

Fresh areas inundated in Baleshwar

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BALESHWAR

THE flood situation in Odisha remained grim with 12.85 lakh people affected in six districts, even as fresh areas got inundated in Baleshwar on Thursday as the Subarnarekha river flowed above the danger level, officials said. Subarnarekha witnessed peak flooding at 3 am on Thursday when the water level at Rajghat in Jaleswar touched 11.82 metres against the danger level of 10.36 meters.

At 9 am, however, the water receded to 11.6 metres, which was still above the danger level, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Rajesh P Patil said. The SRC said flooding in the river has caused fresh inundation in Bhograi and Baliapal blocks. While 28 gram panchayats in Bhograi block have been inundated, 20 blocks of Baliapal have been affected, the official said. As the floodwater submerged villages and paddy fields, the Baleshwar district administration deployed additional relief and rescue teams in the affected blocks.

“The rescue operation has been intensified by deploying personnel of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF),



Odisha Disaster Response Force (ODRF), fire services and local police,” an official at the Baleshwar District Emergency Office said. Odisha’s Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said the water level in Subarnarekha swelled due to discharge of water from Galudih barrage in neighbouring Jharkhand.

The upper catchment areas of the river also received very heavy rainfall due to a depression. Apart from Subarnarekha, Jalaka and Budhabalanga rivers in Baleshwar were also in spate. As many as 331 villages in Baleshwar district have been affected by flooding in Subarnarekha, Jalaka and Budhabalanga rivers.

The floodwaters inundated State Highway 57, which connects Jaleswar and Chandaneswar in Baleshwar district, and vehicular move-

ment was completely halted. Patil said that the government was optimistic that the flood situation would improve soon, but may require more days for Baleshwar to return to normalcy. The affected six districts were Baleshwar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Mayurbhanj and Kendujhar, where floodwaters caused breach of embankments, inundation of villages and disruption of road connectivity.

A total of 4,28,475 people have been evacuated and accommodated in 728 shelters, it said. In Kendrapada district, flooding in Baitarani, Kharasota, Brahmani and Kani rivers have raised concerns. A 50-foot breach in the Luna river embankment near Kaima Kanpur in Baraha Domanda panchayat of Rajkanika block inundated villages under four gram panchayats.

400 protest-linked auto permits to be cancelled

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

THE Odisha Transport department has initiated action to cancel or suspend the permits of around 400 auto-rickshaws allegedly used to block roads during an ongoing protest by app-based cab drivers and bike riders at Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, said an official on Thursday. The road blockade and alleged vandalism by unruly protesters disrupted normal traffic in the area for some time in the Master Canteen Square area on Wednesday.

Several government properties, including CRUT/Ama Bus vehicles, were reportedly damaged during the incident. Based on police records, CCTV footage and preliminary examination of seizure lists, authorities identified and seized more than 400 auto-rickshaws allegedly used to obstruct the road. The Transport department said the use of ve-



hicles for such illegal activities amounts to a violation of permit conditions.

Accordingly, proceedings have been initiated under Section 86(1)(b) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, for suspension or cancellation of the permits. The Bhubaneswar-I RTO has issued show-cause notices to the registered owners and permit holders of the vehicles concerned. They have been asked to provide details regarding who was in control of the vehicles during the in-

cident and whether they were used with the owners’ permission, direction or knowledge.

The vehicle owners have been directed to submit written explanations along with the required documents within the stipulated deadline and appear before the RTO for a personal hearing. If no response is received within the prescribed period, or if the persons concerned fail to appear, the authorities may take a decision on permit suspension or cancellation based on the

available records.

The Transport department clarified that the action against the vehicle permits will not affect any separate criminal or other legal proceedings related to the incident. On Thursday, the Commissionerate Police informed that 113 protesters have so far been arrested and forwarded to court in this case. The Police seized 354 auto-rickshaws involved in the violent protest. Similarly, 60 protesting online cab service drivers have been

released on bond of good behaviour. A total of seven cases have been registered in this regard at the Kharavel Nagar Police Station.

The Commissionerate Police again warned that strong action will be taken against anyone taking the law into their hands. Notably, the app-based cab drivers and bike riders in Odisha have been holding protests in Bhubaneswar over several demands for the last couple of days.

However, the protest turned violent on Wednesday after the drivers staged a road blockade at bustling Master Canteen Square by keeping their auto-rickshaws on the road. They clashed with police when the latter tried to clear the blockade by removing the vehicles. The protestors pelted stones at police and damaged some public buses at the spot. The police later resorted to a mild baton charge to bring the situation under control.

State launches WhatsApp revenue grievance system

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari on Wednesday launched the Revenue Grievance Redressal System through the ‘Ama Sathi’ WhatsApp Chatbot, stating that the new initiative would bring revenue services closer to the people and ensure a transparent, accountable and citizen centric administration.

Launching the new system, the minister said the grievance redressal mechanism has been introduced through the ‘Ama Sathi’ WhatsApp Chatbot as a simple, convenient and transparent digital platform for citizens to lodge complaints relating to various Revenue department services and track their status.

He said that in keeping with changing times, the Revenue department is strengthening and modernising itself to make public services simpler and more accessible. Pujari said this innovative initiative would be a landmark step for the government of Odisha and further strengthen public trust in the administration.

Under the new system, citizens can select the appropriate grievance category through WhatsApp, submit the required details, and upload supporting documents. The complaint will then be forwarded to the authority concerned based on its nature.



For general grievances, the Tahasildar will initially examine the complaint and take necessary action. Where field level verification or additional information is required, the Tahasildar may forward it to the Revenue Inspector (RI) concerned. Following submission of the RI’s report, the matter will return to the Tahasildar for further action. Grievances requiring higher level intervention may be escalated to the Sub Collector and subsequently to the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) and the District Collector.

According to the department, it will monitor grievances against prescribed timelines to ensure timely action and disposal. Complainants will receive WhatsApp updates at various stages, including submission, progress, verifica-

tion, escalation, resolution or rejection. They will also be informed of the outcome and can rate the service and provide feedback.

The system provides facilities for digital submission of grievances, category wise registration, online tracking, field verification by Revenue Inspectors, escalation to higher authorities, citizen notifications and digital record keeping and monitoring. The department said the initiative would enable citizens to lodge complaints without first visiting Revenue offices in person, while giving officials a structured digital workflow, transparent tracking, and clearly defined responsibilities.

Discussions are also underway to digitise grievances submitted physically at Revenue offices and integrate them into the unified

grievance management system, allowing online and in person complaints to be managed and tracked through a single platform.

The ‘Ama Sathi’ WhatsApp Chatbot is already providing several Revenue services. Citizens can access the services through WhatsApp number 9437292000, including mutation, conversion of land classification, marriage registration, society registration, registration related information, certified copies of registered documents, caste, income and residential certificates, among others.

On the occasion, the administration demonstrated how citizens from Rayagada, Jharsuguda and Kataka districts can lodge grievances through WhatsApp, followed by their management and resolution.

Odisha SIR 2026 enters final phase

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BHUBANESWAR

THE Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Odisha entered the final phase as the deadline for filing claims and objections for registration and revision ended on Wednesday, officials said. A statement issued by the office of the Odisha’s Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said the final decision on all claims and objections will be published by September 17 and the final voter list will be published on September 21.

The CEO said that till August 19, notices have been issued in the names of a total of 58,36,430 voters. Of them, notices have been successfully delivered to 58,36,374 voters, the CEO statement said. “Till now, a total of 3,09,71,941 eligible voters in the State have been considered eligible for inclusion in the final voter list,” it said, adding that the number may further increase as the hearing process is ongoing.

Officials made it clear that the electors to whom notices have been issued but have been unable to submit the required valid certificates



or correct information will be removed from the voter list. The SIR process also witnessed great enthusiasm among the youths to add their names in the voter list. A total of 2,79,315 people applied for new name registration through Form-6. Also, 53,625 applications have been received through Form-7 for voters whose names are in two places to remove their names from one place and put them in another place, and for deleting the names of deceased persons, the statement said. As many as 1,97,952 voters have applied through Form-8 for the names of all members of a family to be put together in one polling station along with the name, address, age or other corrections in the voter list, it said.

Elephant tusk seized, four arrested

RUDRANSH MISHRA
DHENKANAL

FOUR persons were arrested by forest officials on Wednesday for allegedly possessing an elephant tusk in the Mahabir range of Dhenkanal. The accused include Sipun Patra from Baghamunda, and Tampai village residents Laxmidhar Naik, Kuber Singh, and Sanatan Naik.

Forest officials stated the accused claimed they found the elephant tusk while gathering mushrooms and decided to take it. The Forest department seized the tusk following the arrests. Officials are now investigating its origin and how the four individuals acquired it.



The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, bans the possession, collection, transportation, and trade of elephant tusks and other wildlife artifacts.

Forest officials warned of strict legal action against anyone involved in the illegal possession or trade of wildlife articles. Divisional Forest Officer Lalit Kumar Patra stated that an investigation is ongoing

to establish the full facts of the case. The arrests follow an intensified crackdown by the State’s Forest wing on rampant wildlife trafficking and poaching networks in Odisha’s protected zones. The region has recently seen a surge in elephant casualties driven by ivory smuggling, deliberate poisoning, and high-voltage power line electrocutions.

ASHA worker carries elderly woman to safety

BHADRAK : AN ASHA worker has been applauded by the Bhadrak district administration for rescuing a 60-year-old woman from the recent Odisha floods by carrying the elderly person to safety on her back, an official said on Thursday. Minati Sahoo carried the woman on her back for around 500 metres through knee-deep water to a safe shelter in Dhamnagar block.

Sahoo, who serves Nadiagaan and Bharatpur areas, was providing medicines in waterlogged villages and spreading awareness among residents about precautions against diseases likely to spread due to the floods, he said. While she was returning from her field visit, she learnt that a breach in the Karanpal river embankment had caused floodwaters to enter Nadiagaan village.

When she visited the area, she noticed the elderly woman, identified as Basanta Das, sitting alone on the verandah of her house. Floodwaters had already reached the verandah level, the official said. Das was unable to move on her own as she was suffering from an infection in her legs and normally needed the support of family members even to walk. Her son, meanwhile, had gone to a medical facility with his pregnant wife, he said.

19 years on, Biriguda families seek ‘Displaced People’ status

C B SINGH
RAYAGADA

NEARLY two decades after the proposed Aditya Alumina project sparked discussions on displacing Biriguda Colony, affected families still await a final decision on their resettlement and rehabilitation benefits.

The long-pending issue came up for discussion at the 5th Rehabilitation and Peripheral Development Advisory Committee (RPDSC) meeting held at the Zilla Parishad conference hall in Rayagada. The meeting was chaired by the RDC, Southern Division, Brahmapur, and attended by Koraput Collector Manoj Satyawan Mahajan, Rayagada Collector Ashutosh Kulkarni, the Koraput Lok Sabha member, MLAs from Koraput and Rayagada districts and members of the RPDSC.

However, the Biriguda rehabilitation issue remained unresolved, with representatives of the affected families

insisting that their long-pending demands be settled before they are asked to vacate the colony for project-related requirements. According to a written submission made by Bipin Kumar Mandinga, an RPDSC member and representative of Biriguda Colony, the present settlement has its roots in a government rehabilitation exercise dating back to 1975, when 45 families were reportedly shifted from the original Biriguda village and settled at the present colony.

The families claim that the government subsequently provided agricultural and homestead land to the settlers. While ‘pattas’ were reportedly issued for agricultural land, the families say they were provided documents relating to their homestead land instead of formal ‘pattas’, leading to the present dispute over their legal and rehabilitation status. Official records placed before the authorities provide a different but complementary picture.



Proceedings of a meeting held on April 17, 2013, in the office of the Sub-Collector, Koraput, recorded that Biriguda Colony was situated over approximately 1.77 acres of government land, classified as Patita, under Khata No. 81 and Plot Nos.

414 and 415 of Biriguda village. A joint inquiry conducted in 2008 had identified 114 families in the colony. By February 2013, the number had increased to 124 households.

The 2013 proceedings recorded that the Aditya

Alumina Project authorities considered acquisition of the 1.77 acres necessary for the project and had submitted a requisition for alienation of the government land. The colony representatives, however, demanded that the families be recognised as

Displaced Persons (DPs) and extended benefits under the Odisha Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, 2006.

The issue had already figured in an official meeting held on February 5, 2011, according to the statement submitted by the colony

representative. The meeting reportedly discussed rehabilitation of the Biriguda families, including proposals relating to rehabilitation housing and recognition of the families as Displaced Persons. Two years later, the April 17, 2013 proceedings again dealt specifically with the 1.77-acre settlement.

The proceedings recorded that the project authorities had expressed the view that acquisition of the land was necessary and that the families would consequently have to be displaced. The colony representatives maintained that they should receive benefits under the R&R Policy before displacement.

Significantly, the 2013 proceedings recorded that the project authorities agreed to accept the proposal for declaring the families as Displaced Persons and providing employment and other benefits under the Odisha R&R Policy, 2006. Yet, the proposed rehabilitation process did not reach a final

settlement.

The matter resurfaced in December 2023, when the Tahsildar, Laxmipur, visited the colony following a direction from the district administration and submitted a report concerning issuance of House Site RORs. The report, dated December 22, 2023, referred to approximately 124 households continuing to reside on the 1.77 acres.

At the RPDSC meeting, the RDC acknowledged the delay in resolving the Biriguda rehabilitation issue and said that a subcommittee would be constituted to expedite the process. The subcommittee will comprise the Collectors of Koraput and Rayagada, the Special Land Acquisition Officer and the Sub-Collectors concerned. It will examine the matter and submit its recommendations within two months. After approval of the subcommittee’s recommendations, the matter will be placed before the RPDSC for a final decision.