



Science for Society

Science for Man

Science in Thinking

BREAKTHROUGH SCIENCE SOCIETY

All India Committee

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Registration No. S/86180 of 1996-97 under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961

A Voluntary Organization Committed to the Cause of Science, Culture and Scientific Outlook

11.01.2023

Dr Dhrubha Mukherjee, President, Breakthrough Science Society, has issued the following statement on the tragic man-made disaster that has overtaken the people and town of Joshimath in Uttarakhand:

Breakthrough Science Society expresses grave concern and demands immediate rescue and rehabilitation of the people and due compensation for the loss of lives, livelihoods and properties. Necessary measures should be taken to prevent such catastrophes in the future.

The land-sinking at the beautiful hill town of Joshimath in the Chamoli District of Uttarakhand has resulted in cracks in the walls of houses, buildings, roads and temples. Some hotels have tilted onto other buildings, and new water sources have emerged in some places. These worrying developments are threatening the life and livelihoods of thousands of people staying there.

This disaster was not unanticipated. Geologists have long been warning that places like Joshimath are prone to landslides and earthquakes because they are located on a running ridge, traversed by running streams with a high gradient from Vishnuprayag, a confluence of the Dhauliganga and Alaknanda rivers. Way back in 1976, an alarm was sounded that the town was located on the site of an ancient landslide and hence was not safe. The landslide debris on which the city was established has a low bearing capacity, and experts have long warned that it cannot support large constructions. Yet, recklessly ignoring all warnings, both the state and Central governments allowed the construction of big buildings and hotels by using boulders and other temporary rock supports.

Joshimath is of great strategic importance to the Indian Army, which has several cantonments in the area. Widening of the National Highway in the last couple of decades, more for military transportation than ease of civil communication, has made the slopes highly unstable since such roads have been built on the debris of previous landslides instead of constructing them at a height where the rock is firmer but which would have entailed higher costs.

Against sane advice and recommendations of scientists and experts, mega-hydro-electric projects are being set up in this fragile para-glacier region. As of today, more than 70 big and small projects are slated on different sections of the Ganga, and its tributaries and thousands of labourers who are working on these infrastructure projects are bound to die a nameless, faceless death because of the exploitative contractor-based model of development being pursued in the mountains. Protests of local people and warnings of scientists are simply ignored as the interest of the profit-hungry corporates override all safety and environmental concerns, with the government pacifying the fears and anger of people by some temporary short-term relief measures and putting the lid on long-term solutions.

We fully support the movement waged by the hapless victims of Joshimath for proper rescue and rehabilitation by the Uttarakhand and Central governments. All projects violating the recommendations of scientific committees should be banned forthwith; the natural beauty and environments of places like Joshimath should be protected; and a permanent, sustainable solution should be found for the development of the people of Uttarakhand.

News by Dr Tapan Si (Ph. 9433369069)