

NEWS & VIEWS

Indo-Polish project to reclaim geo-ecosystem of Cherrapunji

Sanat K Chakraborty for THE PIONEER : January 4, 2007

A team of Indian and Polish geographers is working together to reclaim the degraded geo-ecosystems of Cherrapunji. Cherrapunji said to be the wettest place on the earth, located on the southern spur of the Meghalaya plateau, which is, ironically, facing acute water crisis. It is certainly one of world's unique geographic puzzles about Cherrapunji, which fall close to the line of Tropic of Cancer, should have been a 'dry desert', just as it has been observed in other parts of the world situated on the similar latitude such as, the Great Indian desert of Rajasthan and the Sahara of Africa. But quite the contrary, the scientists observed, Cherrapunji receives an average annual rainfall of about 12000mm and wears a verdant look. They warned that the looming global climate change might cause more unstable weather and higher frequency of extreme rainfalls in the Cherrapunji region. The main objectives of the research were to examine the physical and hydrological elements. To understand the rainstorm characteristics and the conditions of water circulation, to measure and evaluate the intensity of rainfall, run off and denudation rates in the Cherrapunji region and to identify the causes of its geo-ecosystems degradation.

Tripura SOS on arsenic

THE TELEGRAPH : January 04, 2007

Worried over the presence of the high level of arsenic in underground water in the state, the Tripura Government has sought help from the water supply wing under the Union Rural Development Ministry. Luknow based Industrial Toxicological Research Centre (ITRC) scientists had submitted a report to the state government, in which they had confirmed the presence of arsenic in water samples collected from the eastern part of West Tripura, Kamalpur subdivision of Dhalai district, Amarpuar and neighbouring areas in South Tripura and remote areas of Kanchanpur subdivision in North Tripura. According to official sources of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department high level of iron has been found in 85% of water sources in Tripura which is responsible for a high incidence of gastro-enteric diseases and gallstones. However, the presence of high iron content in underground water is common in all hilly areas of the Northeast, said the official of the PHE. The state already has 100 iron removal plants and the state government has decided to set up 150 more iron removal plants all over the state to purify the underground water which contains disproportionately high iron content. Moreover, 17 surface water treatment plants would be set up in different parts of the state.

WB approves Rs 30 cr bio-carbon project in HP

With an aim to promote greenery in Himachal Pradesh, the World Bank has approved a Rs 30 crore bio-carbon project in the state for plantation work. According to the State Forest

ECONOMIC TIMES : January 9, 2007

Minister, all 600 *Panchayats* in the state would be covered under the scheme targeted to carry plantation in over 12,000 hectares of fresh land. One woman has to be engaged as a "motivator" under the project, the minister said. In addition, the Bank had already sanctioned a sum of Rs 365 crore under the 'Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Programme' that intended to promote integrated development of horticulture and agriculture in the state.

Hunt for the clouded leopard

THE STATESMAN : January 19, 2007

Neora Valley National Park in Darjeeling has begun its first survey of the clouded leopard in an attempt to find out more about this elusive, endangered species. The year-long study jointly carried out by the state forest department and Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS), a voluntary organization, will also look at eco-tourism prospects in the park. The survey hopes to find out the estimated clouded leopard population of the park, as well as observing daytime and nocturnal behavior and its prey base. Authorities hope sightings of the clouded leopard by park rangers will prove a major pull for travelers seeking eco-tourism holidays. The 88 km² area of the park is also home to the endangered red panda and musk deer. Other species include leopard, five species of civet, black bear, sloth bear, golden cat, wild boar, barking deer, sambar, Himalayan flying squirrel and thar.

Pheasant-breeding project to be revived in HP

THE PIONEER : February 15, 2007

The pheasant-breeding programme in Himachal Pradesh, which had been derailed by bickering in the Forest Department, will be soon back on track with the return of expert John Corder. This Pheasantry project funded by the Central Zoo Authority had been making remarkable gains under Corder since 2002 and led to successful breeding of the western Tragopan in captivity for the first time in the world. But after his departure, there was no breeding in 2006 as none of the eggs laid in two clutches hatched, putting the department in the firing line. The Government has decided to set up a search committee and according to them natural breeding is considered the best course of conservation of pheasants as the ultimate objective is to re-introduce the birds in the wild. However, in the process, the project has fallen behind by almost two years.

Chiru no more being hunted, J-K Govt tells SC

THE TRIBUNE : March 26, 2007

The Jammu and Kashmir Government has told the Supreme Court that the endangered Himalayan antelope Chiru was no more being hunted in the state for extracting rare wool for making shahtoosh shawls. However, the state government was accused by conservationists for not implementing the apex court's 2005 direction for certifying each and every old shahtoosh shawl owned by people. Clarifying the allege that the

trade is continuing in the state, the advocate-general of the state admitted that the wool could have been brought to the state from Tibet via some smuggling routes in Nepal but after the ban, no manufacturing and trade was being allowed in the state.

A Himalayan water crisis awaits India

THE TELEGRAPH : April 2, 2007

Global warming may melt 80% of Himalayan glacial cover and leave India thirsting for freshwater by 2030, according to a draft UN climate panel report slated for release. The draft, which is yet to be approved from the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes regional impacts of rising temperatures, widely blamed on emissions of greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels. The IPCC-India has declined to comment on the contents of the report saying it is still in a draft stage. However, scientists who have been tracking the fate of Himalayan glaciers for several years said some “dramatic impacts” within the next 20 or 30 years would be consistent with trends already visible in the Himalayas.

Himalayan meltdown catastrophic for India

TIMES OF INDIA : April 3, 2007

The result of the melting of most of the Himalayan glaciers by 2030, as predicted by the UN panel on climate change, could be truly catastrophic for India and its neighbors. The Himalayan region, called the 'Water Tower of Asia', has glacier coverage of about 33,000 km². It provides around 8.6 million cubic metres of water annually. As much as 70% of the world's fresh water is frozen in glaciers. The Himalayan glaciers are the largest store of water outside the polar ice caps, and feed seven great Asian rivers, namely Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Salween, Yangtze and Huang Ho (Yellow River). The glaciers are believed to be retreating at a rate of about 10-15 metres a year. The first danger of the meltdown could be widespread flooding. In a few decades, it could be followed by irreversible droughts, threatening the livelihood of millions of people. This would not only mean unprecedented food shortages but also a massive water crisis in the entire Gangetic basin, which alone is the home to more than 500 million people.

Waste management plant gets approval

THE TRIBUNE : April 11, 2007

The local Municipal will setup a solid waste management plant here for the disposal of gradable and degradable waste of the Palampur town of Himachal Pradesh. The department of urban development of the state government had already given its financial approval to this project. According to Mr. Brij Behari Lal, local MLA and political adviser to the Chief Minister, Rs 90 lakh would be spent on this project and a seven-kanal piece of land had also been transferred to the Municipal Council for this project. Gurdev International Limited, a company dealing with the installation of such plants would provide technical know-how to the municipal council to run the plant. In western

countries such solid waste management plant had proved very successful because of the fact that these plants were totally pollution free. And the government has the top priority to keep this hill town clean and pollution free, according to him.

Reckless cutting of hills, trees by power company

Ravinder Sood for THE TRIBUNE
: May 28, 2007

Resentment prevails among residents of Palampur in Himachal Pradesh over reckless cutting of hills by a private company executing a 15-MW power project here. Villagers from three Panchayats of the Bundla and Kandi areas adjoining Palampur town have lodged a protest against the company and demanded immediate suspension of the work on the project. They have alleged that the ecology of the region has been affected. Twelve irrigation channels and drinking water supply schemes feeding a population of 2 lakh in the lower areas of Palampur have also been affected. According to Palampur divisional forest officer (DFO), the company had deposited Rs 10.29 lakh as cost of trees with the government so far and the sanction was given for felling 724 trees. Besides, the company was also allowed to utilize 30 hectares of forestland for the execution of 15-MW powerhouse. The company had also deposited an additional amount of Rs 49 lakh under the catchment area treatment plan. Meanwhile, the Palampur Welfare and Environment Protection Forum has expressed concern over the reckless cutting of hills by the company. The forum also said If early action was not taken it would cause flash floods in the coming raining season affecting the lives of people leaving in lower areas of Palampur.

Ski project runs into rough weather

Vepa Rao for THE STATESMAN
: June 15, 2007

The proposed \$350-million project for setting up an international Himalayan Ski Village (HSV) in Himachal has run into rough weather with some leading environment activists of the country deciding to launch a major agitation against it. The state government has cleared the detailed project report, giving the green signal for work to begin on the project spanning over 6,000 acres of land and affecting at least 70 villages in the region. Promoted by Mr Alfred Ford, the grandson of the legendary Henry Ford, the project envisages 700 rooms at its international level hotels, apart from 300 Swiss-style chalets, spas and a handicraft village, shopping complexes and several other facilities. Several NGOs including Mr Sunderlal Bahuguna of the Chipko movement and a number of environmental scientists and activists have joined forces now to oppose the project claiming that it would harm the fragile topography and ecology of the region. The activists also claim that the mega-tourism project will pollute land, air and water resources in the area and also affect people's livelihood and life-style adversely.

Endangered high-altitude animals

Rakesh Lohumi for THE TRIBUNE : June 16, 2007

The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has assigned the responsibility of the lead agency to the zoos of the hill states for the conservation breeding of monal and cheer pheasants and brown bear. Besides, its zoos will also participate in the programme for breeding Tibetan wolf, musk deer and snow leopard. The leading zoos for the conservation programme include Himalayan Nature Park (Kufri), Padmaja Naidu National Zoological Park (Darjeeling), and Chopta Zoo (Uttarakhand). The CZA also approved in principle of Rs 3.30-crore project for the captive breeding of cheer pheasant. The World Pheasant Association (WPA) has been concerned over the dwindling population of the bird and encouraging efforts for its conservation. The species already figures in the red data book of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and included in the schedule 1 of protected species under the Wildlife Act.

Experts warn Ganga under grave threat from warming

INDIAN EXPRESS : June 20, 2007

India's holiest river is under greater threat than ever before, according to scientists and meteorologists. Latest finding show that the Himalayan source of the Ganga is drying up at a rate of 40 yards a year, nearly twice as fast as two decades ago, and that some of these glaciers might disappear by 2030. In the dry summer months, the Gangotri glacier provides up to 70% of the water of the Ganga and in India, the river provides water for drinking and farming for more than 50 crore people. According to an UN Report, the Himalayan source is drying up at a rate of 120 feet a year, nearly twice as fast as two decades ago. The immediate effect of a glacier recession is a short-lived surplus of water. But eventually the supply runs out, and experts predict that the Ganga eventually will become a seasonal river, largely dependent on monsoon rains.

Orchid conservation key to economic progress of Karbi Anglong

Kamal Kr Brahma for THE ASSAM TRIBUNE : June 27, 2007

Karbi Anglong of Assam is considered as "nature's treasure trove" and home to orchids, known for its exquisitely beautiful blooms, from one of the dominant textures with as many species, occurring in varying elevations and climatic conditions throughout the district. At least 80 varieties of different orchids are found in the district, some of which bloom in different seasons. Among them, *Aerides multiflorum*, *Cymbidium devoneanum*, *C. longifolium*, *Calanthe measure*, *Coelogyne nitida*, *Dendrobium fimbriatum*, *Dendrobium farmeri* etc, are found in abundance in the district. Some species of the orchids are also identified as medicinal species. In order to make use of these qualities cultivation of medicinal plants are not only commercial but also safer ecologically. Besides, there is a vast

scope for developing allied and subsidiary industries in addition to floriculture. In addition, if the concerned authorities of Karbi Anglong district adopt the practice of cut-flower production then economic development can be achieved in the district. However from this point of view, there is a potential for developing jewellery imitating orchid flowers, carpets with the picture of orchids, bamboo and cane articles depicting the ornamental orchid flowers, etc which could be used by the traders for sale as mementos to the tourists.

India plans strategy to tackle global warming

THE ECONOMIC TIMES : July 15, 2007

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has asked policymakers to come up with a detailed national plan by November to tackle the effects of global warming. In a meeting of his Council on Climate Change, he said that our government plans to undertake a major afforestation programme called Green India for greening six million hectares of degraded forest land and insisted the members of the Council to prepare a comprehensive roadmap for energy efficiency and sustainable development. The Kyoto deal on global warming requires industrialized countries to reduce emissions of six greenhouse gases by 5.2% by a target of 2008-2012 compared with their 1990 levels. India, along with China, is not included for targeted emission cuts under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the only global agreement that sets specific targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. India blames the industrial nations for the problem, and has in the past called for further commitments from them to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Dr. Singh said India would be badly hit because of its dependence of monsoon rains for farming and the Himalayan snow-fed rivers and the country's large coastline. He also said India had for decades laid stress on hydro and nuclear energy but needed to do more to explore newer ways of green development.

Renewable energy programmes in NE

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE : July 22, 2007

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India is implementing various renewable energy programmes in the north eastern (NE) region of the country, according to an official release. A total of 1, 246 family-type biogas plants have been set up in the region during 2006-07 till January 31. The National Biogas and Manure Management Programme (NBMMP) is being implemented in the NE through state departments and agencies. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) implement the programme in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. During the year 2006-07, 11,500 solar home lighting systems, 500 street lighting systems and 8,000 solar lanterns and 35 solar pumps were allocated under the Solar Photovoltaic Programmes (SPV) to the NE by the Ministry.

Eruption in Arunachal hill

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE : August

Gases and molten rock-like substances spewing from a small hilly area along the Kimin-Ziro road in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh have prompted the Geological Survey of

25, 2007

India (GSI) to investigate the phenomenon. People in the area claimed that they saw flashes shooting up into the sky and heard rumbling sounds on the night of August 21. According to GSI, there was no record of such activity in the area in the past. The molten glassy material collected from the site by the GSI team will be sent to Kolkata for chemical analysis to determine the cause of the eruption in the area.

Policy to relocate wild animals soon

THE TRIBUNE : September 20, 2007

The Centre will soon come out with a comprehensive policy to facilitate translocation of wild animals to help reduce the animal-human conflict. Union minister of state for environment and forests Shri S. Ragupathy, who is on a three-day visit to Himachal Pradesh, said that various states were facing problems due to an increasing human-conflict with leopards, monkeys and other animal making frequent forays into human settlements. The proposed policy would take care of all aspects like nature of habitat and carrying capacity of the forests to identify the areas for translocation of the animals. The animals could be relocated either within the same state or shifted to some other states, subject to their willingness. The Centre would also support programmes to contain the population of animals like monkeys through sterilization and other methods. He was impressed by the initiative to introduce the concept of carbon credits taken under the Rs 365-crore World Bank-funded Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project which would enable the villagers to earn Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 per hectare annually from the plantations for a period of 30 years.

Power firms indulging in reckless felling of trees

THE TRIBUNE : September 23, 2007

The reckless felling of trees by various companies executing power projects in the Dhauladhar ranges of Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh has become a matter of serious concern. Though the government had granted permission for the felling of trees certain power companies had axed more trees than the sectioned numbers. Information revealed that the Forest Department had already compounded the offences by imposing nominal penalties for indulging in illicit felling. No stringent action had been initiated against defaulters under the HP Forest Act. The felling of trees had also caused immense loss to the environment. A number of natural water resources have also been damaged in different parts of the region and as many as 12 drinking water supply schemes getting water from the Neugal river had adversely been affected. Raising concern to the region, Palampur Welfare and Environment Protection forum had asked the government to review its policy on the allocation of small hydel projects to private parties.

Manipur to develop Sadu Chiru waterfall

Sobhapati Samom for THE PIONEER : October 09, 2007

In a move to develop the newly-explored Sadu Chiru waterfall in Senapati district of Manipur, the State Government has taken up several steps in recent times. According to the state tourism officials, around 550 acre of land is required for the project. The State Government had even submitted a project proposal on

“Development of Sadu Chiru waterfall complex” to the Union Tourism Ministry. The tourism minister appealed to the villagers of the region to conserve the environment of the Sadu Chiru area. Regarding the controversy arising out of the naming of the waterfall, he called upon the villagers to work it out once the developmental project is being taken up. The Minister also visited the Waroiching hillock under Oinam assembly constituency in Bishnupur district of the state to take up another project of his department.

Man-animal conflict, Forest Conservation Act

Jotirmay Thapliyal for THE PIONEER : December 31, 2007

Uttarakhand's rich biodiversity in terms of forest wealth and wildlife had its own set of problems and achievements in the year 2007. A State with an overwhelming presence of forests and richness in wildlife had to cope with the rising man-animal conflict on one hand while on the other the Forest Conservation Act is continued to be widely perceived as the biggest stumbling block in the State's quest for development. The Uttarakhand Forest Department has initiated bridging the growing attitude of indifference among villagers's vis-à-vis forests. It not only encouraged volunteers for prompt action in case of detection of fire in the forests adjoining to their places of residence but also extended them with monetary support when necessary. On the wildlife front, the forest authorities had a tough time dealing with rising incidents of man-animal conflict. While man-eaters continued to target human settlements in remote hilly villages, the elephants in the plains too made village hamlets as select targets leading to further escalation of conflict. But amidst this, the Uttarakhand wildlife department got a major boost with the Central Wildlife Board giving a green signal for the construction underpasses on highways falling in the way of the elephant corridors in the State. In another bid to ease the conflict, the department also decided to enhance the compensation for the victims of wild animal attacks. However, Uttarakhand managed to retain its rich forest wealth while the rest of country struggled to save its forest wealth.

Uranium mining cleared

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE :
December 31, 2007

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has allowed Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) to commence uranium mining in Meghalaya. After examining application, the Ministry accords environmental clearance to the Kylleng-Pyndengshohiong Uranium Mining and Processing Plant Proposal of the UCIL. The clearance has been given for an annual production capacity of 3,75,000 tonnes of uranium ore by opencast mechanized method and processing of 1500 tonnes per day of ore processing plant involving total land requirement of 351 ha at Mawthabahn in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. The clearance also said that no ecologically sensitive area such as national park, wildlife sanctuary, biosphere reserve or tiger reserve is reported to be located in the core and buffer zone of the mine and that the area does not form

corridor for Schedule-I fauna. However, the clearance is subject to implementation of certain conditions and environmental safeguards which has been intimated to the UCIL.