

With each passing day, the threat of an unprecedented drought seems closer to reality. Desperate farmers have sown paddy two to three times, only to see the crop wither. In 25 out of 36 sub-divisions in the country, rains have been scanty or deficient. This monsoon is turning out to be

India's season of DESPAIR



Amit Bhattacharya | TNN

The most telling evidence of farmer distress in Karnera village near Balabhgarh town of Haryana comes not from its withering paddy fields but from inside a retail store. It's past lunchtime and Mahavir Tyagi appears to be taking an afternoon siesta in his well-stocked seed and fertilizer shop. Not that this 30-something retailer and farmer needs any rest. It's just that he hardly has any work this year.

"Around this time in past years, I would be up to my neck in work, supplying inputs to farmers who come from surrounding villages. My daily sales would be in the range of Rs 70,000-80,000. This year, on lucky days, sales touch Rs 20,000," says Tyagi.

"Why would farmers need fertilizers when their crops aren't getting water?" he asks rhetorically.

The shopkeeper himself owns 22 acres of land in this Tyagi-dominated village next to the Aravalis. Six of the 18 acres of paddy he had sown has been lost. "In the 10 years I've been farming, I've never seen such a dry spell. Around 60% of the paddy village farmers had sown is gone. Even the rest is in danger of withering if it doesn't rain soon," he says.

The next 8-10 days, Tyagi says, will be crucial. "The paddy crop is almost gone. If rains don't come very soon, even the fodder crop would be destroyed. That will badly hit the health of cattle, milk prices and farmer's livelihoods. Already, fodder rates are as high as Rs 5/kg. If it gets any worse, farmers wouldn't be able to feed their livestock."

The village is fed by a canal that brings Yamuna water to the fields. Though the canal currently has enough flow, now that Uttarakhand has had some rains, it can water less than 50% of the village farms. The rest have to rely on underground water, which hardly suffices for a paddy crop when the ground is bone dry.

Extrapolate Karnera's woes and you get a picture of the crisis facing most of north India. As of August 5, the region had a 40% rainfall deficit. In many districts, though, the shortfall ranged from 60% to 80%. With the El Nino phenomenon — that depresses the monsoon in India — likely to take effect by early September, the outlook for the next few weeks appears bleak as well.

The season of despair is upon us and the nation needs to be prepared for desperate times.

दर्जीनों गांवों पर मंडरा रही है आसमानी आफत

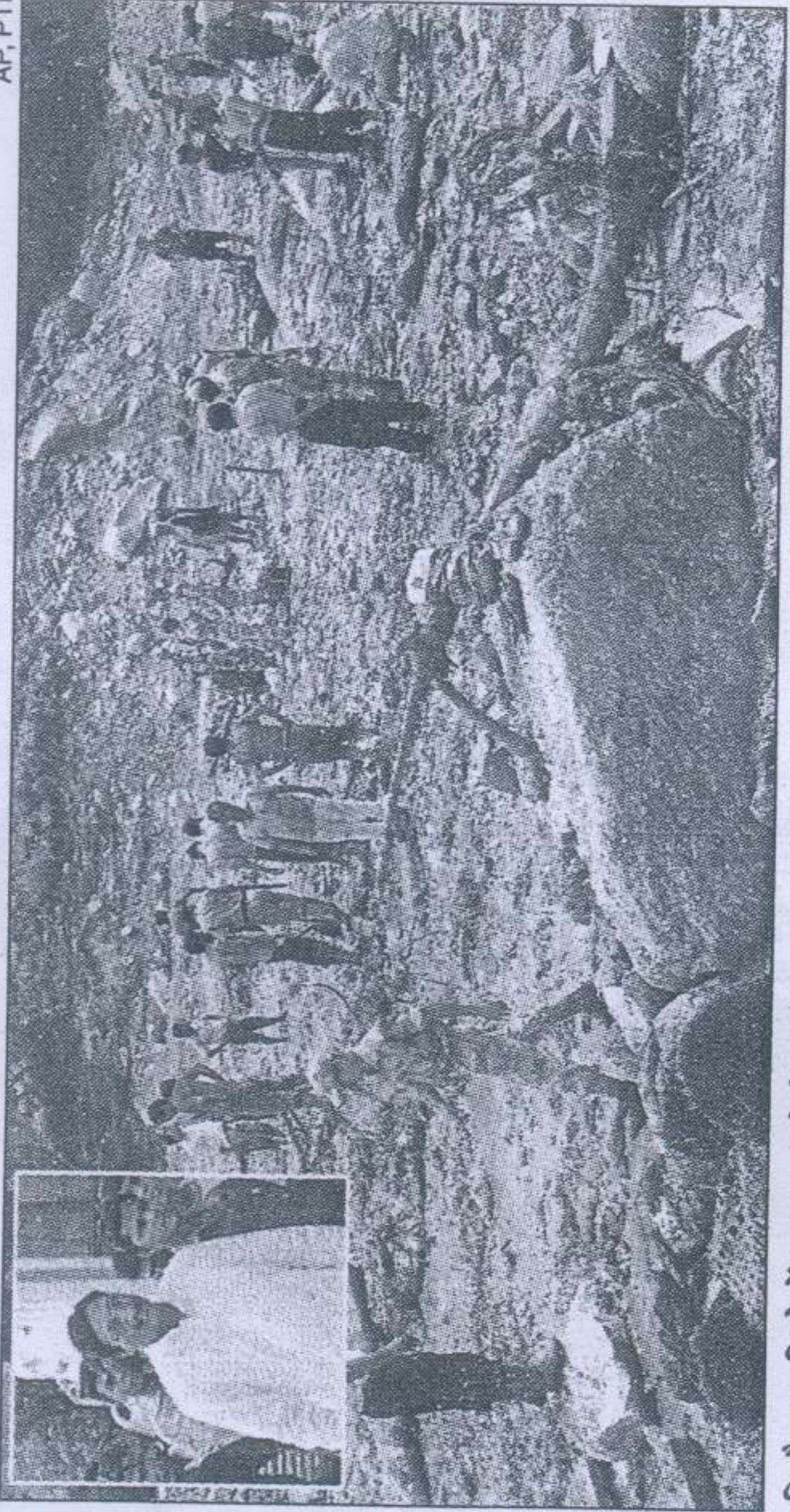
चमोली के 32 गांव बेहद खतरनाक, प्रशासन ने नहीं सीखा सबक

ओमप्रकाश भट्ट ॥ गोपेश्वर

पिथौरागढ़ जिले में शनिवार सुबह हुए भूस्खलन ने एक बार फिर प्राकृतिक आपदाओं के खतरे के बारे में हमारी पूर्व तैयारी और लापरवाही उजागर कर दी है। इस हादसे में एक साथ 43 लोग मारे गए जब कि अभी भी कई मलबे के नीचे दबे हैं। इस हादसे से पिथौरागढ़ में 1998 के अगस्त महीने में हुई मालपा त्रासदी की याद भी ताजा हो गई है।

खतरे से नहीं अनजान : चमोली के अपर जिलाधिकारी बी. एस. मनराल कहते हैं कि चमोली में इस समय 32 गांवों को बेहद खतरनाक श्रेणी के रूप में चिह्नित किया गया है और इन गांवों के पुनर्वास की पूरी योजना काफी पहले ही शासन को सौंपी जा चुकी है। पिथौरागढ़, चमोली व उत्तरकाशी जिले इस आपदा की दृष्टि से सबसे खतरनाक इलाकों में एक हैं। चमोली में हर 7 गांवों में से एक गांव भूस्खलन व तेज बारिश के कारण आवासीय प्रयोजनों के लिए खतरनाक माना गया है।

बारिश बनी काल : शनिवार के हादसे में मुनस्यारी तहसील के दाफा ग्रामसभा की तीन बस्तियों में तेज बारिश काल बनकर आई और ला व चचला बस्तियों का नामोनिशान ही मिटा दिया। ला गांव में रहने वाले सात घरों के 26 व झेकला में रह रहे बारह लोग मलबे की चपेट में आकर जान दे बैठे। इसी तरह नजदीक ही बेडूमहर गांव के पांच लोग भी



AP, PTI

पिथौरागढ़ जिले में बादल फटने से आई मूसलाधार बारिश में तीन गांव बह गए। राहत और बचाव कार्य रविवार को भी जारी रहा। मुख्यमंत्री रमेश पोखरियाल निशंक (इनसेट में) ने मौके पर पहुंचकर हालात का जायजा लिया।

मलबे की चपेट में आए हैं। इस इलाके का पूरा रूप ही बदल गया है। जहां-जहां से भूस्खलन का मलबा निकला वहां के खेत, रास्ते और घरों का कुछ पता नहीं है। इस हादसे में इन तीनों गांवों के लोगों के पालतू मवेशी भी दब गए।

यात्रा का मुख्य पड़ाव था और जहां भूस्खलन हुआ उसके नीचे मानसरोवर यात्रियों को ठहराने के लिए कुमाऊं मंडल विकास निगम ने रात्रि विश्राम के लिए आवास बनाया था। मालपा की घटना में मशहूर नृत्यांगना समेत देश-विदेश के सात से ज्यादा तीर्थ यात्रियों की जान गई। मशहूर लोगों से जुड़ा मामला होने के कारण भूस्खलन का यह मामला राष्ट्रीय चर्चा का विषय बना और हिमालय के भूस्खलनों और बाढ़ से जुड़ी आपदाओं को लेकर केंद्र व राज्य सरकार द्वारा हादसों से होने वाले जानमाल के नुकसान की रोकथाम के लिए योजनाएं बनाई गईं। पर मुनस्यारी तहसील की ताजा घटना ने फिर से हमारी तैयारी और रोकथाम के कार्यक्रमों की जमीनी हकीकत बता दी है।

इच्छाशक्ति की कमी : मानसरोवर हादसे के बाद अंतरिक्ष विभाग ने तत्कालीन केंद्रीय कैबिनेट सचिव के निर्देश पर हिमालय के प्रमुख यात्रा मार्गों का विस्तृत सर्वेक्षण कराया। जिसमें मुख्य रूप से उत्तराखंड के बद्रीनाथ, केदारनाथ गंगोत्री, यमुनोत्री व मानसरोवर जाने वाले मार्गों व इसके दोनों ओर के 20 किलोमीटर की परिधि वाले क्षेत्र का अध्ययन कर भूस्खलन के खतरे का मानचित्र बनाकर रायों को दिए थे। स्थानीय अधिकारियों को इसकी जानकारी भी दी गई पर शनिवार की घटना से, ऐसा कहीं नहीं लगता कि उपलब्ध तकनीक का उपयोग इन आपदाओं के बचाव के लिए हुआ होगा।

Purulia farmers stare at parched fields, drought

MOHANADAM

PURULIA, AUGUST 5

SHOKHA Ram Das (65) stares at his five bigha land in Dumdumi village under Chharra gram panchayat, nearly 12 km south of Purulia town, awaiting the rains. With just 2 per cent cultivation till date, nearly 280,000 hectares of agricultural land in the district is lying vacant, facing a near drought situation.

Hundreds of farmers wake up every morning, hoping for a downpour.

"I have been working in the paddy fields since childhood and have seen many difficult seasons, but this year the situation is critical. We cannot transplant paddy because of lack of rain. We cannot draw water also since there are no canals. I am old and do not have a son who can earn a living. How do I survive?" said Shokha Ram.

There are 400 families in his village and 95 per cent of them are farmers.

According to the district agriculture department, paddy cultivation is worst hit this year. Families in blocks like Raganathpur, Kashipur, Hura, Para, Pancha, Jhalda II, Balarampur and Arsha are facing the brunt. For a district like Purulia, where over 70 per cent of families are dependent on paddy cultivation, the dry spell has brought doom for farmers. Though there are dams in Hura, Bagmundi and Arsha, the lack of rainfall has left them dry.

For Nimai Kumar (40), who has to feed a family of five in Oldih village at Jhalda II, life is hard with no earning. For the last two months, he had been toiling to roll beedis and arrange some food. Likewise, Biswanath Saran (36) works in a stone crushing factory and somehow sees the family survive through the crisis.

"We are forced to work at sponge iron units," said Bhuddeswar Hemron, who owns a three-bigha land. The sole earner of his family, Subhendu Duari (26) walks miles to reach town from his village in Ramdi under Hutmuru gram panchayat in search of work everyday.

The peak season of paddy cultivation is June-July and its transplantation needs water. The month of June receives average 323 mm of rainfall and last year it was 381.7 mm, but this year the rainfall has been only 54 mm. The average rainfall is 419 mm in July, and the figure was 429.3 mm last year, whereas this time it has been 270 mm. "Purulia is facing acute shortage of rainfall. However, there is still time left for transplantation. We are waiting till August 15 before we declare a drought," said R Patra of the district agriculture department.

Paddy seedlings are also drying up, and will have lesser yields when cultivated. There are three types of land for cultivation in this district — *byde*, (elevated land), *kanali* (surface level) and *bohal* (low-lying land). While *bohal* lands are witnessing some farming, nearly 60 per cent of the *byde* land are facing the brunt.



A distressed Shokha Ram Das in his field in Dumdumi village, Purulia. PARTHA PAUL

■ The southwest monsoon remained vigorous in Assam and Meghalaya.

■ It remained subdued over

Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra



Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and north interior Karnataka.

■ Met department predicts subdued

rainfall activity over western, central and peninsular parts of the country during the next three-four days.