

Some more Kedarnaths in offing



By RAAJSHEKHAR PANT

Known once for the brief sojourns of stalwarts like Kamla Nehru and KL Saigal in the historical TB Sanatorium it has; for being the fruit basket of the Central Himalayan region where a wide range of fresh fruits ranging from the well known varieties of apples, plums, apricots and pears to the exotic avocados, kiwis and rose-scented litchis grow in the neighbouring slopes and dales, where most of the roads leading to the interior of the Kumaon Himalayas would converge, thus keeping it vibrant with



Risky constructions

fresh groundwater. With the increasing volume of water, as the number of brooks running downhill keep on adding to its torrents, it becomes increasingly prone to flash floods. Flowing towards the north-west, this gargling rivulet before joining the river Kosi bisects the sprawling campus of the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Research (NBPGR). God alone knows for how long the once somnolent flow

which, thanks to its characteristic nonchalance, did never bother to apply for the mutation of the same. The delegation also pleaded that turning a blind eye to such an aberration would in due course divest the children from the only open expanse they had been using as their playground over the years. Save a hollow assurance that the matter would be looked into, the administration never did anything.

This dilly-dallying on the part of the administration wrote the preface of the hazard that now looms quite large over the town. An entire market consisting of everything from fast-food eateries to mutton-shops, provision-stores, green grocers, a temple and residential blocks has eclipsed the rivulet now. Transformation of seemingly makeshift structures of tin sheets - erected on cement platforms that rest on RCC pillars and foundations dug deep into the heart of the stream and extended at times to the other bank of the rivulet - into permanent shacks has now become the order of the day. These structures have eaten up the willow trees that once lined this stream and its sloppy flow is often laden with the gradually mounting avalanche of garbage and plastic...and all this happened in the past eight years.

It will not be out of place to mention here that the flash floods caused in this stream following the heavy rains in the year 2010 besides toll of human life and property also demolished three bridges and much of the roads along it. The quantum of destruction, God forbid, if the floods repeat themselves, may well be



Construction binge

imagined.

And this situation is there when we have the Wetland (Management and Conservation) Rules 2010 of the MoEF; when we are one of the signatories to the Ramsar Convention; when a rule of British times is there prohibiting all constructions within a range of 50 feet from a water body; when a verdict of Ramkrishna Sevashram Trust vs State of Uttaranchal prohibiting excavation and mining on river beds is there, besides a letter of the monitoring committee of the year 2006 upholding the same and so on. Interestingly, also against the construction of multistoreyed flats and a well organised series of efforts to convert the open expanse adjacent to the rivulet to a parking lot when some concerned citizens filed a PIL the court concerned

the hill roads. In olden times, especially in the hills, where natural hazards have always been an integral part of life, social values, faith, tradition and a sense of respect for wisdom gathered over the generations of co-existence with nature happened to regulate and shape the ethics of construction - still so conspicuous in old structures. But now, when whetting the human lust for immediate gains the market forces have been knocking the very bottom off of these traditional checks, we unfortunately are left bereft of any system to replace it. For the new generation of politicians in the state, winning elections and keeping their vote bank pleased is more important; the masses want to make maximum hay while the sun shines and the 'here today and gone tomorrow' lobby of bureaucrats is absolutely blasé



Squeezing the rivulet

the transit rush of hill folk and tourists - Bhowali, a valley like settlement, just 10 kms downhill from Nainital, has become a classical simulacra of earning a quick buck by playing fair or foul (mostly foul) in connivance with the conflating duo of the politicians having a myopic view of development, often with a motive pronounced enough to aggrandise themselves by all possible means, and the stained bureaucracy working as their touts.

There is a rivulet here having an 'S' shaped course looping through the valley. It forms the natural drainage of the valley and is the only source of the

of this rivulet will be able to bear the excesses it is continuously being subjected to.

In the year 2003-4, just three years after the formation of the state of Uttarakhand, the first ever encroachment started right at the edge of this rivulet. A national English daily raised this issue quite vehemently. A delegation consisting of some concerned and senior citizens of the town approached the administration with the plea that the encroached land as per a Gazette Notification (No.3248-D/9-B-657-W-64 of July 8, 1964) belonged to the civic body



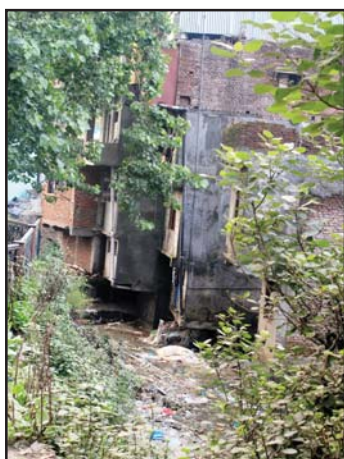
Plastic avalanche

ordered that no construction could be furthered there.

But all such things are rendered stale when development becomes a synonym with concrete structures and long trails of vehicles creeping along

towards the call of mountains... why get surprised then... we have a whole lot of Kedarnaths in offing and Bhowali is just another number in the long list.

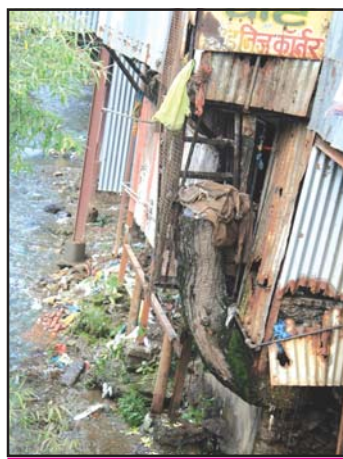
(The writer is a fellow of CSE.)



Constructions that have been impeding the flow of the river



Impeding the flow



Trees have been cut to make riverside restaurants



A whole lot of eateries has come up along the river