, probably because we were not looking at the right thing then," says P.N. Vinayachandran, who worked with the well-known Japanese oceanographer, Toshio Yamagata, studying the Indian Ocean Dipole. Dr. Vinayachandran and Prof. Yamagata are among the authors of a much-cited *Nature* paper published in 1999 that described the dipole and suggested the index that is currently used to measure it.

In 2001, a paper from Prof. Yamagata's group in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters (GRL)* suggested that the Indian Ocean Dipole was modulating ENSO's impact on the Indian monsoon. This paper used computer simulations of processes happening in the atmosphere to show that a positive dipole increased monsoon rainfall over India while a negative dipole reduced rain. The authors of the paper therefore argued that "the IOD events affect the Indian summer monsoon on their own and thus apparently weaken or strengthen the influence of the ENSO on the [monsoon]." Despite the Southern Oscillation being adverse, the presence of a positive dipole had facilitated normal or excess rainfall over India in 1983, 1994 and 1997.

This research had been taken further, said Karumuri Ashok, the first author of the *GRL* paper, at an international conference in Pune earlier this year. More computer simulations had been carried out to study the changes in atmospheric circulation created by positive dipoles and El Ninos, acting separately and together. As a result, it was possible to explain just how a strong positive Indian Ocean Dipole was able to counter the negative impact of an El Nino on the Indian monsoon. Moreover, while the *GRL* paper had looked primarily at the potential role of eastern pole (around Indonesia) of the dipole, it was now clear that the western pole (off the African coast) was also important in causing surplus rain over western India, according to Dr. Ashok.

Meanwhile, Dr. Vinayachandran and fellow scientists at the Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) are discovering that the atmospheric component of the dipole, which they have called the Equatorial Indian Ocean Oscillation (EQUINOO), could be playing a bigger role than imagined. "Anomalous wind patterns during the monsoon can seriously affect rainfall, without these winds being sustained long enough to create the changes in sea temperature that are characteristic of the Indian Ocean Dipole," points out Dr. Vinayachandran.

In a paper published in *Current Science* last December, Sulochana

Gadgil, Dr. Vinayachandran and graduate student P.A. Francis looked at the relationship between EQUINOO, ENSO and the monsoon rainfall for the years from 1979 to 2003. With EQUINOO, they said, "we can explain not only the droughts that occurred in the absence of El Nino or in the presence of a weak El Nino, but also excess rainfall seasons in which ENSO did not predominate."

"We have since examined data for the last 46 years and have been able to statistically establish that the combination of EQUINOO and ENSO account for much of the Indian monsoon years with large excess or deficit rainfall," Prof. Gadgil told *The Hindu*. But the analysis also showed that neither EQUINOO and ENSO nor a combination of the two could explain small variations in the

monsoon rainfall. This work would be published shortly, she added.

The IISc scientists have been particularly struck by how a negative EQUINOO, acting alone or in conjunction with an El Nino, could reduce monsoon rainfall. The drought of 2002, one of the worst in recent years and which most forecasters missed, happened in the face of only a weak El Nino. But the deficit could be explained when the strong negative EQUINOO was also taken into account. Moreover, the EQUINOO was a better predictor than the Indian Ocean Dipole. Even in 2002, there was no significantly negative dipole. Again, in 1979 and 1986, which too were drought years, there was neither a significantly negative dipole nor an El Nino, but both years saw strong negative EQUINOOs.

How closely the Indian Ocean Dipole and ENSO are linked is a contentious issue. Dr. Ashok takes the view that the Indian Ocean Dipole events are largely independent of ENSO and arise out of the coupled ocean-atmosphere dynamics in the tropical Indian Ocean itself. "Only 35 per cent of the IOD events co-occur with ENSO, which demonstrates the independent nature of IOD," he points out. In 1961, a positive dipole occurred without an El Nino in the Pacific; in 1967, a positive dipole coincided with a La Nina; and the positive dipole of 1997 happened along with a strong El Nino.

On the other hand, Raghu Murtugudde of the University of Maryland points to the high correlation between the Southern Oscillation and winds in the central equatorial Indian Ocean, the region of the EQUINOO. He believes that some unifying factor, such as the 'Western Pacific deep convection,' a powerful "heat engine" that leads to tremendous cloud formation, could be driving the tropical climate.

As the IISc paper did not suggest any new mechanisms at work, it "doesn't really enhance the predictive understanding of monsoons," says Dr. Murtugudde. The IISc group noted in its paper that "the signal for unfavourable [wind] anomalies is seen from mid-April" in 2002. "Had we known more about the association of [the Indian monsoon rainfall] with EQUINOO, we could have made an educated guess about the season of 2002 having deficit rainfall," they added. But Prof. Gadgil is cautious about using early wind anomalies for prediction. "We first need to understand the physics behind the evolution of EQUINOO, and how various processes nurture or kill it," she says.

'Give us water, not food'

Government
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By Meena Menon

ASHTI, (BEED DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA), MAY 1. "Give us water, now; food is not so important," says 65-year-old Saraswati Ambedkar, a resident of Sanjay Nagar, a Dalit colony in Ashti taluka. Kalavati Shirwale, another resident, says the only handpump does not work. "I pay Rs. 5 for two cans of water. No tanker comes here. The water is often dirty: we have no choice but to drink it."

A kilometre away, the only well for the colony is almost dry. In the morning, there is barely enough water to fill a small pot. Large tin cans are placed in queue at night.

"Water trickles down the rocky sides of the well and we have to wait till night so that at least a few of us can fill our cans," says Ms. Saraswati.

Boys such as Suresh Bandu Dhas, go down to the rocky well with a rope to take water. They take turns every night. "I sometimes fill only three cans at a time," says Suresh, a fifth standard student.

Cattle too are hit by water scarcity. Residents of the colony claim that one of the largest cattle camps in the State that is nearby had virtually drained off all the water from the well.

Drought has virtually

come to stay for the fourth year in succession in Beed district, one of the three worst affected in the Marathwada region. Travelling through the critically affected taluka, one can see bullock carts ferrying large plastic cans of water that are sold at the rate of Rs. 5 for a 20-litre can.

Tanker operators extract water from some few

DROUGHT IN MAHARASHTRA — I

borewells and sell water. The Government supplies water free of cost.

For the last five months, people have been at the mercy of erratic and inadequate water supply from the Government and private tankers.

Sources in the Government said in the 177 villages of Ashti taluka, over 190 Government tankers supply water daily, apart from 186 private tankers.

The local people, however, complained that supply was erratic and they had been without water for eight days at a stretch.

Almost every water source, including 25 to 30 large ponds and two minor irrigation projects, have dried up.

Even the groundwater level has dipped to 300 feet.

At Pokhri's Dalit colony, women and children cluster around a tanker near a well. Unmindful of the risk of falling into the 50-foot well, women try to fill their steel and brass pots from the tanker's pipe.

"The tanker comes every evening, but it is barely enough," says Panchphula Dattatreya.

Soon, the pipe snakes its way down the well, which is filthy and full of garbage. What the women did not manage to get directly from the tanker is poured into the well. They quickly drop buckets and other utensils into it.

"We use this for washing and sometimes we even drink it," says Ms. Panchphula.

In less than 30 minutes, the 1,200 litre tanker has emptied about half its content, and leaves for another part of the sprawling village.

With 500 people living in this settlement, the daily supply of 600 litres is hardly enough.

Each person is entitled to 20 litres a day, as per Government calculations, says the Ashti Tehsildar, V.N. Bothikar.

However, this calculation does not take into account the cattle that are dying.

The poor water supply and quality has affected the health of Ashti's residents.

Global warming poses threat to biodiversity

By Tim Radford

LONDON, APRIL 30. NASA scientists have confirmed once again that the world is warming. An 18-year survey of land surface temperatures has found that, between 1991 and 1998, those cities, fields, forests, savannahs and deserts not covered by snow had steadily grown warmer.

They also assembled a snapshot of the planet during July 2003 — the summer of Europe's lethal heatwave — that shows temperatures of up to 25 Centigrade across northern Canada, Alaska and Siberia. Only the heart of Greenland, and a few islands and peninsulas in the Arctic ocean, remained below zero.

It backed up a picture assembled over the past 25 years from thousands of meteorological measurements of air temperatures 3 metres above ground. The world is getting warmer.

This warming is linked to a steady rise in levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. And carbon dioxide is building up because of the profligate burning of fossil fuel almost everywhere on the planet, but particularly in the richest nations. Furthermore, the warming will go on, with potentially calamitous consequences.

Not everybody believes this. One or two U.S.-based oil companies do not believe this. Nor does Lord Lawson of Blaby, a former U.K. Conservative finance minister, who told the British Parliament last week that the inter-Governmental panel on climate change, which has for more than a decade examined the evidence, was an "an environmentalist closed shop that is unsullied by any acquaintance with economics, statistics or, indeed, economic history". And there are certainly scientifically trained people who question the proposition. But very few of these are climate scientists.

The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, as he made clear in his speech to industrialists and others yesterday, takes global warming seriously.

So does his chief scientific adviser, the Oxford chemist, Sir David King, who in January warned the Americans that global warming was a more serious threat than global terrorism, and who last week produced a devastating analysis of Britain's vulnerability to flooding as sea levels rise.

Last year was the second warmest ever recorded. It shared this honour with 2002.

The 10 warmest years ever recorded have all occurred in the past 14. Researchers have checked back through indirect evidence — tree rings, coral growths, ice cores — and confirmed that the warmest decade in the past 1,000 years was from 1990 to 1999. The warmest year of the millennium was 1998.

There is a clear link between a warmer world and wilder weather.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent have analysed the past 33 years of natural disasters — 90 per cent of which are weather related — and found that the number of these has increased threefold in the past three decades. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

THE HINDU • 1 MAY 2004

'Kyoto protocol, a death treaty'

By Nick Paton Walsh

167
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MOSCOW, APRIL 15. Russia appeared yesterday to spell an end to the Kyoto protocol when President Putin's top adviser on the controversial emissions treaty denounced the restrictions it would impose on the country's economy.

Andrei Illarionov said Kyoto would be a "death treaty". The economic restraints would, he said, stifle the economy like "an international gulag or Auschwitz". To come into effect, the treaty has to be ratified by Russia. The Kremlin has procrastinated. The last statement from Mr. Putin in December said Russia could not ratify it in its current form as it placed restrictions on business that were against Russia's national interests. Yet the Kremlin has remained silent on the issue for months, many analysts saying Mr. Putin was anxious not to rock the boat before his re-election in March and might later seek a compromise. Yesterday's attack on the treaty indicated that the Kremlin had never been further away from ratification, experts said.

Speaking to reporters in St Petersburg, Mr. Illarionov said the treaty "has very many negative implications" and would "stifle economic growth". He likened the protocol's restrictions on normal economic freedoms to an "interstate gu-

Environment
lag", except that, "in a gulag, people were at least given the same rations, which did not lessen from one day to the next. "But the Kyoto protocol proposes decreasing rations day by day. The Kyoto protocol is a death treaty because its main purpose is to stifle economic growth and economic activity. "If you set quotas on each of us requiring us to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 58 per cent over a course of a certain period of time, we will have to turn into dwarves or babies, or to stop (breathing), which would have quite predictable results on our (body)," he said. An aide to Mr. Illarionov said Mr. Putin had yet to make up his mind and was only advised by Mr. Illarionov, who had already formed an opinion.

He added that Mr. Illarionov's comments were connected to a meeting between Mr. Putin and a group of liberal economic reformers this week. He hinted that their advice was that the level of economic growth the Kremlin has promised — a doubling of GDP in 10 years — would be incompatible with the protocol.

"Maybe that is why it was raised again", the aide said. The United States, which has repudiated the treaty, is responsible for 24 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions and Russia for 17.4 per cent. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

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PM river plan comes under NGO attack

Debasis Sarkar
SILIGURI 12 APRIL

Environment
PRIME Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's river linking project on the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin seems to have stirred the hornet's nest. NGOs and academic institutes in Bangladesh are planning an international conference, between December 17-19 this year, to protest against the hazards the project is going to cause. Apart from the Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) and University of Dhaka, the conference will rope in many international NGOs too.

Md Khalequzzaman, of US' Lock Haven University and a member of the organising body of this conference, told ET: "It is through this conference that we wish to get activists and environmentalists from Bangladesh, India and Nepal together for a meaningful dialogue on the river project." There were complaints from some sections that though India, China, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh were equal "stakeholders" (considering the affect the project will have on these countries) in water resources development panning in the region, this project was envisaged by India unilaterally.

জনজাতি বনাম অরণ্য

নির্বাচনের আগে শাসক দলের রাজনীতিকরা কল্পতরু হইবেন, ইহা অস্বাভাবিক নয়। এবারেও সাধারণ নির্বাচন আসন্ন হইয়া উঠিতেই

তেমন কল্পতরু ভাব ধরিয়াজেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী। প্রচারের তোড়ে এমন অনেক সরকারি প্রকল্প বা সিদ্ধান্তের কথাও ঢোল-শহরতে জানানো হইতেছে যাহার বৈধতা সম্পর্কে সংশয় আছে। এমনই একটি প্রকল্প বনবাসী জনজাতীয়দের জন্য বিপুল পরিমাণ অরণ্যভূমির দখলকে আইনি স্বীকৃতি দিয়া প্রচারিত একটি বিজ্ঞপ্তি। বিজ্ঞপ্তিটিতে ১৯৯৩ সনের ৩১ ডিসেম্বরের আগে দখলে থাকা আরণ্যক জমি দখলদারদের আইনসম্মত অধিকারে ন্যস্ত করার ঘোষণা করা হয়। সর্বোচ্চ আদালত এই বিজ্ঞপ্তিকে আপত্তিকর মনে করিয়াছে। শীর্ষ আদালতকে না জানাইয়া একতরফাভাবে দেশের এত বিশাল আরণ্যক ভূমি ধ্বংস করিয়া ফেলা যে পরিবেশের ভারসাম্য নষ্ট করিয়া বন্যা, কৃষি উৎপাদনে বিপর্যয় এবং দুর্ভিক্ষের মতো দুর্বিপাক সৃষ্টি করিতে পারে, সে শঙ্কাও শীর্ষ আদালত ব্যক্ত করিতে ভোলে নাই।

আপত্তিটি সঙ্গত। শুধু এ জন্য নয় যে, এ ভাবে প্রায় দুই লক্ষ হেক্টর সংরক্ষিত বনাঞ্চল বিনিয়ন্ত্রিত করিয়া বসবাসের জন্য বিলি করিয়া দিলে বনভূমি সংরক্ষণের নীতিতেই অস্তর্ঘাত করা হইবে। সেই বৃহৎ ও দীর্ঘমেয়াদি ক্ষতি তো একপ্রকার স্বতঃসিদ্ধই। সংকীর্ণ রাজনৈতিক স্বার্থে, আশু ফললাভের আশায় শাসকরা এ ধরনের নীতিপ্রস্তার পরিচয় এই প্রথম দিতেছেন, এমনও নয়। সেই সঙ্গে আপত্তিকর সরকারি অনুগ্রহ বিতরণের এই পদ্ধতিটিও। ইহা মধ্যযুগীয় স্বৈরতন্ত্রের দরবারি দাক্ষিণ্য বিলির পদ্ধতি। দেশের সম্পদকে নিজস্ব তালুকদারি ভাবিয়া লওয়ার মানসিকতা। যেন ইচ্ছা করিলেই অগ্রপশ্চাৎ বিবেচনা না করিয়া কোনও সরকার বা তাহার প্রধানমন্ত্রী একতরফা দেশবাসীর যে কোনও জনগোষ্ঠীকে দেশের নদী, আকাশ, অরণ্য, শস্যক্ষেত্র উপটোকন দিতে পারেন। সত্য যে অরণ্য কেবল সংরক্ষিত রাখার উপর জোর দিলে আরণ্যক ভূমিতে উন্নয়নের কাজ বন্ধ থাকিবে, তাহার সংলগ্ন বনবাসীদের জীবনযাত্রার মান উন্নয়নের কাজটিও থাকিয়া যাইবে অনারদ্ধ। কিন্তু

সংরক্ষিত বনাঞ্চলে নদীর বাঁধ কিংবা জলাধার কিংবা জলবিদ্যুৎ প্রকল্প নির্মাণের পদ্ধতি আলাদা, সরকার নিজেই সে জন্য আদালতের কাছে আগাম অনুমতি চাহিয়া থাকে। এ ক্ষেত্রে সে ধরনের কোনও যৌথ বা জনগোষ্ঠীয় উন্নয়নের সার্বিক নকশা নাই, নিছকই জনজাতীয়দের বেআইনি জবরদখলকে আইনসম্মত করিতে সংরক্ষিত বনাঞ্চলের অংশবিশেষ 'অসংরক্ষিত' ঘোষণা করা। সেটাও করা হইতেছে আর পাঁচটা নির্বাচনী প্রতিশ্রুতির ধাঁচে। এই বিনিয়ন্ত্রণ যদি কোনও সরকারি নীতি হইয়া থাকে, তবে সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রকে তাহা আগাম আলোচিত হওয়া দরকার, সংসদে এই মর্মে বিতর্ক, আলোচনা হওয়া দরকার এবং যথাবিহিত বিল উত্থাপন করিয়া তাহা অনুমোদন করানো দরকার।

সরকার সে সব না করিয়া সংক্ষিপ্ত পথ ধরিয়াজে। খবরের কাগজে বিজ্ঞাপন দিয়া অরণ্য সংরক্ষণ বিষয়ক সরকারি নীতি অবলীলায় সংশোধন করিয়া লক্ষ-লক্ষ হেক্টর বনভূমির আরণ্যক পরিচয় ঘুচাইয়া তাহাকে বসত এলাকায় রূপান্তরিত করিয়া ফেলিতেছে। এই বন্দোবস্ত রদ হওয়া দরকার। উন্নয়নের জন্য অরণ্যভূমি চির কালই সাফ করা হইয়াছে। মানুষ যবে হইতে গোচারণ ও কৃষিকার্য শিখিয়াছে, তখন হইতেই অরণ্য সংকোচনের শুরু। কিন্তু এই সংকোচন মানুষের পরিবেশের পক্ষেই প্রতিকূল ও বিপর্যয়কর হইয়া ওঠায় বনভূমির সংরক্ষণের চিন্তা ও উপায় মানুষের সমাজ ও রাষ্ট্রই উদ্ভাবন করিয়াছে। অরণ্যসংলগ্ন জনজাতীয়দের অরণ্যসম্পদ ব্যবহারের অধিকার এবং তাহাতে রাষ্ট্রের নিয়ন্ত্রণ ও হস্তক্ষেপের (অর্থাৎ সংরক্ষণের) আন্তঃসম্পর্কটিও বেশ জটিল ও বহুমাত্রিক। ভোট পাইবার জন্য সংরক্ষণের সর্বসম্মত নীতি বিসর্জন দেওয়ার সরলীকৃত জনতোষণ কোনও বিচক্ষণ সরকার বা তাহার প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কাছে প্রত্যাশিত নয়। কেননা, জনজাতীয় কল্যাণের প্রহৃদের অন্তরালে ইহা আসলে ভোটভিখারীদের ভোটশিকারিতে পরিণত হওয়ার চেনা গল্প। সুপ্রিম কোর্ট এই অপপ্রয়াস হইতে সরকারকে নিরস্ত হইতে বলিয়া ঠিক কাজই করিয়াছে। গণতন্ত্রের নামে যথেষ্টাচার করিলে গণতন্ত্র বিপন্ন হয়, এই সত্যটি আরও একবার উন্মোচিত হইল।

27 FEB 2004

Climate Haze

Talk of Asian Brown Cloud smacks of partisan politics

Every silver lining has a dark cloud. Environmentalists and concerned citizens welcomed the UNEP-initiated project to study the brown haze over the Indian Ocean. But the team's observation, as in 2003 and before, is assuming the proportions of a dark design. The international team of scientists studying the Asian Brown Cloud — now renamed as the Atmospheric Brown Cloud to show political correctness — has laid a good portion of the blame on developing Asian countries, who, they say, are responsible not only for the Asian haze, but also for the soot deposited on the Himalayan range which is accelerating glacial melting. Briefly, their take is that activities in the Indo-Gangetic plains are releasing a toxic cocktail of gases into the atmosphere. The UNEP representative, Klaus Toepfer, had, in fact, warned the year before that the black carbon, ash, acids and aerosols being released into the atmosphere will soon 'infect' the rest of the world. "A pollution parcel like this, which stretches three km high, can travel halfway round the globe in a week", he had warned.

Unsurprisingly, opinion in these parts is that the mission is a deliberate effort to deflect attention from the industrial pollution of the West. Let's face it. Global warming is a highly controversial issue that has been politicised by the big polluter-consumer combine, including the US which has defaulted on every conceivable international accord on the environment. It is a challenge that India and her neighbours must accept: for failure to make a forceful case will leave us to bear the burden of blame and penalty for the planet's atmospheric pollution and its consequences. The first brown haze alert, in fact, came post the 1999 Indonesian forest fires. The Indian Ocean experiment took an alarmist view of that and said that forest fires, biomass burning and other pollutants in Asia were threatening the earth. That the haze also sets off a cooling process since the dense air prevents solar energy from reaching the earth and heating its atmosphere has been conveniently overlooked. The southern hemisphere is warming at a much lower rate than is the northern hemisphere. Also, not just the Himalayas, even the North Pole is suffering because of pollution sweeping upwards from industries in North America and Europe. There is a theory, in fact, that the Himalayan soot is the result of the fall-out of the two Gulf wars. The global focus should be on promoting cleaner technology and energy conservation, across the board — not hunting for scapegoats.

JPC nails

Statesman News Service 87
 NEW DELHI, Feb. 4. — The Joint Parliamentary Committee on soft drinks has said the 12 branded products of Pepsi and Coca-Cola it had examined did contain unacceptable levels of pesticides and recommended that the products carry health warnings for children and pregnant women.

The JPC was formed following studies by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), which had claimed that Coca-Cola and Pepsi products had health-endangering levels of pesticides. The committee's report urged the government to censure the cola majors for publishing misleading and

'germ colas', says they're unfit for kids

Environment
Major recommendations

- Charge more for use of ground water from soft drink and drinking water companies
- Formulate standards for soft drinks, fruit juices, & other beverages based on scientific criteria and international norms
- Scientists, not bureaucrats, should head teams representing India in Codex meetings
- Bring down caffeine levels and have advisories on caffeinated soft drinks



false advertisements immediately after the CSE report was made public.

Appreciating the CSE's whistle blowing act, the JPC, after examining 36 samples of 12 major brands, asked

lactating women not to drink them. The panel recommended that caffeinated drinks should carry this warning: "The beverage contains caffeine and is not recommended for children, pregnant or lactating women and individuals sensitive to caffeine."

The report also came down heavily on the health ministry: "The health and family welfare ministry, a nodal ministry for laying down standards of safety for all food items, became alive only after CSE published its report on the presence of pesticides in soft drink on 5 August last year."

The committee further desired that all soft drink products must have a logo on it displaying that the product

is safe. "Such a logo must be obligatory on all food packages, either processed or fresh, as a guarantee from the supplier or the manufacturers. It should be applied to the imported products as well."

While CSE director Ms Sumita Narain saw in the JPC an endorsement of the country's public health agenda, the two cola giants (Coke and Pepsi), on the other hand, maintained that their products were safe for consumption. Referring to JPC's recommendations for tougher norms for the carbonated beverages industry, Ms Narain said:

"India needs stringent norms to check presence of pesticides in our drinking and food products."

5 FEB 2004

Review panel defers decision on Narmada dam height

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By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, JAN. 29. The political-level Review Committee of the Narmada Control Authority, chaired by the Union Water Resources Minister, Arjun Charan Sethi, today postponed a decision at its meeting here on raising the height of the Narmada dam in Gujarat and decided to meet again on February 12.

Later, Mr. Sethi met the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and briefed him on the outcome of the meeting.

Mr. Sethi told *The Hindu* that since Maharashtra opposed the move to raise the height of the dam, it was decided to depute the Union Secretary of Social Justice and

Empowerment and Chairman of the Sub-Group on Rehabilitation and Resettlement, B.S. Baswan, to the State to make a spot assessment of the situation and report to the official-level Narmada Control Authority.

Maharashtra, one of the four valley States, indicated its stand at the official-level meeting of the Narmada Control Authority here on Wednesday itself when it had objected to raising the height as rehabilitation work was not completed at the present level of 100 metres.

The other riparian States are Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Today's apex body meeting was attended by the Gujarat

Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, the Rajasthan Minister for Irrigation, Shambhar Lal Jat, and the Maharashtra Minister for Revenue and Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Ramraje Naik Nimbalkar.

The decision to reconvene was taken after Mr. Nimbalkar opposed raising the height of the dam from the present level of 100 metres to 110.64 metres till all the displaced were rehabilitated and resettled.

He did not agree to repeated suggestions of the three other States to agree "in principle" to raising the dam height, saying this was a decision of the Maharashtra Cabinet.

Editorial on Page 10

THE HINDU 30 JAN 2004

THE HINDU

499-12
29/1
Sushilkumar

Decision on raising Narmada dam height deferred

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, JAN. 28. The Narmada Control Authority today deferred a decision on raising the height of the Narmada dam in Gujarat at its meeting here, after one of the riparian States, Maharashtra, raised objections. It is understood that the Maharashtra Government will oppose raising the height of the dam from 100 metres to 110.64 metres at the meeting of the Review Committee of the Narmada Control Authority (RCNCA), the apex body on the Sardar Sarovar Project, tomorrow.

The NCA, chaired by the Union Water Resources Secretary, V.K. Duggal, deferred a decision after the Maharashtra Government sought at least three months time for rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced and dispossessed families in the State. The Maharashtra representative said that surveys were still on and that about 450 families needed to be rehabilitated and resettled.

Taking note of Maharashtra's "difficulty", the NCA decided to present the matter as such to the RCNCA, which is meeting here tomorrow under the chairmanship of the Union Minister for Water Resources, Arjun Charan Sethi. The Chief Ministers of the Narmada Valley States — Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan — are members of the Review Committee. The Committee will review the status of the progress made on the Narmada dam and on the rehabilitation and resettlement of the oustees.

Significantly, today the States were not ready with their Action Taken Reports as had been decided in the previous meeting of the NCA's Rehabilitation and Resettlement Sub-Group. The NCA meeting today was preceded by a meeting of the Sub-Group, chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Empowerment, where the States expressed their difficulties in resettling the displaced populations.

The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal has said that dispossessed families should be rehabilitated and resettled a year before submergence, whereas the height of the dam has direct effect on submergence.



The Narmada Bachao Andolan leader, Medha Patkar, ends her six-day fast, by accepting a glass of tender coconut water from the Maharashtra Minister for Rehabilitation, Viasrao Patil, in Mumbai on Wednesday. —Photo: Vivek Bendre

Medha Patkar ends fast

By Kalpana Sharma

MUMBAI, JAN. 28. Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan ended her six-day fast today after the Maharashtra Government decided that it would not give its consent to raising the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada to 110.64 metres until all families in Maharashtra affected by this were resettled.

In a letter to Ms. Patkar, handed over to her personally by the State Home Minister, R.R. Patil, the Government confirmed that it would not submit its Action Taken Report (ATR) on rehabilitation at the crucial meeting of the Review Committee of the Narmada Control Authority in New Delhi tomorrow. Unless the NCA is satisfied that all those affected by an increase in the height of the dam have been resettled, clearance for further construction cannot be given.

Ms. Patkar and three others from the NBA have been on dharna from January 21 and thereafter on a fast demanding a written assurance from the State Government that the families that will lose their lands if the height of

the dam is further increased are first resettled. Despite the Chief Minister, Sushilkumar Shinde's verbal assurance at the World Social Forum, that the Government was committed to resettling those affected in Maharashtra first before agreeing to further construction on the dam, no such assurance was given in writing to the NBA.

The State Government has declared that it will complete the process of scrutinising all claims by project-affected families by March 30, 2004 and that within four months it will have completed the resettlement and rehabilitation. However, while announcing the end of her fast, Ms. Patkar pointed out that the deadline was an unrealistic one given the complexity of the problem.

She also urged the State Government to make a more realistic assessment of how much it would benefit from the electricity generated when the height of the dam is raised.

The NCA would wait to see what emerged from tomorrow's RCNCA meeting and announce the next course of action on February 1, she said.

29 JAN 2004

THE HINDU

Water-harvesting: a policy perspective

By Ramaswamy R. Iyer

FOR SOME time now, the extensive adoption of rainwater harvesting and the revival of traditional water management systems that have gone into decline have been urged by many. The Centre for Science and Environment has been strongly advocating this approach. The National Commission for Integrated Water Resource Development Plan devoted a whole chapter of its Report (1999) to this subject. The Prime Minister, in his address to the National Water Resources Council in April 2002, gave a resounding call on this theme. Even the National Water Policy 2002 gives some recognition to the idea. In some places, arrangements for rooftop rainwater harvesting are now mandatory. Dr. T.N. Narasimhan's article on the editorial page in *The Hindu* (January 6, 2004) seems to go counter to all this, though that is perhaps a misreading of the article.

It is of course necessary to consider how much extra water these local initiatives can add to the availability for use (a study by Kanchan Chopra and Biswanath Goldar gives a figure of 140 billion cubic metres as possible 'additional runoff capture' for the country as a whole), and what impact extensive interventions in the upper catchments will have on the runoff. It was therefore with considerable interest that I read Dr. Narasimhan's article. It argues that extensive rainwater harvesting will disrupt the hydrological cycle. The author is a scholar whom I hold in high regard, and it seems to me that this is an important article that needs to be pondered over, because the (very necessary) note of caution that he sounds may be misinterpreted.

A minor and incidental point may be put aside first. Dr. Narasimhan makes a reference to, and questions, the thesis that water flowing to the

sea is wasted. This is one of the arguments frequently put forward as a justification for large projects. I have never seen this particular argument advanced in support of rainwater harvesting. The usual argument in favour of the latter is meeting the water needs of arid or drought-prone areas, providing some irrigation to rainfed agriculture in such areas, enhancing livelihoods, reducing poverty, and minimising out-migration.

However well we learn to manage water use, some action on the supply side may be necessary particularly in the context of a growing population.

The proposition that extensive rainwater harvesting will disrupt runoff seems *prima facie* plausible. But is this in fact true? If so, how serious is the danger? If this is done in a really extensive manner, does it have the potential of drying up the rivers? In the extreme case, will we be preventing rivers from forming? Is it better to interfere with runoff and hamper the formation of rivers, or to let them form and run and then kill them with a dam?

But is there a real dilemma here? In Alwar, the water harvesting activities are said to have had the effect of reviving the Arvari, and raising groundwater levels not only in the immediate vicinity but further down. That seems to go counter to Dr. Narasimhan's prognostication. However, some may question the reality and extent of Rajendra Singh's achievements, and others may say that what happened at Alwar may not happen elsewhere. Historically rainwater harvesting has been practised in many parts of the country, through diverse methods. Is there a

history of river flows being affected? The extent of precipitation over the Indian landmass is 4,000 BCM. The 'available' water resources, as measured at the terminal points of the river systems, is put by the National Commission at 1,953 BCM. The 'usable' surface water resources are estimated as 690 BCM. Given the gap between rainfall and 'available' water, and that between the latter and 'usable' surface water, it would ap-

pear that there is scope for some addition to the available and usable water through local water harvesting without adverse consequences. However, this is merely a hypothesis that needs to be examined and confirmed.

I read Dr. Narasimhan's article as stressing the importance of considering the hydrological implications of whatever we undertake; and the implications may vary from place to place. Many of the things that the article says are applicable with even greater force to big dams. They certainly have major impacts on the river regime and therefore on the hydrological cycle. They have other environmental consequences — and of course they displace people. Groundwater exploitation tends to deplete aquifers and also contaminate them.

That leads to a difficult question. What advice can we offer to people living in water-scarce or drought-prone areas? Should they try and make their lives somewhat more livable and perhaps more prosperous

by enhancing the availability of water locally? Should the state promise them water from distant areas? Or should these people abandon the area and move to other places better endowed with water? In Ralegan Siddhi, Hivre Bazaar and Alwar, Anna Hazare, Sarpanch Papatlal Pawar and Rajendra Singh initiated processes of social mobilisation and brought about a transformation. In all these cases the entry point was water. Was that wrong? I am quite sure that Dr. Narasimhan did not intend to imply this.

However well we learn to manage water use, some action on the supply side may be necessary, particularly in the context of a growing population. If we rule out big dams because they have serious impacts, if we rule out rainwater harvesting because it disrupts runoff, and if we rule out groundwater extraction through power-driven tubewells and borewells because of the danger of resource depletion, what options are left? Perhaps the right answer is that all these means may be used but wisely, in moderation, and in a sensible combination.

My own combination — apart from demand restraint and management, improved efficiency in water use, multiple use of the same water and resource conservation — would be: local augmentation (water harvesting and watershed development) as the primary thrust, with large projects (dams and reservoirs, long distance water transfers) as projects of the last resort, and groundwater exploitation subject to stringent regulation to ensure equity and resource conservation and protection. What I have tried to do is to provide a basis for such discussion, and to obviate the possibility of a misinterpretation and misuse of a learned article which we need to take very seriously.

Global warming will cool Europe, North America

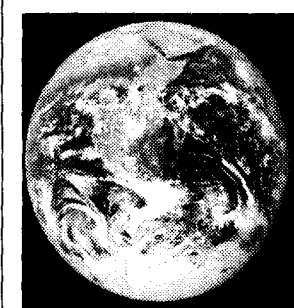
Reuters
Stockholm, January 22

PARTS OF Europe and North America could get drastically colder if warming Atlantic ocean currents are halted by a surprise side-effect of global warming, scientists said on Wednesday.

The possible shut-down of the Gulf Stream is one of several catastrophic changes — ranging from collapses of fish stocks to more frequent forest fires — that could be triggered by human activities, they said in a book launched in Sweden.

"In the worst case it (the Gulf Stream) could shut down... it might even happen this century," said Stefan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. "This would trigger regional cooling, but not an Ice Age."

Climate models indicated a surge of fresh water into the North Atlantic from a melting of northern glaciers caused by



GLOBAL WARMING may have a reverse side-effect on large parts of the world, with regional cooling lowering temperatures across vast tracts of Europe & North America

THE WARM GULF STREAM would be shut down by melting Arctic glaciers, killing huge stocks of marine life on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean

global warming could stop the current that sweeps warm waters from the Gulf of Mexico toward Europe. "The Eastern coast of Canada and the US would also be affected. This is sometimes wrongly perceived as a European problem by American politicians," he told Reuters.

He said the Gulf Stream had collapsed about 20 times in the past 1,00,000 years, most recently at the tail of the last Ice Age about 8,000 years ago after an

abrupt melting of icecaps. If the Gulf Stream stopped, average temperatures might fall by 5-10° C in Scandinavia or 3-4° C in Germany. By contrast, global warming, widely blamed on emissions of gases like carbon dioxide from cars and factories, is expected to raise global average temperatures by 1.4-5.8° C by 2100.

Rahmstorf's study was included in a new book, *Global Change and the Earth System: a planet under pressure*.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 JAN 2004

SC moved to stop GM crop trials

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Upset with the closed-door approach to transgenic crop decisions, a Delhi-based NGO has approached the supreme court seeking a stop to field trials and commercialisation till a sound regulatory and monitoring system is put in place.

The NGO, Gene Campaign, filed a PIL in the apex court on Wednesday, essentially after its attempts to get the government to open up were stonewalled by the department of biotechnology. Gene Campaign chief Suman Sahai on Thursday described the possibility of gene contamination and potential danger to health as very real. Given the example of transgenic cotton, there is need to be even more cautious, she said, claiming farmers have no real understanding of why certain precautions were necessary and what could go wrong.

What is needed then is a system which can crack down quickly and check damage.

Ms Sahai voiced particular concern about crops for which India was a centre of origin or diversity. Rice, for example. "We don't know what is happening to rice but there are 55 proj-

ects on GM rice," she said, seeking a well-debated stance and policy on which GM crops need to be researched, how trials are to be conducted and monitored and how risks are to be assessed. "Even the most pro-GM country, the US, posts data on the web. We want a competent, transparent system," she said.

Gene Campaign is seeking action on three fronts. First, the 1989 rules which regulate GMOs must be brought in consonance with the Constitutionally-guaranteed rights to life, health and a clean, safe environment or be declared unconstitutional.

Second, the government must set up a high-powered committee to formulate a national policy on GMOs through nationwide, multi-stakeholder consultations, on a much bigger scale than what a committee chaired by scientist M.S. Swaminathan has been doing till now.

Third, have a moratorium on permissions, approvals and trials, particularly those of a commercial nature and particularly for crops for which India is a centre of origin, till the rules are amended and a sound system is in place.

Eco-tourism new threat to Orissa wildlife

By Jatindra Dash

Bhubaneswar: Eco-tourism is turning out to be the new villain on the horizon for Orissa's precious natural reserves, which boast of a rich environment and diverse wildlife. Already shattered by a severe loss of habitat and rampant poaching, the shrinking wildlife population in this coastal state is further threatened by a government-promoted tourism blitzkrieg.

Blessed with diverse terrain comprising hills, dense evergreen forests, scrub jungles, estuarine and mangrove forests, the state boasts of 20 sanctuaries, including the famous Nandankanan zoo and the Similipal national park that are home to a wide variety of plant and animal life.

The state tourism department recently launched a massive publicity campaign to promote tourism in wildlife sanctuaries like Bhitarkanika, Satkosia, Chilika Lake, Chandaka and the Similipal tiger reserve. This has resulted in thousands of tourists pouring into these sanctuaries every day, a senior wildlife official said.

Tours to such ecologically sensi-

tive areas have been euphemistically dubbed as "eco-tourism" but the visitors pose a threat to the health and peace of both wildlife species and their habitat, he said. The protected areas are now littered with garbage, including polythene carry bags and plastic bottles. Loud music is another nuisance inflicted upon the animals.

The state government has ordered handing over of all forest bungalows in sanctuaries to the tourism department. However, it is feared that if this were done, the forest staff would be unable to control or regulate the entry or behaviour of visitors.

Mechanised tourist boats used for tours on the Chilika Lake have proved to be the biggest threat to the highly endangered Irrawady dolphins in Asia's largest saltwater lake covering over 100,000 hectares. The lake today houses a tiny population of just 65 dolphins. Songkhla Lake in

Thailand is the only other water body in the world where these rare mammals can be sighted.

Fourteen dead dolphins, mangled by boat propellers, have been counted here in the last two-and-a-half years. Unless the use of mechanised boats with long jutting propellers is restricted, these dolphins may soon become extinct, an official said.

Similarly, the state government has closed its eyes to an illegal tourist resort operating at Sankuda island, which is a regulated area. The island is the habitat of the recently re-discovered rare Barkudia skink or legless lizard. Similarly, herds of noisy tourists frequent the Deras reservoir, located inside the Chandaka wildlife sanctuary, known for its wild elephant population.

Loud music disturbs the environs while bags, liquor bottles and cigarette packs litter the area, severely polluting the habitat, said a forest of-

ficer. Instead of country boats, noisy tourist boats fitted with old diesel engines are used to visit Dangmal, located inside the core area of Bhitarkanika national park, more famous for its nesting sites of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles.

The boats pass through the narrow Khola creek, where the famous giant estuarine crocodiles of Bhitarkanika bask in winter, officials said. But the constant traffic of these noisy boats puts the crocodiles under great stress as they are unable to bask in the sun, affecting their metabolism.

Tourists do not hesitate to shout and throw stones at the crocodiles in order to prod them into the water, wildlife enthusiast Ranjit Patnaik said.

Nalabana bird sanctuary in Chilika Lake, where thousands of rare migratory waterfowl have now arrived for their winter sojourn, faces a serious threat of pollution.

Hundreds of tourists visit this ecologically sensitive island every day, leaving behind plastic pouches, food wrappers and other garbage. This threatens valuable birds and their habitat.



Global warming can kill a quarter of life on land by 2050: study ^{9/11} ^{9/11/10}

Paris: Over one million plants and animals—a quarter of all life on land—could become extinct in just decades due to man-made climate change, scientists say. The main culprit for this change, they say in an article carried on Thursday in the British journal *Nature*, is greenhouse gases, which are churned out by automobiles and industry and trap heat in the earth's atmosphere.

"An immediate and progressive switch to technologies that produce little or no new greenhouse gases, combined with active removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, could save a million or more species from extinction," lead author Chris Thomas, a biologist from University of Leeds, said in a statement.

Mr Thomas's team studied six regions rich in biodiversity, representing 20 per cent of the planet's land area, and made projections for the survival of 1,103 species between 1990 and 2050, using elaborate computer models. Three scenarios for expected climate change were used in the computer models—a minimum

expected total rise of between 0.8 and 1.7 degrees Celsius by 2050; a mid-range scenario with total temperature increases of 1.8-2.0 degrees; and the maximum rise, when the earth's average climates



rise by over 2 degrees during the period.

Australia, one of the regions studied, would lose over half of its more than 400 butterfly species by 2050, thanks to global warming. Brazil's Cerrado area, a savannah-type area with a wealth of plant and animal species, could lose between 39 and 48 per cent of

its flora—thousands of plants whose medical or scientific benefits will never be known. The six regions studied by the scientists were Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Europe, Mexico and South Africa.

The head of the UN Environment Programme, Klaus Toepfer, warned that "the figure of one million may be an underestimate," since it only counts the extinction of species due to climate change, without taking into account a "ripple effect" that could also kill off interdependent plants and animals. Mr Toepfer said humans would suffer from the consequences of global warming, the result of their dependence on fossil fuels.

"If one million species become extinct as a result of global warming, it is not just the plant and animal kingdoms and the beauty of the planet that will suffer. Billions of people, especially in the developing world, will suffer too as they rely on nature for such essential goods and services as food, shelter and medicines," he said. AFP

THE TIMES OF INDIA

9 JAN 2004

9 JAN 2004

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SHARING RIVER WATERS

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THE BROAD AGREEMENT reached between Tamil Nadu and Kerala to revise the Parambikulam-Aliyar inter-State water accord, which lapsed in 1988, clearly signals that the best way forward in resolving such disputes lies in negotiation and conciliation, not adjudication. After several rounds of discussion, the two States crafted a mutually acceptable formulation at the ministerial-level meeting on Sunday. All that remains is for the two Chief Ministers to sign the accord after some minor unresolved issues are sorted out. The Parambikulam-Aliyar agreement has proved that if States demonstrate a degree of flexibility in sharing the available water, no inter-State river water dispute is intractable. It has been Tamil Nadu's case that Kerala is not releasing the stipulated 16.5 thousand million cubic feet of water and the average inflow has been of the order of 10 tmcft over the years. Kerala has been asking Tamil Nadu to maintain the full level at the Kerala Sholayar dam by September 1 and February 1 every year, by releasing sufficient water. The peculiar flow pattern of this system has posed several problems to the two States, affecting both irrigation and drinking water supplies in the regions that the system feeds.

Commendable as this provisional agreement on Parambikulam is, the two States have other contentious issues to be resolved. They should extend the same spirit of accommodation to find a *modus vivendi* on the controversy over raising the level of the Periyar dam (Mullaiperiyar). Kerala has been opposing the suggestion from Tamil Nadu, which has backed its claim with a technical study to show that the increase in height will not weaken the structure. Tamil Nadu has a problem with a weir that Kerala is constructing on the Cauvery. It has not only objected to the move, but also taken the issue to the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. A disputatious approach is not only time consuming, but,

what is worse, adversely affects relations between neighbouring States. Although the Centre can set up a tribunal under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act (ISWDA) of 1956 to resolve such disputes, there is no law or authority to enforce the award of a tribunal. That is a lacuna in the Act.

Given the reality of inter-State river water disputes, which are sharpened when there is little surplus water to share and when the monsoons let the beneficiaries down, the Centre has to come up with a more implementable law and a more practical mechanism that can prevent disputes from sharpening and when that is not possible resolve them on an objective and amicable basis. Looking at the international and national frameworks that exist in the area of dispute resolution, the Helsinki Rules or principles and the ISWDA appear to provide the most viable and fair formulations for watersharing. The Helsinki Rules could serve as guidelines to implement Tribunal awards or agreements arising out of dispute resolution. The basic flaw with the ISWDA however seems to be its jump from negotiation to adjudication, without any intermediate, voluntary processes such as mediation, conciliation or arbitration. The Sarkaria Commission, which went into inter-State water disputes and their resolution, noted that the Centre lacked any means to enforce an award should any State refuse to give effect to it, either fully or partially. The law needs to be amended to render a Tribunal award enforceable as if it were an order or decree of the Supreme Court. Instead of having to take recourse to the courts and souring normal relations between neighbouring States, there should be engagement in a dialogue until an amicable settlement, which is implementable, can be reached. By politicising such disputes, Governments are making it difficult to find and accept mature solutions that will benefit the people of India.

POISONED PLANET

Toxic Threat To Life

By YP GUPTA

Today, the air is dangerously polluted with some poison, thereby posing a serious challenge to our survival. In its annual report for 2001-02, the Central Pollution Control Board has reported that the situation on air pollution in the four metropolitan cities and also in Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Hyderabad is alarming. The situation in 21 other cities is worse. It is reported that the critical levels of respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM) and suspended particulate matter (SPM) have been causing extreme pollution in these cities. Vehicular pollution is responsible for high RSPM levels. More than 25 cities have been listed under "critical pollution" air quality status.

In view of the alarming vehicular air pollution in Delhi, the Supreme Court had earlier directed the government to run all the diesel-run commercial vehicles with eco-friendly CNG (compressed natural gas) fuel. It had also directed to follow Euro-II norms, to upgrade fuel quality and to run vehicles with CNG.

Delhi won't improve

The CPCB has reported that the use of CNG fuel led to an improvement in the air quality in Delhi. Its RSPM levels dropped to 189 microgram per cubic meter at the ITO crossing from 357 microgram per cubic meter. The CNG use has reduced pollution by 15 per cent. But a study by the Tata Energy Research Institute has shown that there is an increase in the pollution levels of Delhi's atmosphere after conversion to CNG fuel. The air quality index depending on three major pollutants — particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide — did not change much. The Centre for Science and Environment has projected that the percentage change in the levels of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, benzene and particulate matter in the Delhi's atmosphere would vary between 42 and 51 per cent by 2015. The CPCB has reported that the air quality of Delhi would deteriorate, and carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and other noxious chemicals would be high in future.

A UN report on environment and health had said that nearly four million children die annually of acute respiratory infections from air pollution, and that asthma cases have been rising in the industrial world by 50 per cent in the last two decades. It is reported that air pollution from a heat wave in August 2003

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caused the death of thousands of French people. The European Environment Agency has reported that more than 2000 premature deaths in the European Union countries take place every year due to high ozone levels in the atmosphere.

The World Health Organisation has estimated that air pollution in India has been killing

18,000 million litres of domestic and industrial waste enter the Yamuna river, polluting it with toxic chemicals and high level of coliform bacteria. The coliform count varies between one lakh and 10 lakh while the normal count should be at 5,000. The higher level of coliform increases the incidence of water-borne diseases. Despite a ten-



one lakh people every year, of which 10,000 die in Delhi. Air pollution, insanitary conditions and deteriorating public health due to rapid pace of urbanisation are considered as the major contributing factors in the developing world. The World Bank has reported that about 88 per cent of the world's total population would be located in the urban areas by 2025.

Delhi has been dying a slow death due to polluted air. The urban population has been choking where the levels of SPM have increased to around seven times the average critical limit of 60 microgram prescribed by the WHO. Kanpur tops in the level of SPM having 470.9 microgram per cubic meter of air. The other major Indian cities also have critical SPM levels (more than 210 microgram).

World's worst water

A World Bank report says that the Indian cities have been choking with industrial and vehicular pollution. Vehicles, thermal power plants and industrial units in Delhi are the major toxic air pollutants. Delhi is ranked fourth among the 41 cities of the world monitored for air pollution, and is among the 10 most polluted cities in the country. Its vehicles numbering over 35 lakh account for 65 per cent of air pollution.

Water pollution and sewage disposal have equally polluted Delhi's environment. The problem of garbage disposal in Delhi has been quite acute. Over

year clean-up effort, the Yamuna remains toxic. The discharge of industrial effluents and municipal waste in Haryana has polluted the Western Yamuna Canal water, and has adversely affected the drinking water supply. The CPCB has requested the Haryana agencies to locate the source of effluents. Several sheep were poisoned and died from the industrial effluent in Noida Phase II drains. The Supreme Court had directed the industrial units discharging effluents into the Yamuna river to install treatment plants to prevent further degradation of the river. In its recent evaluation of global water resources, the United Nations has reported that India's water quality is poor, and it ranks 120th among the 122 nations in terms of the quality of water available for its citizens.

Air pollution is widespread throughout the world, choking many of its cities and thereby posing a serious challenge to save life on this planet. During the Gulf War in 1991, vast areas surrounding Kuwait were highly polluted with suspended particulate matter, poisonous gases and toxic substances from burning of Kuwaiti oil wells, petroleum refineries and the resultant oil slick.

The thick black smoke covered most of Asia and caused climatic changes. Iraq became a "poisoned desert" having widespread epidemics, and thousands of its children died. A war is the greatest ecological disaster. The

2003 war against Iraq has poisoned the entire ecological system in Iraq and its surrounding areas.

In India, a relatively under-developed country, the damaging pollutants in the form of hydrocarbons, suspended particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, lead oxide, etc., from industry and use of petroleum in automobiles belched out into the atmosphere amounts to a few million tones per year. These pollutants have been poisoning the atmosphere, causing a number of diseases like lung cancer, asthma, bronchitis, etc.

Serious challenge

The Institute for Research in Reproduction (Mumbai) has reported that the sperm of Indian males has significantly declined to just 20 million from 60 million per millilitre earlier due to environmental toxins effect. This is largely responsible for infertility and abnormal babies.

Delhi is at the top in respect of lung diseases with 30 per cent of its population suffering from respiratory diseases due to pollution by poisonous gases causing breathing problems. Many people in the affluent residential areas of Mumbai have been suffering from bronchitis, asthma and lung cancer.

Asthma is a major pollution-related problem in Delhi. Every tenth schoolgoing child has been suffering from asthma caused by air pollution. Around 50 million people suffer from asthma in India, and nine lakh asthma patients live in Delhi. The incidence of bronchitis in Delhi has been rising by 25 to 60 per cent each year.

Delhi also tops in the country in lead emissions mainly by automobiles. Increasing lead pollution from industry and automobiles poses a serious environmental hazard. Automobile and diesel engine exhausts contain lead, which is a carcinogenic. Lead from automobile exhausts accumulates in the form of dust. On inhalation, organic lead emitted from cars, gets easily absorbed in brain, liver, kidney and blood, which becomes cumulative poison leading to brain damage, muscular paralysis, convulsions and even death.

Air pollution is thus posing a serious challenge for survival on this planet. World bodies have proposed to impose taxes and levies on the industrial units causing pollution. The introduction of clean fuel is likely to improve air quality as well as life quality. Also, a clean development mechanism is being initiated aiming at checking climate change for curbing pollution.