

News & Views

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Watershed management in Himalaya urge

The delegates of the seminar organised by Himalayan Institute of Action Research and Development stressed on an integrated scientific framework must be evolved for planning management of the fragile ecological resources of the Himalayan region, with a focus on watershed management. Environment and resource mapping, hydrological parameters of watersheds, application of remote sensing techniques and geographical information system measurement of biotic interference and ecotop therapy/ecotop surgery were discussed in the seminar. The watershed management approach aims at creating a self-supporting system essential for sustainability of the hill region's economy.

THE BUSINESS LINE: March 6, 1998

Threat to Manipur wetlands

The wetlands of Manipur valley are playing an important role in the environmental management of the state. The ecology of the lakes of Manipur have badly deteriorated, due to accelerating rate of siltation, eutrophication and pollution. Some of the lakes like Tokyelpat, Lamphelpat and Utrapat have dried up. The volume of water in the Loktak lake has reduced to half from 600 million cubic metres in 1970 due to heavy siltation rate raising the bottom of the lake during last two decades. Uncontrolled cutting of wood for timber fuel and other forest products has led to heavy destruction of forest in the catchment areas of the wetlands. Deforestation caused accelerated soil erosion and siltation of the lakes and river, filling up the wetlands gradually. Besides the nutrients brought from the catchment with the run-off, huge amount of domestic sewage and municipal sewage along with the toxic organochlorine pesticides like DDT cause pollution. With the drying of these wetlands the whole environment of the state are in serious threat.

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE: March 8, 1998

Scheme to augment power

Kinnaur, the beautiful valley of apple orchards is now diversifying the field of power in a big way. The Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB) and other power agencies are busy exploiting the present power potential in the hill district. The Sanjay Vidyut Pariyojna Bhaba is supplying power to Himachal and other adjoining states. A private company has started its first venture on Baspa Stage-II 300MW hydro-power project. Besides these, the dam site of the Nathpa Jhakri project having a capacity of 1500MW is being constructed as a joint venture of the Himachal Government and Nathpa Jhakri Power Corporation is also falls in Kinnaur district. It is estimated that a huge power potential of 3000MW remains to be exploited in the district.

THE TRIBUNE: March 24, 1998

Development vs displacement: a struggle simmers at the border

Part of Gurez Valley, in north Kashmir along the line of control, an ancient tribe is fighting the lone battle against a dam which is considered crucial for the development of the region. In the remote corner of India the valley is the homeland of 25,000 Dard Shin tribes will be submerged once the proposed dam of the Kishen Ganga is built. The land acquisition notices for the Rs.2000 crore 330MW hydro-electric project have already been sent. Dawar, the capital of Gurez and hub of all socio-cultural activity in the area will be drowned and the displacement will not only endanger a language and a particular ethnic community but also their homeland along with the significant archaeological treasure. The government, however, insists that the project is vital for the development of the region and displacement a small price to pay for it and the displaced population will be adequately take care of.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS: March 26, 1998

4.5 cr for wasteland development

Under the integrated wasteland development project, Rs. 4.5 crore had been sanctioned by the central government for Sirmour in Himachal Pradesh. 15 watersheds would be selected and developed and when completed it would develop 12,500 hectares of wasteland by soil erosion measures, large scale plantation, development of grass lands. The project also envisages employment opportunities for unemployment youths.

THE TRIBUNE: April 2, 1998

Call to preserve natural resources

The conveyor of 'Gene-Campaign' held at Shillong urged the people to preserve the patent rights of their natural resources of the region. The north-eastern region is one of the twelve regions of the world having vast biodiversity potential. The campaign's sustained position continues to be against patents and privatisation in this field in this field. The bio-technology, is one of the modern technology where we can be highly competitive and should not allow ourselves to be tied up by patent laws. For the first time since independence, India is in a position to be not just the consumer of a new technology but one of its important produces, admits conveyor.

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE: April 6, 1998

Centre to aid J&K's revival package for tourism sector

The centre government will give full support to the special packages being worked out with leading financial institutions by the Jammu & Kashmir government for revival of the militancy-torn state economy. Leading financial institutions like IFCI, IDBI and many banks will be participating in implementing these packages. The package aims direct finance at subsidised interest rate to entrepreneurs for different categories of tourism activities in the state including that for guest houses, motorboats, travel and excursion and tourist transport. Apart from the financial incentives, the state government is also working on a agenda for strengthening of other related sectors like telecommunication which the state government feel are vital factors upon which hinges the success of reviving of tourism industry in the valley.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS: April 7, 1998

Timber mafia going strong

The police seized large quantities of timber in a dozen other cases during last three months in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. In the wake of tight vigilance being maintained by the police and the forest department, timber smugglers have currently switched over to new modes of transport like maruti vans and is alleged that politicians are at the back of the forest mafia and provide protection to the forest offenders. The latest official count of 1997 reveals a disturbing decline of forest cover of 5,500 km² compared to the count of 1995 just within two years and this fast shrinking rate is a great concern over country's forest cover.

THE TRIBUNE: April 7, 1998

Bleak future for watershed development scheme

The report reveals a bleak future for watershed development projects continuing in the sub-Himalayan Uttar Pradesh. The Himalayan Watershed Management Project, initiated by the World Bank in 1982, in the valley of two tributaries, Nayaar and Panaar was abandoned in less than a decade amidst criticism about lapses in the implementation and monitoring. The European Economic Community (EEC), with highly acclaimed approach of participatory rural appraisal, besides involving village communities in the decision making and implementation of the project, remained at the mercy of its donors, only to undergo erratic expansions and contractions until its final stages. The status of Watershed Management Directorate established in a forest clearing at Dehradun is still not clear. Efforts to award it a

permanent status have not borne fruit, amidst pulls and pressures between the donor agency and successive representatives of the government. However, in a meeting between EEC officials and *Uttaranchal Vikas Vibhag*, the EEC asked to bear the burden of employee's wages. But the devaluation of the rupees and wage hikes making things all the more difficult for a cash-strapped treasury.

THE STATESMAN: April 8, 1998

Panel to review management of Loktak lake

An understanding was reached between India and Canada under the India-Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) on February to launch a major project for the sustainable development and water resource management of the Loktak lake based on a project proposal conceived by the Loktak Development Authority (LDA) and Wetlands International South Asia (WISA) to save it from deterioration as a result of the Loktak Hydroelectric power project. The Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) has reconstituted a high level technical advisory committee on lakes to oversee matters of development and management of these natural water bodies. The committee comprising members from MoEF, LDA, Planning Commission, Manipur University and World Wildlife Fund of India and has seriously considered an overall review of the present management of Loktak lake, the largest fresh water lake in the north-eastern region by different agencies.

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE: April 9, 1998

Red mites pose threat to apple crop in Himachal

Red spider mites have posed a serious threat to the apple crop in Himachal Pradesh, which is the backbone of the state economy in terms of revenue. According to experts of Dr Y.S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry the premature defoliation observed in an endemic form in some apple growing areas of Chamba resulted in reduced photosynthetic activity effecting apple production. Experts point out that an invasion by European red mite took place first in Mandi and Kullu district then it spread to Chamba and Shimla and over 62% of total apple orchards has been reported to be infected with the mite.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS: April 13, 1998

Govt in fix over resuming mining

The Himachal Government is ready to lift the ban on mining, which is a livelihood for thousands of people in the surrounding area of Khaniyara in Kangra district. The main hurdle in permitting mining in the area is the Supreme Court order that no non-forest activity would be carried out on forest land without approval of the Central government. In view of this, permission has to be sought from the Centre, as some of the ecologically fragile area of Khaniyara has been indicated as forest land in the revenue records, though the forest department agreed that the area is unculturable waste and does not strictly come under this category. The permits for short-term mining would be issued to all those who had applied, after getting the permission only, though some mining lessees admit illegal mining is going on at a number of places and there is no point to maintaining ban on it.

THE TRIBUNE: April 15, 1998

A project to predict earthquakes

'Peninsular shield of India' could no longer be considered seismically inactive and the United Nations expert committee, after the 1993 Latur quake, had strongly recommended regular monitoring of the region, and suggested dense Geographical Positioning System (GPS) & vertical control methods to monitor seismotectonic activities. Based on this Dehradun based Survey of India (Department of Science & Technology) will launch a World Bank funded plan to geodetically monitor the peninsular shield using GPS to predict earthquakes apart from monitoring Crystal movements in the subcontinent on a regular basis. Today GPS is the most widely used technique to generate inputs for the earthquake prediction process and also finds extensive application in fields as varied as navigation, surveying, mapping, remote sensing and developmental activities.

THE HINDU: April 21, 1998

Bill to prevent foreign states from patenting Darjeeling tea

After *Basmati* and turmeric issues patenting Darjeeling tea is a major issue in international community. The Indian tea industry is demanding a patent for the premium tea on the grounds that Sri Lankan producers and exporters are selling tea grown in the island nation as 'Darjeeling tea'. In view of this the government is preparing a draft bill to treat Darjeeling tea as a geographic indicator to prevent other countries from patenting it or claiming to sell the premium tea variety. According to the official, the industry and trade policy divisions of the Centre are preparing the Bill for enactment which would make India the only country of origin of Darjeeling tea besides being the geographic indicator.

THE STATESMAN: April 24, 1998

Darjeeling tea planters resort to organic farming

Organic farming in tea is fast gaining ground in the hills and as many as 11 gardens in Darjeeling have gone fully bio-organic. Apart from clinching better export deals in the European market, such kind of farming has helped in the retention of top soil and kept it alive with micro-organisms. With exports of organic tea on the rise, most growers are contemplating a conversion of the tea growing area for organic cultivation. Most organic planters admitted that the trend in productivity has shown an increase in tea estates that gone for conversion and that is why many gardens are switching over to bio-organic farming.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS: April 27, 1998

Devastating quake forecast in Assam before 2010

The probability of an earthquake in Assam of a magnitude greater than 8 on the Richter Scale at any time before the year 2010, according to a renowned environmental scientist, Prof. S.K. Sarmah of Gauhati University. Prof. Sarmah said these, together with computed return periods for high magnitude earthquake of the region and historical seismicity tended to indicate the probability of occurrence of a high magnitude earthquake in the western part of the north-east at any time in the next few years and any delay in the occurrence of the quake will only increase its magnitude. In order to reduce loss of lives and properties due to this earthquake, it is necessary to adopt some precautionary measure without delay and people should be made aware of the dangers soon.

THE HINDU: April 27, 1998

J&K Govt plans to restore Dal lake to former glory

The Jammu & Kashmir Government has chalked out a comprehensive programme for restoration of the famous Dal lake situated at an altitude of 1,580m above sea level in the eastern part of Srinagar, to its original shape and avert its possible extinction. The lake has shrunk from 48 km² in 1947 to nearly 15 km² due to unchecked encroachments and pollution. Under the restoration programme a modern machine manufactured in collaboration with the Dutch costing about Rs. 3.5 crore would be put in use for de-silting under supervision of scientists, limnologists and engineers.

THE STATESMAN: April 28, 1998

Pest attack

Deodar defoliator (*Ectropis deodarae*), a forest pest has affected about one lakh cedar trees in Naganalli and Mihani ranges of Theog forest division of Shimla district, Himachal Pradesh. The pest feeds no other tree species except on deodar and it is a valuable tree growing between 1800 to 2600 m above sea level in the north-west Himalaya comprising an estimated area of 2,03,263 ha in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and hills of Uttar Pradesh. The scientists fears that the attack may become epidemic cause large scale destruction, if appropriate action is not taken immediately.

DOWN TO EARTH: April 30, 1998

‘Crack’ in Tehri dam causes alarm

Though the official of Tehri Hydro Development Corporation denied the report of either sinking or cracking any part of the site, but the reports have triggered a debate on whether the phenomenon is only of a local nature or related to seismic activity in the Garhwal region. The region has experiences frequent tremors since time immemorial and frequent tectonic activity along the outer Himalayan belt, made of fragile rocks along with frequent rainfall have often triggered fluvial action and slope failures, according to experts. However, former Director-General of Geological Survey of India denies any seismic activity causing the crack, might have appeared due to some constructional lacunae. Those opposing the construction, argue that the quake hit Uttarkashi district in October 1991 also effected the adjoining Tehri district, where the mega dam is being constructed, is a seismically very active area.

THE TIMES OF INDIA: April 30, 1998

Development plans fail to help Tripura tribal

Tribals of Tripura are flooded with too many development projects but many of these projects fall through as they are unsuitable for them. Certain schemes introduced in the area were not acceptable to the tribals, according to the Director of Tribal Research Directorate (TRD). Some times projects are pushed through without training the tribals in their use, for instance solar energy in some remote tribal villages. He admits that the government departments do not consult the TRD on the suitability of a scheme before launching it, often lack of education also makes tribals less receptive to development programmes.

THE TIMES OF INDIA: May 6, 1998

J&K govt aims to revive sericulture

The Jammu and Kashmir government has embarked upon a multipronged strategy to revive sericulture using traditional method of cultivation in a bid to double cocoon production in the state this year. According to the official sources, the sericulture development department is distributing silk worm seeds to farmers and expects three lakh kg cocoon production and 335 incubation centres have been set up in the valley.

THE BUSINESS STANDARD: May 9, 1998

Limestone mining continues unabated in Doon valley

Inspite of Supreme Court order banning all mining activities, contractors are continuing limestone mining in the Doon valley in Uttar Pradesh even though their lease hold period had expired as long back as 1984. The mining areas are located in the thick forests in the Tehri Garhwal district within the Doon valley, which were saved from destruction by the apex court through several orders, from indiscriminate limestone mining in 1983 on a public interest petition by an NGO. After the apex court order of December 1996 in the tree felling case, the status of the 9.85 hectares of civil land was that of forest land as the entire mining area was having natural growth of forest tree and undergrowth, the District Magistrate order to allow mining and export mining material from this land was defiance and no way justifiable.

THE BUSINESS AND POLITICAL OBSERVER: May 11, 1998

Tourism, ecology must go hand in hand

The concept of eco-tourism in the Himalayan regions is required urgently as it will go a long way in preserving the natural beauty of these mountains which attract thousand of tourists from the world over and help support these mountain economies. All developmental activity related to making available better tourist amenities must also be eco-friendly, according to Mr Umesh Dwivedi, editor of *Himalayan*

Paryavaran - an environment magazine. Eco-tourism is ecologically and socially responsible nature based tourism that fosters environmental appreciation and understanding.

THE PIONEER: May 14, 1998

Scientists find scarcity of honeybees cause for fruit loss in Himachal

Scientists at the Dr Y.S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry have found that the lack of an adequate number of bee colonies in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh is one reason for the poor apple crop. The horticulture experts feel that many orchards do not bear enough fruit because of population of bees is too small, which plays a significant contribution in apple pollination. There are all about 10,000 to 12,000 bee colonies including private bee-keepers which is just 8% of the total requirement of the state. According to their recommendations, apple yields can be considerably increased by pollination by honeybees and at least two bee colonies are required for each hectare of orchard, which can be met by government intervention and additional involvement by the private sector.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS: May 18, 1998

Jhum cultivation causes soil degradation in Nagaland

According to official sources about 44 lakh tones of fertile top soil is lost every year from areas where Jhum (shifting) cultivation is practiced in Nagaland. It has been estimated that 70% of the total top soil degradation and water resources deterioration was due to it. According to the Director of Soil Conservation, 'contour bunding' across the hill slopes of jhum fields is the most suitable technique and with jhum cycle having been reduced to 4-5 years from the earlier 8-10 years earth contour bunds were proposed to be constructed during the Ninth Plan in the State. The tangible progress has been made in weaning away farmers from jhum cultivation by adopting watershed techniques under the State plan and Centrally-sponsored schemes, claimed by the director and one project each would be taken up in all the 52 rural development blocks of the state during the Ninth Plan.

THE HINDU: May 19, 1998

Tehri - the cracks are showing

The Tehri Hydro Dam Corporation (THDC) officials have refuted the existence of any cracks or damage to the structure near the control gate shaft through which the stored water of the reservoir would flow towards the turbines. The officials also denied any sinking of the mountain in face portion. They claim that they are only removing the loose overburden mass to reach a firm foundation before starting the actual construction of the main structure. The author presents a detailed discussion on environmental and ecological factors related to the dam with a long term view. The Tehri dam project is a prime example of large technological intervention in nature and unthinking adherence to a plan based on old ideas. The region has very shaky foundation and the dam is located in a highly seismic zone. The Ganga tear fault, also known as the inner ridge of Delhi-Haridwar is pushing the Garhwal region to north-east at a rate of 2 to 3 cm every year causing prone to earthquakes. The enormous amount of water (storage capacity 2615 million m³) in 42.5 km² reservoir will enhance the intensity of any earthquake that might take place and cause collapse of the dam. The new Tehri township where those ousted from the dam site are going shifted is also of doubtful stability as cracks had developed and there was sinking of roads even before the quake. On the dam site the gate number 3 lies in a relatively unstable shear zone of the hills and due to the unstable slope formed by the slumped mass the top surface of the shaft no. 3 has sunk, causing cracks. Further damage to the structure is not ruled out with the onset of rains.

Sitesh Bhatia for THE STATESMAN: May 25, 1998

Need to properly manage water resources

Arunachal Pradesh could be one of the richest state of the country if its water resources were properly managed, said the Chief Minister, Gegong Apang while inaugurating a workshop on water resource management at Itanagar. He also said that the state could supply 50% of the county's hydel power requirements with proper management of its vast water resources. Expressing concern over the

faulty national planning, Sri Apang said the planners failed to realize the need for proper management of water resources in the north-eastern region and Arunachal Pradesh in particular.

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE: May 28, 1998