September 2023 Uttarakhand Disaster & Accident Synopsis (UDAS) Monthly Reports

Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation Dehradun, Uttarakhand

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About UDAS Monthly Reports

Uttarakhand Disaster & Accident Synopsis (UDAS) is a monthly initiative by Dehradun-based environmental action and advocacy group, Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation. The goal of the UDAS reports is to document disasters and accidents in Uttarakhand, leading to human and ecological casualties. UDAS is based on media reports in respectable publications in English and Hindi newspapers, as well as news portals. UDAS neither attempts nor claims to document all disasters and all accidents in Uttarakhand; its focus instead is to document major casualties and non-casualty events on a regular basis.

We strongly believe that with the perils of inclement climate and unabated disasters, the ecologically fragile and earthquake-prone state of Uttarakhand needs to take many more steps to increase its disaster preparedness. We, therefore, see UDAS as a document that highlights attention towards the urgent need of a holistic disaster management and accident minimization policy framework in Uttarakhand.

It is our earnest hope that UDAS will spur political leadership, policy makers, bureaucracy, research and academic institutions, businesses, civil society organisations, media and the citizenry at large to initiate inclusive, regular and action-oriented conversations on the subjects of resilience, mitigation and adaptation in Uttarakhand. With mainstreaming and a greater focus on the issue, there is likely to be an improvement in the process of planning of climate actions and disaster management in Uttarakhand.

1. September 2023 : Joshimath "sinking" update

The Uttarakhand high court summoned the chief secretary over non-compliance of its order to form a committee on land subsidence in Joshimath town on September 1, 2023. Hundreds of buildings developed cracks earlier this year, forcing families to shift to temporary relief camps. The court directed the chief secretary to appear during the next hearing on September 22, 2023

On January 12, 2023 the high court had directed the state government to form the panel and submit a report in a sealed envelope within two months, after several families were forced to shift to temporary relief camps due to the cracks. Since then,

868 residential buildings and other structures developed cracks, 181 of these were declared unsafe, and families affected. A division bench of chief justice Vipin Sanghi and justice Alok Kumar Verma was hearing a plea related to the 2021 Chamoli flood disaster, that claimed 204 lives, when it recalled its order related to the Joshimath crisis, advocate Snigdha Tiwari, who appeared for the petitioner, said. "The court has summoned chief secretary SS Sandhu during the next hearing on September 22," she said.

In its January order, the High Court had directed inclusion of Piyoosh Rautela, executive director of Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority, and MPS Bisht former director Uttarakhand Space Application Centre, into the committee. In her petition, Tiwari sought formation of an independent committee to analyse the impacts of hydel power projects in the upper reaches of Himalayan valleys and a stay on construction of all under-construction hydropower projects, till early warning systems are put in place.

She also sought formation of an independent committee comprising hydrologists, geologists, glaciologists, disaster management experts, social scientists, geomorphologists, ecologists, hydrogeologists and landslide experts to assess the current situation on the ground in Joshimath, Reni village and Tapovan. The application sought directions to the committee to make recommendations relying on scientific findings with respect to the viability of the hydel power project, disaster mitigation and management plans within a time frame decided by the court.



SCHTEMBER 2, 2023 HIMOUSTAN TIMES

In another order passed by the High Court on September 20, 2023 it said that there was no reason that the State should keep the reports prepared by the experts secret,

and should not disclose the same to the public at large," a division bench of the high court comprising Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Alok Kumar Verma said in an order on a PIL.

"In fact, circulation of the said reports would provide vital information to the public, and the public would have confidence in them that the State is serious about dealing with the situation," the court said. In an earlier order, the high court had asked independent experts from the fields of hydrology, geology, glaciology, disaster management, geomorphology and landslide to study the land subsidence issue.

The high court was furnished with the reports prepared by experts on the Joshimath subsidence crisis on September 20 in sealed covers. The court observed that the petitioner could not have known about the existence of these reports since the state has not made them public.

Eight central technical and scientific institutions, including the Central Building Research Institute, Geological Survey of India, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, National Geophysical Research Institute, Central Ground Water Board, Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, National Institute of Hydrology and IIT, Roorkee were engaged to study the problem and ascertain its causes. They submitted their preliminary reports to the National Disaster Management Authority in January but the contents were never made public.



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Dehradun: The Uttarakhand high court has raised questions over the state government's decision not to make reports prepared by eight central scientific and technical institutions the Joshimath subsidence, public.

Commenting on the matter, a division bench of Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Alok Kumar Verma said in a court order, which was issued on Wednesday, and made available on Thursday, "We see no reason that the state should keep the reports prepared by the experts secret and disclose the same to the pub-lic at arge."



Copies of the reports had been placed in a sealed cover by the state government

The court went on to add, "In fact, circulation of the saidreports would provide vital information to the public, and the public would have confidence in them that the state is serious about dealing with the situation.

Continued on P 2

₹1,465cr package for Joshimath rehabilitation

"he central government has given an 'in-principle' approval of a Rs 1,465 crore package to the Uttarakhand government for rehabilitation and reconstruction of subsidence-hit Joshimath town. Confirming the development on Thursday, secretary of state disaster management department, Ranjit Sinha, told TOI, "A total amount of Rs 1,800 crore was proposed for the rehabilitation out of for the rehabilitation, out of which, we got in-principle ap-proval of Rs 1,465 crore from the central government." P

SEPTEMBGN 21, 2013 TIMES OF INDIA

Among several observations and recommendations made by experts of the premier institutions, the important ones focused on the town's carrying capacity and poor construction design and soil bearing capacity. Notably, the town has come up on moraine or loose soil deposited by landslides.

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in its 130- page Post Disaster Need Assessment' (PDNA) report on the town's 'sinking', said, "Joshimath exceeded its carrying capacity, far beyond its capacity, and the area must be declared as a no-new construction zone."

As per 2011 census, Joshimath's population was 16,709, with a density of 1,454 per sq km. The town's estimated population now stands somewhere between 25,000 and 26,000, as per the district administration. In its 180-page report, the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) also questioned the current construction practices in Joshimath and recommended the need for reviewing the principles of town planning for development of towns here and in similar hilly parts of the Himalayas.

In a significant recommendation, the Roorkee-based institution also urged for preparing a plan for "phased de-densification of Joshimath and similar locations." The Geological Survey of India (GSI) report mentions that the density of the recent ground cracks was more in areas which are densely populated and dotted with multi-storey buildings. This has been the case with areas like Manohar Bagh and Singhdhar where a maximum number of ground cracks and damage to civil structures seem to have occurred.



The damages to the buildings in Joshimath town of Chamoli district were due to "excessive vibration" in the ground by traffic, apart from the main cause of land settlement in the region, CBRI had also said in its report.

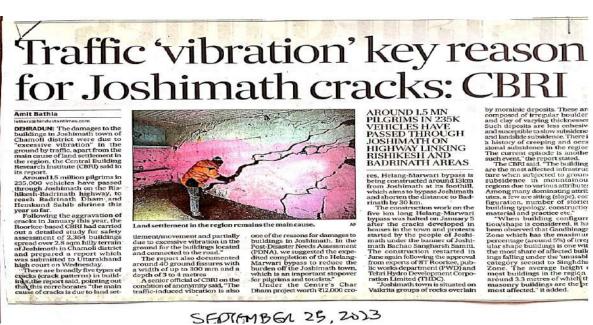
Around 1.5 million pilgrims in 235,000 vehicles have passed through Joshimath on the Rishikesh-badrinath highway, to reach Badrinath Dham and Hemkund Sahib shrines this year so far.

Following the aggravation of cracks in January this year, the Roorkee-based CBRI had carried out a detailed study for safety assessment of 2,364 buildings spread over 2.8 sgm hilly terrain of Joshimath in Chamoli district and prepared a report which was submitted to Uttarakhand high court on Wednesday.

There are broadly five types of cracks (crack patterns) in buildings, the report said, pointing out that this corroborates "the main cause of cracks is due to land settlement/movement and partially due to excessive vibration in the ground for the buildings located and connected to the road."

The report also documented around 40 ground fissures with a width of up to 300 mm and a depth of 3 to 4 metres. A senior official of CBRI on the condition of anonymity said, "The traffic-induced vibration is also one of the reasons for damages to buildings in Joshimath. In the Post-disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), we suggested the expedited completion of the Helang-marwari bypass to reduce the burden off the Joshimath town, which is an important stopover for pilgrims and tourists."

The construction work on the five km long Helang-Marwari bypass was halted on January 5 after cracks developed in houses in the town and protests started by the people of Joshimath under the banner of Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti. The construction restarted in June again following the approval from experts of IIT Roorkee, public works department (PWD) and Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Limited (THDC).



The central government has given an 'in-principle' approval of a Rs 1,465 crore package to the Uttarakhand government for rehabilitation and reconstruction of subsidence hit joshimath town. Confirming the development, secretary of the state disaster management department Ranjit Sinha told TOI,' A total amount of Rs 1,800 crore was proposed for the rehabilitation, out of which, we got in principle approval of Rs 1,465 crore from the central government. The remaining amount of Rs 335 crore will be borne by the state government.

Sinha said that the money will be disbursed in phases, with the first instalment going for rehabilitation of affected families, followed by reconstruction works. All projects will be completed within three years, he added.

When asked about the areas which will be permanently banned for settlement in future, Sinha said that "high-risk zones will be evacuated, keeping in mind the safety of the residents." "Decision in this regard will be taken once we get a final order from the union government," he added. Notably experts have classified joshimath town into three categories: high Risk zone, medium risk zone, and slight risk zone. According to sources, almost 1/3rd of the total settlement falls under a high risk zone.



2. September 3, 2023 : Huge Avalanche Behind Kedarnath Temple In Uttarakhand

Rudraprayag: An avalanche hit the Sumeru mountain on September 3 behind the Kedarnath Temple in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district, according to an official.

A senior official of the district emergency control centre from Rudraprayag said that the avalanche was reported three to four kilometres behind the Kedarnath Dham temple near the source of Saraswati River at 7.30 AM and no loss of life or property was reported. No significant change in the water level of the river was observed and all teams had been altered about the incident.

On June 9, an avalanche in the Chorabari Glacier Zone on Kedarnath was recorded which also led to clouds of snow rising in the air for a long time.

Kedarnath Valley hit by avalanche, no casualties: Official

HT Correspondent

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MUSSOORIE: The Sumeru Mountain in the Kedarnath Valley was struck by a snow avalanche on Sunday. There was no loss of life or property was reported in the incident, officials familiar with the matter said.

A senior official of the district emergency control centre Rudraprayag said: "The avalanche was reported three to four-kilometres behind the Kedarnath Dham temple near the source of Saraswati River at 7.30 am on Sunday and no loss of life or property was reported, while no significant change in the water level of the river was observed and all teams have been alerted about the incident."

Brijendar Singh, a vendor who sells water bottles to the pilgrims on the Kedarnath yatra route said, "The avalanche hit early morning leaving behind a cloud of snow as it roared down the



The incident took place near Kedarnath Dham. HTPHOTO

mountain".

According to experts, powder avalanches arise mostly from slab avalanches.

A powder cloud forms in the presence of a large altitude difference when a sufficient quantity of snow gets suspended in the air temporarily.

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SEPTEMBER 4, 2023 HIMDUSTAN TIMES

3. September 6, 2023 : Disasters in Himalayan state are completely man-made, says Uttarakhand High Court

The Uttarakhand High Court, while addressing a PIL over the lack of compliance with the Doon Valley notification for formulation of a tourism development plan within the valley, pulled up the state government on September 6.

"The Himalayas were formed thousands of years ago but disasters are happening only now... All these disasters are completely man-made," the division bench comprising Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Rakesh Thapliyal said.

The judges also said the state has "completely disregarded the law and wants to commercialise everything".

The court was hearing a PIL filed by lawyer and environmentalist Akash Vashishtha, who sought "enforcement and strict adherence to the Doon Valley Notification (1989) under the Environment (Protection) Act" after recent landslides and subsidence in areas like Dhanaulti and Chamba due to rains.

The Doon Valley region encompasses Dehradun, Mussoorie, Rishikesh, Haridwar and surrounding areas. The court observed that the "state government had failed to formulate the required tourism development plan in line with the aforementioned notification".

The court asked the Centre to submit an affidavit detailing the status of implementation and adherence to the Doon Valley notification. It issued a directive to the state government, instructing officials to "prepare a comprehensive plan within the next four weeks adhering to the Doon Valley notification"



SEPTEMBER 7, 2023 TIMES OF INDIA

4. September 8, 2023: Depth of Cracks increases in Purna Giri Dham

The depth of cracks has increased in Purna Giri Dham. The cracks in the fair area which were about one foot deep three weeks ago, have now become more than two feet deep.

These cracks were covered with tarpaulin by the traders a few days ago, but due to the delay in treatment, the local priests are afraid of a situation like Joshimath.

Locals said that water is leaking from the cracks and reaching the nearby Dharamshalas. In the meantime, the arrival of devotees for Maa Purnagiri darshan is going on. More than one thousand devotees are coming daily.

District Magistrate Navneet Pandey had ordered a geological survey but even after three weeks the treatment work in the subsidence area has not begun.



5. September 11, 2023: Two earthquakes hit Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi within 12 hours; no damage reported

An earthquake measuring 2.9 on the Richter Scale hit Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district on the morning of September 11, the National Center for Seismology (NCS) website stated.

The earthquake in Uttarkashi occurred around 5 km beneath the earth's surface at 3:48AM. This was the second earthquake reported in the state within 12 hours.

Around 4.41 PM on September 10, an earthquake of magnitude 2.5 hit Uttarakhand's Chamoli district.

The National Center for Seismology (NCS) is the nodal agency of the Centre under the Earth Sciences Ministry for monitoring earthquake activity in the country on a 24/7 basis.

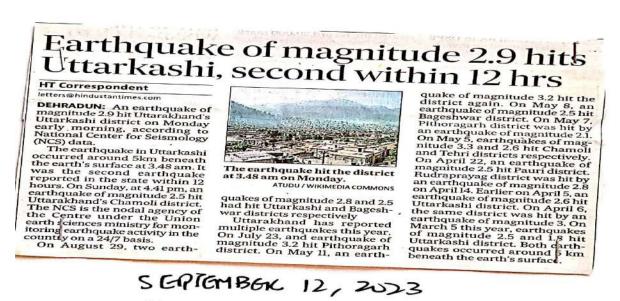
Uttarakhand has reported multiple earthquakes this year.

On July 23, an earthquake of magnitude 3.2 hit Pithoragarh district. On May 11, an earthquake of magnitude 3.2 hit the district again. On May 8, an earthquake of magnitude 2.5 hit Bageshwar district.

On May 7, Pithoragarh district was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 2.1. On May 5, earthquakes of magnitude 3.3 and 2.6 hit Chamoli and Tehri districts respectively. On April 22, an earthquake of magnitude 2.5 hit Pauri district.

Rudraprayag district was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 2.8 on April 14. Earlier on April 5, an earthquake of magnitude 2.6 hit Uttarkashi district. On April 6, the same district was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 3.

On March 5 this year, earthquakes of magnitude 2.5 and 1.8 hit Uttarkashi district.



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6. September 21, 2023: House collapses in Badrinath valley, resident blames poor master plan implementation

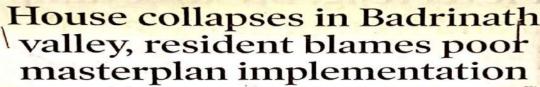
Privank Karnatak, a resident of Badrinath valley who has been protesting for the past 70 days against the state government's master plan that envisages transforming the town of Badrinath into a 'smart spiritual hub' was shocked on September 19 when he saw his ancestral home crashing down like a pack of cards into river Alaknanda.

He alleged the house collapsed because the river water was diverted, affecting the area's ecology. Currently, a 1.8 km-long extendable Alaknanda riverfront project is underway. "Besides, unabated excavation and digging of the landscape for the masterplan is worsening the situation," said Priyank.

He's among some priestly families from Narayan Puri the authorities plan to relocate from Narayan Parvat, where Badrinath shrine is located, to Nar Parvat on the other side of the river. According to experts, both Nar Parvat and Narayan Parvat are equally fragile as the entire valley is built on fluvial, glacio-fluvial and colluvial deposits which make it prone to rock falls, snow avalanche and soil creeping.

Karnatak has now written a complaint to cops, blaming authorities for carelessness while implementing the blaming authorities for carelessness while implementing the masterplan and sought action.

Meanwhile, protesting residents claimed they are "being moved out of their houses forcefully without their consent and till now no one from the administration has reached out to them. They will continue to protest against the masterplan and the rehabilitation policy which is not acceptable to them. The authorities, however, claimed that "consent was taken from the majority of residents before proceeding with construction in the area".



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Dehradun: Priyank Karnatak, a resident of Badrinath valley who has been protesting for the past 70 days against the state government's masterplan that envisages transforming the town into a 'smart spiritual hub', was shocked on Tuesday when he saw his ancestral home crashing down like a pack of cards into river Alaknanda.

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Priyank Karnatak, a resident of Badrinath valley, alleged that the house collapsed because the river water was diverted, affecting the area's ecology

Circle officer of Chamoli Pramod Shah said,
"As there was no loss of life or no one sustained
injuries, the complaint doesn't call for an FIR. Rehabilitation is already being addressed by the administration."

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SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 TIMES OF INDIA

7. September 23, 2023 : Nainital building falls like pack of cards, spreads panic

Panic spread in the Mallital Avagarh compound area of Nainital on September 23 afternoon after a two-story building in Chatan Lodge collapsed like a pack of cards, causing damage to two adjacent structures, although no casualties were reported. More than a dozen buildings situated on a hill were at risk after the building collapse, prompting immediate evacuation of residents from the endangered area.

SDM Pramod Kumar said that the process of evacuating the houses nearby was happening. "All the vulnerable houses in the area are being evacuated in view of the threat of more landslides," he said.

Meanwhile, locals alleged that the landfall occurred following a recent anti-encroachment drive conducted by authorities on the land of BD Pandey Hospital in Mallital. This resulted in the development of cracks in the surrounding areas and houses located uphill, they claimed.

The recurrent landslides in Nainital have become a growing cause for concern. Numerous areas in the city, including Raj Bhavan Road, DSB Hostel, Birla Road, Mall Road, Pangut Road, and Harinagar's Baliyanala area, are prone to landslides and remain vulnerable.

Geologists have attributed the mounting pressure from residential construction in Nainital as a significant factor driving these incidents. Despite the warnings, substantial new construction projects continue unabated in the city, raising alarms about the region's long-term safety.



About Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation

SDC Foundation is a Dehradun-based environmental action and advocacy group engaged in communication, citizen engagement and capacity building in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. The foundation works in partnership with institutions of Government of India, Government of Uttarakhand and other stakeholders such as research & academic institutions, community groups, civil society, media partners, NGOs, businesses & trade bodies, schools & colleges in the state.

Climate and environment conservation, waste management, sustainable urbanisation and a basket of sustainable development issues are key focus areas of the foundation.

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PS: Errors or omissions in UDAS documentation, if any, are purely unintentional. In case any errors or key omissions are detected or any fresh updates are available for events that are already documented, SDC Foundation may kindly be notified at email id contactsdcuk@gmail.com. We shall make the necessary corrections in subsequent versions of the monthly reports of UDAS.