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निदेशक (स.प.प्र.)

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Hindustan Times (Delhi)

नवभारत टाइम्स (दिल्ली)

The Tribune (Chandigarh)

The Hindu (Chennai)

The Assam Tribune (Guwahati)

The Times of India (Mumbai)

The Telegraph (Kolkata)

हिन्दुस्तान (पटना)

The Deccan Herald (Bengluru)

The Deccan Chronical (Hyderabad)

Central Chronical (Bhopal)

Delhi-Kathmandu ties: Finding a win-win on floods

Both must cooperate to reduce soil erosion, revive stalled reservoir projects, and kick-off the Kosi High Dam project



RANJIT
RAE

Floods in north Bihar and the districts of Uttar Pradesh (UP), bordering Nepal, during the monsoon season, cause enormous losses in lives and property. Similarly, large parts of Nepal's Tarai get submerged. This tragedy repeats on a loop every year. Heavy rains in the catchment areas of the major trans-boundary river systems — the Kosi, Gandak/Narayani and Karnali/Ghagra as well as Rapti and Mahakali/Sharda — lead to substantial run-offs as these rivers debouch into the plains, causing widespread flooding.

So far, the two countries have adopted flood-control measures that largely comprise river-training works, including embankment construction. This approach comes with its problems. Due to soil erosion and landslides in the upper catchment area, particularly of the eastern rivers, the run-offs are heavily laden with silt. This results in a rise in the level of the river beds. In some places, the Kosi now flows above the surrounding territory. Embankments provide a temporary respite. In the long-run, if the banks are breached, as happened in 2008 to the east afflux bund, there are catastrophic consequences. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the Kosi has made significant oscillations in its course over the last 200 years.

Both countries blame each other for the floods. The chief ministers of UP and Bihar complain to the prime minister that Nepal was not providing full cooperation on embankment construction for these trans-boundary rivers and their tributaries, even though some of this activity is financed by India.

Nepal, on the other hand, blames India for the flooding of its Tarai plains. It argues that India has constructed roads all along the India-Nepal border without installing adequate drainage. The roads, it contends, act like an embankment and cause submergence of land and villages on Nepal's side. A report of a joint India-Nepal technical team that did not find any evidence for this allegation has not been accepted by the Nepali authorities.

A longer term more sustainable approach is needed to address the root causes of the problem. India must cooperate with Nepal on the prevention of soil erosion and reforestation projects including in the Chure (Shiwalik) Hills under the Rashtrapati Chure Conservation Programme, a project under the patronage of the president of Nepal.

More importantly, we need to revive the many reservoir projects agreed upon in the past and whose implementation has been tardy. The Narendra Modi government provided a huge impetus to the Pancheshwar Hydro-Power Project on the Mahakali/Sharda River that had remained stalled for almost two decades since the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, six years down the road, it has got bogged down again, particularly over Nepal's refusal to accept India's proposal to include the waters of the Lower Sharda Bar-



■ Heavy rains in the catchment areas of the major trans-boundary river systems lead to flooding in the plains
HTPHOTO

rage in the existing consumptive usage of the Mahakali waters.

If this issue is not sorted out at the political level, the project will be delayed again at a huge cost. The last time the project was delayed, the overall cost increased from ₹12,000 crore to ₹40,000 crore even as the total capacity has been reduced from 6,720 MW to 5,040 MW largely due to hydrological factors.

Another priority should be the revival of the Kosi high dam proposal. Though the Kosi Barrage was built several decades ago, and embankment works have proceeded apace, the high dam proposal has not made much progress since its conception in the 1950s. The joint project office has been unable to complete the survey-related work needed for the preparation of the detailed project report (DPR), even though it was set up in 2004, in part due to resistance from local communities. Considerable efforts are needed to address the concerns of the local population, especially in the area that will be submerged. The Nepali authorities are less than supportive on the grounds that the entire submergence will be in Nepal, while the bulk of the benefits in terms of irrigation and flood control will go to India. The Sun Kosi Storage-cum-Diversion Scheme has been made an integral part of the project keeping in mind Nepal's interests. An objective and fair system for sharing the costs and benefits from the project will need to be worked out.

So far, India has opted for a bilateral approach. But Bangladesh too is an interested party as the project will regulate water flows into the Ganga and the Padma. Trilateral cooperation will make it easier politically for Nepal to pursue the project. If the project is implemented, an important benefit for Nepal will be the creation of inland waterways along the Ganga and Kosi, which will result in a significant reduction of logistics costs for trade. It will also significantly strengthen sub-regional cooperation. Though relations with Nepal are currently fraught and it is unlikely that solutions will be easily found, India needs to review joint reservoir projects strategically at the political level.

Ranjit Rae is former ambassador to Nepal
The views expressed are personal

272 roads blocked as heavy rain lashes state

Nurpur the wettest | ₹335 crore property loss



Commuters take shelter under a tree during heavy rain in Shimla on Thursday. PHOTO: AMIT KANWAR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, AUGUST 27

Heavy rain lashed several parts of the state, triggering landslides that blocked 272 roads and disrupting normal life. The Met office has forecast heavy rain in lower and mid hills tomorrow and rains and thunderstorms accompanied with lightning in lower and mid hills and rain and snow in higher hills over the next six days up to September 2.

As many as 272 roads — 177 in Mandi zone, 49 in Kangra zone, 27 in Shimla zone and 19 in Hamirpur zone — were blocked. The total loss of public property during the current monsoon season has been assessed at Rs 335 crore till date. A large number of rivulets and tributaries of major rivers are in spate and the work is going on a

TRAFFIC DISRUPTED ON CHD-MANALI HIGHWAY

■ The Chandigarh-Manali highway, which had been opened to traffic after being blocked on Wednesday evening due to landslides in Mandi district, was closed on Thursday evening again.

■ Landslips were reported at Hanogi, Dwada and near Aut in the district, which blocked the traffic at several places between Mandi and Kullu on this highway. A large number of vehicles were stuck in long traffic jams.

■ Similarly, the Pathankot-Mandi highway was also blocked near Bijni just a few km away from Mandi town due to a massive landslide, blocking the traffic.

war footing to open the blocked roads.

Widespread heavy rain occurred in Kangra, Mandi, Chamba and Hamirpur districts. Nurpur was the wettest in the state with 133 mm of rainfall.

The intermittent heavy rain during the past one week have reduced the deficit from 28 per cent to 17 per cent — the state received 507 mm of average rainfall against the normal

rainfall of 613 mm.

Bilaspur, Kullu and Una received 22 per cent, 23 per cent and six per cent excess rains while the rainfall deficit was 72 per cent, 50 per cent and 41 per cent in Lahaul and Spiti, Chamba and Kinnaur districts, respectively. The rain deficit in the remaining six districts ranged between 15 per cent (Kangra) and 29 per cent (Sirmaur), the MeT office said.

Incessant rain across Jammu kills two, destroys 50 houses

77 transformers damaged; 35 persons rescued; crops inundated

ARTEEV SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST 27

Two persons, including an employee of Punjab National Bank (PNB), lost their lives in two separate incidents of heavy rain across the Jammu region in the past 24 hours.

According to the police, a PNB employee, identified as Sudhir Choudhary (26), resident of Raghunath Pura Shiv Nagar, Udhampur, was killed while three others sustained injuries when a boulder hit their vehicle near the Kheri area on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway. The deceased was on his way to Samroli (the place of his posting) from Udhampur in a car when the incident took place.

In another incident, a 40-year-old man, Mohammad Yaqoob, resident of Kanou Kither, got washed away in flash floods in the Bunjwah area of Kishtwar.

Incessant rain continued to wreak havoc across the Jammu region for the second consecutive day, causing damage to over 50 houses, while over 35 persons stuck in flash floods were rescued from different parts of the region.

"Around 20 houses have suffered damage in heavy rain. We have requisitioned the help of the Army to rescue four trapped persons in the Salhotri area. We also received information that two persons went for grazing of cattle on the river bank in Khanetar area and got trapped there. We are on job to rescue them as well," Rahul Yadav, Deputy



The swollen Tawi following heavy rain in Jammu on Thursday. PTI

BANK EMPLOYEE AMONG VICTIMS

- A Punjab National Bank employee, Sudhir Choudhary (26), resident of Udhampur, was killed while three others sustained injuries when a boulder hit their vehicle near the Kheri area on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway.
- A 40-year-old man, Mohammad Yaqoob, resident of Kanou Kither, got washed away in flash floods in the Bunjwah area of Kishtwar.

NH REMAINS BLOCKED

- The Jammu-Srinagar highway remained closed for the third straight day.
- "We could not carry out restoration work due to heavy rain. The highway has been blocked at six to seven locations," PK Phonsa, Project Director, NHAI, Ramban sector, said.

Commissioner, Poonch, told *The Tribune*.

"Seven persons, including three children, were rescued by the police with the help of the Indian Air Force during a 30 hour-long rescue operation," said SSP, Kathua, Shailendra Mishra.

Four residential houses suffered damage in the Billawar area of Kathua, while paddy crop grown on 100 kanals of land in the Chaba Chak area was inundated by flood water.

Similarly, there were reports of damages to several houses in Ramban district where the Jammu-Sri-

nagar highway remained closed for the third straight day. "We could not carry out restoration work due to heavy rain. The highway has been blocked at six to seven locations," PK Phonsa, Project Director, NHAI, Ramban sector, said.

The main road between Kishtwar and Paddar was also closed due to a major landslide in the Naiegad Padriyana area. In Udhampur district, 10 major roads and 44 other roads constructed under the PMGSY were closed due to landslides, while 14 houses suf-

fered damage in the district.

The DC, Reasi, Indu Kanwal Chib, said the standing crops in two panchayats were damaged in heavy rain.

Chief Engineer, Irrigation and Flood Control, Jammu, Hamesh Manchanda said the situation was under control so far though the water level in major rivers and streams across the Jammu region rose due to heavy rain.

Chief Engineer, PDD, Jammu, Gurmeet Singh disclosed that nearly 77 transformers were damaged during the last 48 hours. Out of them 44 were replaced.