



# HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT TRUST

## HIMALAYAS ONLINE

JOTVINDER SINGH  
GURPAL KAUR SONI  
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## **HIMALAYAN NATIONS DEVELOP ENERGY, WATER ROADMAP IN LEAD UP TO CLIMATE SUMMIT**

"The Himalayas are one of the biologically richest areas on Earth. But they are also among the most vulnerable to climate change," said Tariq Aziz", leader of WWF's Living Himalayas Initiative. "Creating conditions that make the uptake of clean energy technologies feasible is an important part of ensuring the needs of local communities are met without negative impacts on the environment," he said.

The energy meet saw participating nations develop five key strategies for regional cooperation in climate change and energy security, including the diversification in supply and use of cleaner energy resources, enhancing access to clean energy and improving efficiency.

Held in advance of the November 2011 Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas, the series of meetings examined how the 4 nations can ensure water, food and energy security while maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services throughout the region.

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Kathmandu, Nepal: Experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal gathered in Kathmandu in late July for discussions on long-term energy security in the Himalayas, concluding a series of planning sessions that aim to put an ambitious 10-year regional adaptation plan in motion.

## HIMALAYAN EARTHQUAKE: LANDSLIDES AND RAIN HAMPER SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS



Rescue workers use shovels and bare hands to free bodies from debris after earthquake kills dozens in India, Nepal and Tibet

Rain and landslides were hampering the search for survivors of a 6.9 magnitude earthquake that has killed at least 50 people in the isolated Himalayan regions stretching across India, Nepal and Tibet.

Rescue workers used shovels and their bare hands to pull bodies from the debris of collapsed buildings as the death toll rose.

Thick cloud was preventing helicopters from flying over the affected areas and slowing the arrival of at least 400 rescue workers and medica trying to reach the most affected area by road.

At least 25 people died in the north-eastern Indian state of Sikkim after the quake on Sunday evening, police said.

Paramilitary soldiers had recovered 18 bodies and had located seven others buried under mounds of concrete in Gangtok, Sikkim's capital, said the local police chief, Jasbir Singh.

Another 11 people were killed the neighbouring Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal. Seven people died in Nepal and China's official Xinhua news agency reported seven deaths from Tibet.

"The situation doesn't look good," an official from a UN disaster management team in New Delhi said.

"Even if the number of casualties is low, there is likely to be a huge need for humanitarian assistance for affected civilians whose homes have been destroyed and who need food and shelter. The UN is taking this very seriously."

Sikkim is the country's most sparsely populated state. It is surrounded by Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, and is prone to landslides, with the number of high-rise buildings increasing in its mountain towns because of India's economic boom.

Most of the deaths occurred when houses, already weakened from recent monsoon rains, collapsed because of the force of the quake, which was centred in Sikkim near India's border with Nepal.

Much of the damage was not immediately known because the region is remote and sparsely populated.

"People are still panicky," said Pawan Thapa, a resident of Gangtok. "We spent the whole night outside our homes."

He added that shops, businesses and offices were closed in the city and neighbouring areas.

Army officers and border police stationed near the epicentre of the quake in Sikkim, which has a large military deployment near the Chinese border, rescued at least 200 villagers.

Their patrols sent in radio reports of more casualties as they spread out on foot to isolated mountain villages.

Many towns in Sikkim experienced power cuts, while thousands are being sheltered by the government. At least 100 people were injured in Sikkim, while hundreds of tourists, mainly Indian, were stranded on the main road out of the state to West Bengal in the south.

The quake was felt in New Delhi as well as to Bangladesh, shaking buildings.

Several earthquakes have hit north and east India this year, but none have caused major damage or injuries.

In 2001, an earthquake in the western state of Gujarat killed at least 19,700 people and caused damage in neighbouring Pakistan.

## **HIMALAYAN EARTHQUAKE DEATH TOLL REACHES 81 IN INDIA, NEPAL AND CHINA**

GANGTOK: Helicopters airdropped emergency supplies Tuesday to Himalayan villages worst-hit by a quake that killed at least 81 people in India, Nepal and China, while earthmovers pushed through debris clogging precipitous valleys.

Soldiers in the northeastern Indian state of Sikkim cleared a path to Mangan, one of the towns closest to the epicenter of Sunday's 6.9-magnitude quake, but many other

communities remained cut off and authorities fear the death toll will rise once rescuers reach them.

Indian army helicopters ferried rescuers and dropped food and supplies to still-inaccessible villages in Sikkim, a sparsely populated and almost entirely mountainous region that was an independent protectorate before becoming an Indian state in 1975. It borders Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Chinese region of Tibet.

The quake killed at least 50 people in Sikkim, said the state's top official, Karma Gyatso. India's Home Secretary R. K. Singh told reporters that 12 people were killed in West Bengal and six others in Bihar state. Authorities in neighboring Nepal reported six deaths, while China's official Xinhua news agency reported seven deaths in Tibet.

Army helicopters were still conducting aerial surveys of the quake zone, though local authorities already have reported extensive damage to homes and buildings across Sikkim, Gyatso said.

In Nepal, officials said six people were killed when houses collapsed near the capital Katmandu, bringing down an earlier figure of seven deaths due to the quake.

The region has been hit by major earthquakes in the past, including in 1950 and 1897.

## **HIMALAYAN ECOSYSTEM VITAL TO INDIAN LANDMASS: DESHMUKH**

New Delhi: The Himalayan ecosystem is highly vulnerable to the stress caused by the increased pressure of population and exploitation of natural resources and it is important to protect it, union Minister for Earth Sciences Vilasrao Deshmukh said Friday.

"The Himalayan ecosystem is vital to the ecological security of the Indian landmass. It provides forest cover, feeds perennial rivers that provide water for drinking, irrigation, and hydropower, and provides a home and a basis for sustainable biodiversity, agriculture, and tourism," said Deshmukh, who is also the science and technology minister.

"The Himalayan ecosystem is highly vulnerable to the stress caused by increased pressure of population, exploitation of natural resources and other related challenges. Climate change may adversely impact the Himalayan ecosystem through increased temperature, altered precipitation patterns, and episodes or drought," he said.

Considering the fragility and importance of the Himalaya, Deshmukh said that a National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE) has been included in the eight National Missions of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) with the objectives of conserving and protecting Himalayan glaciers and its ecosystem.

## **VILLAGERS LIVING AMID LANDSLIP FEARS**

Ram Prasad Budhathoki of Chaurkhani in Kuinemangale-5, Myagdi, has not forgotten the fateful date of September 10, 2010, when a landslide struck his village and rendered 45 families, including his own, homeless.

“Life is an ordeal for us. Big fish of the district pledged relief after the disaster, but we have got nothing so far”. Budhathoki laments.

Life is no less difficult for the people of Gairikhet, another landslide prone village below Kuinemangale. Living under the constant threat of landslides with the nearby Rahughat river eroding their land, celebrating Dashain was out of the question for the village folk. “Landslips have swept away almost all of our land”, bemoans Budhathoki. “The whole village is at grave risk”.

Locals have demanded a lasting solution to the landslide woes. Chandraman Chhantyal, principal of the Raghuganga Primary School, says intermittent landslips have displaced two families and damaged half a dozen houses this year alone.

“With the land at the end of the settlement gradually eroding, the whole settlement is at risk,” Naraman Chhantyal, another local says.

Last year, landslips in Gairikhet had swept away about 700 ropani of farm land belonging to some 30 households.

## **ROBBING HIMALAYAS OF ITS GRANDEUR**

Could anything be more pristine, more awe inspiring and more magnificent than the mighty Himalayas. Though they come under one of the most hilly sensitive ecological zones in subcontinent, balance of the Himalayan region is jeopardized by unplanned almost reckless development and exploitation of its natural resources.

The most visible indication of this fast paced destruction is melting glaciers droughts, earthquakes, floods and landslides. People living in immediate plains are already suffering and more likely to do so in future. Himalayan climate, always considered salubrious is now polluted. Once mosquito free, the Himalayan valley is now seeing people affected by malaria and dengue.

Every year forests are systematically set on fire and crores of rupees change hands in name of fire fighting. Every year, this fire claims large tracts of forest-land. Pushed out of their natural habitat, animals venture into human habitation for food. Once the ember dies down, a move towards afforestation is mooted. Instead of planting bamboo, which stores water, eucalyptus that draws out water from all around leaving the ground is dry is planted. Uttarakhand has been blessed by sufficient water reserves but such mindless plantation is proving to be detrimental and is drastically reducing ground water levels. The development paradigm adopted by the State is only adding to the problem. More than 220 water power projects are currently underway 14 on rivers of Uttarakhand. Gigantic amounts of debris generated will go into the rivers ruining them beyond any

redeemable limits.

So while India and the world has been in the throes of negotiating terms for climate changes accord at Copenhagen, the precious Himalayas are being plundered and gradually destroyed. The writing on the wall is clear: Unless a meaningful initiative to save the Himalayan

Environment is not taken on time, a terrible future awaits us all

## **A SURGE IN GLACIERS IN KARAKORAM RANGE**

Not all glaciers are melting! If the ice in the Himalayan ranges has been melting fast, then scientists have seen a reverse phenomenon in the Karakoram range where a surge has been noticed in the main and tributary glaciers. According to European glaciologist working in the High Altitude Research station in the Himalayas, K2 range of mountains have been reporting an increase in the glacier formations. The Karakoram Range in northern Pakistan and adjacent India and China is one of the main glacierised areas of the region, together with Pamirs and Tien Shan. Some the largest valley glaciers in the world can be found there, culminating in the aggregation of four of the longest glaciers in Asia around the K2 and Gasherbrum groups.

Because disappearing“ glaciers is the main prognosis for ongoing climate change, Karakoram events may seem good news. After all glacial melt water from the Karakoram dominate the flow of the main Indus and Yarakand rivers. As resources and hazards, they directly affect the lives of some 200 million people in surrounding dry lands.

## **UTTARAKHAND TO BE THE FIRST STATE TO ESTABLISH SPECIAL AUTHORITY ON GLACIERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Though there are many academic institutions involved in research on the condition of glaciers and climate change, Uttarakhand will be the first of its kind to work on the practical aspects of climate change and its impact on glaciers.

Uttarakhand Space Application Centre (USAC), nodal agency of this authority will be headed by Chief Minister, Uttarakhand, Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank. USAC will focus on the practical aspects of research on the condition of glaciers and effect of climate change on the Himalayas in Uttarakhand. The authority will also frame guidelines for ensuring the protection of glaciers in the State. USAC will also use dynamic data available through satellite imaging provided by ISRO.

## **MELTING HIMALAYAN GLACIERS TO HIT INDUS, BRAHMAPUTRA**

The melting glaciers in the Himalayas will have varying impact on the waters of Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yangtze and Yellow rivers, according to a new Dutch research. Changes to the flow of meltwater due to global warming may have a “severe impact on food security in some areas. However, they also point out that people living elsewhere are likely to see an increase in food productivity. Brahmaputra & Indus basins are most susceptible to reductions of flow threatening the food security of an estimated 60 million people. An accelerated melt peak may alleviate a shortage of irrigation water in the drought prone early stages of the growing season.

## **GREEN HIKER & THE MOUNTAIN CLEANERS IN HIMACHAL - COME, GET INVOLVED!**

### **The Green Hiker Campaign and the Mountain**

**Cleaners** (<http://www.mountaincleaners.org/>) are joining hands this year for the conservation of the high altitude **Manimahesh Lake**, in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, India. Mythologically believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva, the lake visited by religious tourists every year from April to September. The lake receives an average of 700,000 visitors during the peak season (August-September). These tourists embark on a 14 km *yatra* from Harsar village to the lake nestled at an altitude of 4,088 masl, to eventually bathe in its holy waters.

During the course of this pilgrimage, what they leave behind is plastic litter, left over food and wrappers along the trekking path; fruits, offerings, sheep and goat carcasses, and clothes in and around the lake, and tons of human excreta in the open. This could be attributed to the absence of a planned waste disposal system and toilets and the lack of awareness. There are also numerous tea stalls and tents erected along the path and near the lake. Other disturbing factors include thousands of vehicles at Harsar, diesel generators, blaring loudspeakers and the illegal extraction of medicinal plants.

Covering an area of 378.87 sq. km, from an altitude of 2,250-6,044 m asl, also lies the Kugti Wildlife Sanctuary in the same region. The sanctuary is the last home of the Himalayan Tahr in Himachal Pradesh and is also a repository of rare medicinal plants like the *Gentiana kuroo* (Karu) and *Jurinea macrocephala* (Dhup). These herbs are believed to be locally threatened due to over-extraction. A few other species found here are the Himalayan Black Bear, Brown Bear, Ibex, White-eyed Buzzard Eagle and Grey-headed Bunting. An alternative route to Manimahesh cuts through the wildlife sanctuary and the telling human footprint is visible here too.

It is therefore, imperative to help keep the lake and its environs free from pollution and degradation. WWF-India has been working on this since 2008, with the help of local support and partnerships. This is where the association between **WWF-India** and



the **Mountain Cleaners** began. A group of volunteers with the mission to keep the mountains clean and garbage-free, the Mountain Cleaners took the initiative to interact with the local people and devise ways to collect garbage from the upper reaches of the mountains in HP and bring it down to recycle into articles of use. For Manimahesh, from the base camp to the lake, garbage bins for different kinds of waste – plastic, biodegradable and glass can be seen, while sacks were distributed to stall owners to collect trash, to be collected later by their volunteers.

As you can imagine, this is a mammoth task for a handful of people. Therefore, the Mountain Cleaners are looking for 50 volunteers who can come up there and help them clean Mamimahesh Lake and its surroundings, and keep it that way! For information on how to get involved and other details, please write to **Jodie Underhill** at [mountaincleaners@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mountaincleaners@hotmail.co.uk) or [jodie@mountaincleaners.org](mailto:jodie@mountaincleaners.org)

High up in the mountains of Himachal, you will be able to see Green Hiker and Mountain Cleaners, working together for a cleaner Manimahesh Lake,

Green Hiker hopes to put into place a long term conservation plan at Manimahesh Lake in partnership with the local administration and Forest Department. Stay tuned for more activities!

## **BRIGHT IDEA: AUSSIES BAN LIGHT BULBS**

BBC reports that Australia looks set to become the first country to ban incandescent light bulbs - with the aim of cutting greenhouse gas emissions

Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said yellow incandescent bulbs, which have been in use virtually unchanged for the past 125 years, would be replaced by more efficient compact fluorescent bulbs.

During the incandescent bulb phaseout period from 2008-2012 800,000 tonnes of carbon emissions will be removed, and by 2015 the annual cut in emissions will be four million tonnes. Lighting currently accounts for more than 10% of domestic greenhouse emissions and 25% of emissions from the commercial sector in Australia.

Australia, along with the US, has refused to sign up to the Kyoto Protocol setting greenhouse gas reduction targets. Instead, it wants an agreement requiring energy-hungry developing countries like India and China to help combat climate change.