

KASHMIR OBSERVERTM

Tuesday | 20-06-2023

Building for Safety

On Saturday evening, earthquakes struck Ladakh and Doda district. The Ladakh earthquake measured 4.5 on the Richter scale and the one in Doda 4.4, according to the National Center for Seismology (NCS). The earthquakes were part of a series of natural events that have struck Jammu and Kashmir in recent days. And their recurrence has been a source of deep concern for people in the union territory.

The geography of the Kashmir valley places it at the convergence of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates, making it highly vulnerable to earthquakes. The region is overdue for a major earthquake, and if precautions are not taken, the consequences could be catastrophic in terms of loss of life and infrastructure.

Living in a region prone to frequent seismic activity, residents of the Valley must recognize the critical importance of constructing earthquake-resistant houses and retrofitting existing ones. People are generally unaware of what it means to build an earthquake-resistant structure or how to prepare for potential tremors. Incorporating earthquake-resistant features provides occupants with crucial evacuation time during a disaster.

However, the trend in recent construction projects in the region shows a lack of consideration for safety measures. People often replicate designs without incorporating necessary safety features, leading to structures that lack flexibility and symmetry—both essential elements for withstanding earthquakes. Ignoring expert advice and making construction errors such as placing corner windows further compromises structural integrity.

Experts have pointed out a basic fault in construction practices where walls have become progressively thinner, compromising the strength of the foundation. Traditional architectural styles in Kashmir, such as the "Taq system" and "Dhajji Diwari style," relied on wood and exhibited flexibility, allowing them to withstand earthquakes. However, modern constructions fail to consider the region's unique geography and climate. In the past, J&K chapter of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), has highlighted the importance of understanding the nuances of traditional architecture and incorporating favorable aspects into modern designs. The INTACH has been critical of the architectural practices that overlook the climatic and geographical requirements of the region in favor of designs suitable for other parts of India. A prime example is the ill-advised construction of cement and marble buildings in Kashmir Valley, Ladakh, an area known for its extreme cold temperatures.

The devastating earthquake in October 2005 serves as a stark reminder of the region's vulnerability. The magnitude 7.6 earthquake claimed over 80,000 thousand lives and caused extensive damage to infrastructure. Despite this tragedy, adequate measures to mitigate future losses remain elusive.

It is crucial for the government to take proactive measures, such as implementing a sustained awareness campaign. Alongside periodic advertisement campaigns, regular workshops in educational institutions can educate students, teachers, and stakeholders about earthquake preparedness and safe construction practices.

OTHER OPINION

Three Years After Galwan

De-escalation has not taken place. Chinese actions of rapidly scaling up war-like infrastructure along the LAC do not inspire confidence that it will ever go back to the cold border it was despite the fundamental cartographic problems that have dogged it since 1949. Vindication for this concern came with an attempt by the PLA to spring a surprise on a forward post in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, territory that is claimed by China as part of Tibet, last December. Thanks to lessons learnt in the eastern Ladakh area, the attempt was thwarted. China now seems to believe that the disengagement was the resolution, as evident from the message conveyed by the Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu, during a meeting with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh two months ago.

In the process of disengagement, India stepped back from areas where it was previously patrolling to create a demilitarised buffer zone at the five points where the Chinese intrusion had taken place. It is unclear if Indian access to areas in this buffer zone will be restored. In official communication with the Chinese, India has stopped using the phrase "return to status quo" as it existed on April 2020. Both sides have decided that the intrusions in the Depsang Plains and in Demchok are "legacy issues" and need not be taken up now.

At this point, as India and China continue high-level engagement at regional fora such as the SCO and BRICS groupings, it is hard to fathom what a resolution might look like. Meanwhile, bilateral trade continues to touch new heights with India importing more than ever before from the Asian giant. As Delhi and Washington find closer alignment — Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to the US may bring greater defence co-operation — and seek to "compete" with Beijing through the Quad, India would do well not to see its own problems with China at the long land border through the American security lens focussed on the Taiwan Strait.

The Indian Express

Is the Pollution Control Committee's Report to NGT Questionable?



Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat

“From the next day of hearing i.e. June 1st 2023, illegal mining with JCB/L&T cranes was stopped. Since then, water in Doodh Ganga is clean and the riverbed mining work is being done manually by contractors by employing more labourers

Last year in March, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) imposed a penalty of Rs 3 Crores on the Jammu & Kashmir government for its "acknowledged failure" in preventing pollution in Doodh Ganga stream. After 6 months the NGT again slapped a penalty of Rs 32 crores on Govt. The Doodh Ganga stream flows through various areas of Budgam & Srinagar and supplies drinking water to around 8 lakh population. Out of Rs 3 crore Rs 1 crore was paid by Urban Local Bodies (Municipal Committee Budgam / Chadoora each), Rs 1 Crore was paid by Srinagar Municipal Corporation -SMC and Rs 1 Crore was realized from Geology & Mining Department J&K Govt through its District Mineral Offices (DMO) Budgam. The Principal Bench of the tribunal headed by Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel in its order said:

"The state is accordingly held liable to pay interim compensation of Rs. One crore each under all the three heads which may be deposited in a separate account to be utilized for restoration of the environment. The amount may be deposited with the District Magistrate, Budgam and spent as per plan approved by the Chief Secretary."

As per the NGT's order, it was open to the state to recover the amount from the polluters or erring officers in accordance with law. The money was later-on recovered from Govt's exchequer and was deposited in District Magistrate Budgam's account. The amount was to be spent on the restoration of Doodh Ganga but this has not been done till date. Some restoration work was taken up by the Flood Control department but the contractors who did that work haven't been paid the money as District Administration Budgam hasn't gotten a go-ahead signal from Chief Secretary's office as the said office had to okay the action plan.

The petition in NGT as already discussed in one of my earlier articles was filed by this author as authorities had filed to address the issue of solid & liquid waste management plus controlling the illegal riverbed mining. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) in its March 2022 order had also directed the J&K Pollution Control Committee-PCC to recover compensation on account of damage caused to the environment. The order further said:

"For illegal mining, the loss caused to the State in the form of value of minerals as well as the loss caused to the environment for undertaking such activity without requisite clearances needs to be recovered by the Pollution Control Committee"

PCC's Action Taken Report

The J&K Pollution Control Committee or PCC which was called J&K Pollution Control



Board or PCB before the abrogation of Article 370, submitted an Action Taken Report (ATR) before NGT on 12.05.2023.

The National Green Tribunal Principal Bench, New Delhi in the original application No. 241/2021 titled Raja Muzaffar Bhat Versus Union of India and others vide its order dated 08-03-2022 had directed PCC to submit ATR vis a vis recovery of environmental compensation. The order said:

"For illegal mining, the loss caused to the State in the form of value of minerals as well as the loss caused to the environment for undertaking such activity without requisite clearance needs to be recovered by the State PCB in light of judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court inter-alia in Goa Foundation v/s Union of India and Ors (2014) 6 SCC 590 and Common Cause v/s Union of India."

Instead of sending its own teams to the site to see who was involved in the illegal riverbed mining, the Pollution Control Committee-PCC instead relied on the Mining Department's report who is one of the accused parties in this case and have been penalised already with Rs 1 crore penalty as discussed above.

DMO Shielding Contractors

The District Mineral Officer (DMO) Budgam instead of exposing the illegal riverbed mining being done by Project Proponents (Contractors) in mineral block 11 and 12 has blamed local tractor trolly and tipper drivers for illegal mining.

On his recommendation, around 30 such drivers have been asked to deposit penalty money which amounts to around Rs 28.50 lakhs. How can these tipper or tractor trolley drivers take out the minerals without the support of project proponents/ contractors who have been openly using JCBs and L&T cranes and whose GPS photos have already been submitted before the NGT?

The DMO Budgam vide letter No. DMOBud/DGIWF -0512903-2906 dated 27-12-2022 reported that the lease holders of Minor Mineral Block No. 11 (Chadoora Old Bridge to Hanjigund) and Block

“Instead of sending its own teams to the site to see who was involved in the illegal riverbed mining, the Pollution Control Committee-PCC instead relied on the Mining Department's report who is one of the accused parties in this case

No. 12 (Chadoora Foot Bridge to Sogam Bridge) have not been found involved in illegal mining within or outside the peripheries on their respective Blocks and furnished the list of Tractor/Tipper owners and one found indulged in illegal extraction/ transportation of minerals from Doodh Ganga stream.

The same report has been further submitted by the District officer J&K Pollution Control Committee -PCC Budgam vide letter No. PCC/DO/Bud120231290 Dated 02-05-2023 to its Regional Director and the list of offenders has been submitted before the NGT as well.

The Pollution Control Committee J&K claims that their Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) had been entrusted with the assessment of the Environmental Compensation (EC) to be levied on account of illegal extractor/transportation of minerals from Doodh Ganga Nallah. The said committee as per my reports hardly visited the site as its members are posted in Reasi, Rajouri, Poonch districts plus there is no mention in any official documents that they visited the Doodh Ganga area.

Without going to ground zero the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has assessed and recommended to levy Environmental Compensation (EC) to the tune of Rs.28.50 Lacs on the offenders for illegal extraction / transportation of Minerals. Unfortunately, not even a single contractor/project proponent has been held guilty by them.

NGT says not satisfied with Govt

In its order dated May 24th 2023, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) said that it was dissatisfied with the working of J&K government vis-a-vis controlling pollution and illegal riverbed mining in Doodh Ganga.

The case was again listed for hearing on May 29th and 30th respectively. The tribunal gave J&K government two-months time to implement its previous directions after the newly posted Principal Secretary Housing and Urban Development Department (HUDD) Prashat Goel gave personal assurance. The matter was listed for hearing before the NGT bench of Justice Sudhir Aggarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel.

My counsel Advocate Rahul Chowdhary and Sruthi K along with counsel for Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF) Balendu Shekhar plus with around one dozen of officers from the J&K government including Principal Secretary HUDD, J&K Government, Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Director ULB Kashmir, Chief Engineer UEED Kashmir, DC Budgam, Regional Director Pollution Control Committee, Director Geology and Mining, J&K Government, and District Mineral Officer Budgam were present during the hearing.

In its earlier hearing on May 24, 2023, the NGT observed that no substantial progress had been made and directed that effective and meaningful affidavits be filed in the context of remediation of existing dump sites, providing waste processing facilities and preventing discharge of sewage from dewatering pumping stations.

Conclusion

Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation-SMC on behalf of the Principal Secretary HUDD J&K Govt assured NGT during the case hearing on May 30th 2023 that illegal riverbed mining had been stopped in Doodh Ganga.

From the next day of hearing i.e. June 1st 2023, illegal mining with JCB/L&T cranes was stopped. Since then, water in Doodh Ganga is

clean and the riverbed mining work is being done manually by contractors by employing more labourers.

There was an incident wherein JCB was used in night hours some days back and I brought the matter into notice of SMC Commissioner who assured this won't be tolerated. He took up the issue with DC Budgam. The Govt also transferred the Secretary Mining J&K Govt to UT of Ladakh recently and that is also seen as a step to streamline the illegal riverbed mining.

After the May 30th hearing, the Principal Secretary HUDD seems to be personally monitoring the Doodh Ganga case and I am sure the work on Sewage Treatment Plants and treatment of legacy waste will also be done on priority. I also request the J&K Pollution Control Committee not to rely on the Mining Department's report in preparing the environmental compensation. This author has already prepared a detailed counter response to the PCC's report which would be submitted before NGT before the next date of hearing.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat is an Acumen Fellow. He is also the Anant Fellow for Climate Action

Partygate Crashes Johnson's Political Career

Boris Johnson's sudden resignation as an MP has resulted in a crisis both for the Conservative Party and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, but the ultimate winner from the resulting chaos might be Johnson himself

Asad Mirza

Former British prime minister Boris Johnson stepped down last week as a Tory MP after claiming he was "forced out of Parliament" over Partygate. In an explosive and lengthy statement, he called the Commons Privileges Committee investigating if he misled the Commons over Downing Street lockdown parties, a "kangaroo court" whose purpose "has been to find me guilty, regardless of the facts". In its defence the committee said it had "followed the procedures and the mandate".

Apparently BoJo had an inkling of what was to come as evident by the Committee's report, which said that Johnson "committed a serious contempt" of parliament when he told the parliament that rules were followed at all times.

The findings amount to a historic admonishment of a former prime minister, who won a landslide electoral victory less than four years ago but saw his political career collapse amid a series of scandals.

"The contempt was all the more serious because it was committed by the Prime Minister, the most senior member of the government," the Privileges Committee wrote in its report. "There is no precedent for a Prime Minister having been found to have deliberately misled the House."

"He misled the House on an issue of the greatest importance to the House and to the public, and did so repeatedly," the members wrote, adding that Johnson also misled the committee when he presented evidence in his defence. The report added a further, damning recommendation in light of his resignation: that Johnson is denied a former member's pass to enter parliament, a long-standing convention for ex-MPs.

Two other Conservative MPs Nadine Dorries and Nigel Adams followed Johnson's resignation—meaning the Conservatives are now facing three by-elections immediately.

Apart from these by-elections, the bigger discussion in the Westminster is what will BoJo do now. Apparently known as a maverick, he is also known for his ability to bounce back from oblivion. BBC's Laura Kuenssberg in an interview on Sunday said clues from his track record tell us there is little chance he would have fought if he hadn't been sure he could win. Four times in the past Johnson has bounced back politically.

In 1987, Boris Johnson was fired by The Times for falsifying a quote - but was



BUT THE BIG QUESTION IS IF BOJO WILL NOT RUN FOR PARLIAMENT AGAIN, and is happy to maintain the suspense of a return, what else might he do with his time?

hired the following year by The Daily Telegraph, as the paper's Brussels correspondent. In 2004, he was fired as the Conservatives' shadow arts minister for lying about an affair - but was back on the front benches a year later. In 2016, he pulled out of his first bid to be the Conservative leader and prime minister after his close friend Michael Gove launched a rival bid - but he made a surprise comeback as foreign secretary under eventual winner Theresa May.

In 2018, he quit Mrs May's cabinet in

protest at her Brexit deal, only to return as leader of the party the following year, going on to win a huge majority at a general election.

There are varying reactions to his sudden departure, Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner called Johnson a "coward" who "doesn't accept responsibility for his own actions" But his former advisor, Will Walden, says he doesn't think this is the end for Johnson - "he is preparing himself for what might be next". Former Tory chairman Jake Berry, a friend of Boris

Johnson, told reporters: "The establishment has seen Boris out the door." But Berry also said: "He appeals to the great British public more than I've seen any British politician do. There is something special about him. He's an extraordinary character."

This means no one is sure of or even has a hint of his future plans, though most of them whether Conservative or Labour would like to write his political epitaph after his latest decision.

Johnson in his tirade against the gov-

ernment also targeted the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of "talking rubbish" after the prime minister said his predecessor asked him to overrule the vetting committee for appointments to the House of Lords.

The Conservative Party seems to be more in turmoil and chaos now than ever before, the chances of it winning the next general election seems slim. The Labour Party is baying for blood and asking for immediate elections, of which it is sure to win. In this scenario it would be practical for Rishi Sunak to take this as an opportunity to retrench and consolidate himself in the party, to expel the far-right fringe and anyone else who refuses to toe his pragmatic and sensible line.

The party would, of course, be smaller, but it would be more cohesive and manageable, and would gradually rebuild in strength by welcoming back those disillusioned by the David Cameron, Boris Johnson, and Liz Truss years of lunacy.

But the big question is if BoJo will not run for Parliament again, and is happy to maintain the suspense of a return, what else might he do with his time?

There are reports that coincidentally, his old newspaper the Telegraph has just come up for sale and its former editor Will Lewis, who sometimes advised BoJo, when he was in No 10 besides working together at the Telegraph, and who has just been made a knight by BoJo in the latest Honours List, may team up with BoJo. Further leading to speculation that the duo might be part of a bid to take it over the Telegraph?

Turning back to journalism once again might be one of the escape routes available to BoJo but in his reincarnation as an Editor, he would be the worst nightmare for the Conservatives and Rishi Sunak, both.

The raft of speculations shows that the man has not lost his nuisance value and the art of turning nuisance and resultant chaos in his favour. Both his friends and foes at the moment are in complete dark and this might not be the final chapter of his weird political career.

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Asad Mirza is a Delhi-based senior political commentator. He can be contacted at www.asadmira.in

Economics Needs A Climate Revolution

Tom Brookes
Gernot Wagner

Nowhere are the limitations of neoclassical economic thinking — the DNA of economics as it is currently taught and practised — more apparent than in the face of the climate crisis. While there are fresh ideas and models emerging, the old orthodoxy remains deeply entrenched. Change cannot come fast enough.

The economics discipline has failed to understand the climate crisis — let alone provide effective policy solutions for it — because most economists tend to divide problems into small, manageable pieces. Rational people, they are wont to say, think at the margin. What matters is not the average or totality of one's actions but rather the very next step, weighed against the immediate alternatives.

Such thinking is indeed rational for small discrete problems. Compartmentalisation is necessary for managing competing demands on one's time and attention. But marginal thinking is inadequate for an all-consuming problem touching every aspect of society.

Economists also tend to equate rationality with precision. The discipline's power over public discourse and policymaking lies in its implicit claim that those who cannot compute precise benefits and costs are somehow irrational. This allows economists — and their models — to ignore pervasive climate risks and uncertainties, including the possibility of climatic tipping points and societal responses to them. And when one considers economists' fixation with equilibrium models, the mis-

match between the climate challenge and the discipline's current tools becomes too glaring to ignore.

Yes, a return to equilibrium — getting "back to normal" — is an all-too-human preference. But it is precisely the opposite of what is needed — rapidly phasing out fossil fuels — to stabilise the world's climate.

These limitations are reflected in benefit-cost analyses of cutting emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The traditional thinking suggests a go-slow path for cutting CO₂. The logic seems compelling: the cost of damage caused by climate change, after all, is incurred in the future, while the costs of climate action occur today. The Nobel prize-winning verdict is that we should delay necessary investment in a low-carbon economy to avoid hurting the current high-carbon economy.

To be clear, a lot of new thinking has gone into showing that even this conventional logic would call for significantly more climate action now, because the costs are often overestimated while the potential (even if uncertain) benefits are underestimated. The young researchers advancing this work must walk a near-impossible tightrope, because they cannot publish what they believe to be their best work (based on the most defensible assumptions) without invoking the outmoded neoclassical model to demonstrate the validity of new ideas.

The very structure of academic economics all but guarantees that marginal thinking continues to dominate. The most effective way to introduce new ideas into the peer-reviewed academic literature is to follow something akin to an 80/20-



rule: stick to the established script for the most part; but try to push the envelope by probing one dubious assumption at a time. Needless to say, this makes it extremely difficult to change the overall frame of reference, even when those who helped establish the standard view are looking well beyond it themselves.

Consider the case of Kenneth J. Arrow, who shared a Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1972 for showing how marginal actions taken by self-interested individuals can improve societal welfare. That pio-

neering work cemented economists' equilibrium thinking. But Arrow lived for another 45 years, and he spent that time moving past his earlier work. In the 1980s, for example, he was instrumental in founding the Santa Fe Institute, which is dedicated to what has since become known as complexity science — an attempt to move beyond the equilibrium mindset he had helped establish. Because equilibrium thinking underpins the traditional climate-economic models that were developed in the 1990s, these models assume

that there are tradeoffs between climate action and economic growth. They imagine a world where the economy simply glides along a Panglossian path of progress. Climate policy might still be worthwhile, but only if we are willing to accept costs that will throw the economy off its chosen path.

Against the backdrop of this traditional view, recent pronouncements by the International Monetary Fund and the International Energy Agency are nothing short of revolutionary. Both institutions have now con-

cluded that ambitious climate action leads to higher growth and more jobs even in the near term.

The logic is straightforward: climate policies create many more jobs in clean-energy sectors than are lost in fossil-fuel sectors, reminding us that investment is the flipside of cost. That is why the proposal for a \$2 trillion infrastructure package in the United States could be expected to spur higher net economic activity and employment. Perhaps more surprising is the finding that carbon pricing alone appears to reduce emissions without hurting jobs or overall economic growth. The problem with carbon taxes or emissions trading is that real-world policies are not reducing emissions fast enough and therefore will need to be buttressed by regulation.

There is no excuse for continuing to adhere to an intellectual paradigm that has served us so badly for so long. The standard models have been used to reject policies that would have helped turn the tide many years ago, back when the climate crisis still could have been addressed with marginal changes to the existing economic system. Now, we no longer have the luxury of being able to settle for incremental change.

The good news is that rapid change is happening on the political front, owing not least to the shrinking cost of climate action. The bad news is that the framework of neoclassical economics is still blocking progress. The discipline is long overdue for its own tipping point toward new modes of thinking commensurate with the climate challenge.

The article was originally published by Khaleej Times

