Chief Secy rejects Oppn's 'man-made flood' charge



HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

THE Odisha government on Wednesday rejected the Opposition's charge that the widespread flooding in Ganjam district following last month's cyclone Arnab was 'man-made', pointing out that unprecedented rainfall over three consecutive days had caused the deluge. Asserting that there was no lapse in flood management and operations of reservoir gates, Chief Secretary Anu Garg expressed satisfaction that the State government has ensured "zero casualty" that can be attributed to the deluge.

Eleven people died in Odisha, while six were still missing in incidents linked to cyclone Arnab that made landfall in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh on October 28. The BJD supremo, Naveen Patnaik, had described the flood in Ganjam district after the very severe cyclone as "man-made" and demanded accountability for people's suffering "caused by lapses" in the BJP government's handling of the calamity. The former chief minister alleged that despite the weather department's warning, the water levels of dams were not monitored.

Pointing out that standard operating procedure dictates that adequate water from dams must be released before the onset of rains, Patnaik said, "In the case of Ganjam, water from dams was released after the onset of heavy cyclonic rains. This compounded the floods and caused huge loss of life and property."

Nixing the allegation, the Chief Secretary said, "Let me clarify, unprecedented rainfall for three consecutive days was responsible for the recent floods in Ganjam district. There was absolutely no lapse in flood management and gate operations." After reviewing the relief and restoration works in Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamala districts, severely hit by floods in the aftermath of the cyclone, she told reporters, "The visiting Central team, which also comprised a member from the Ministry of Jal Shakti, told us after field assessment that the flood was due to unprecedented rains."

However, Chief Secretary Garg, who was also in charge of the Water Resources department during her tenure, rejected the allegations of lapses in flood management. Defending the State government's handling of the calamity, Garg said Ganjam district witnessed exceptionally heavy rainfall, with the Patrapur block recording 546 mm of rain in a day.

Rainfall was the highest in the area since 1990 and 2013. Apart from Patrapur, many places in the district received above 300 mm of rain during the period, the Chief Secretary said. Garg said ensuring the safety of water reservoirs was "supreme" for the government and explained that decisions on opening gates to discharge excess water from dams were taken in view of the situation and to ensure dam safety.

She said that 6,907 cumecs (cubic meters per second) accumulated at the Purusottampur gauge station of the Rushikulya river, which is double the water carrying capacity of the river. "As such, the dams could regulate only 10 per cent of the water that reached Purusottampur gauge station while 90 per cent flowed directly through the river. The flood was not due to the 10 per cent of the excess water, but much higher than that," Garg said.

Admitting that the flood has caused extensive damage, the Chief Secretary expressed satisfaction that the State government has ensured "zero casualties" that can be attributed to the deluge. Odisha witnessed three successive floods in Subarnarekha, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalang, Jalaka and other small rivers in the northern parts of the State during the monsoon this year. The Opposition Congress had also blamed the BJP government for the flood in Ganjam, with former chief secretary Suresh Chandra Mohapatra alleging that lack of sincerity on the part of authorities caused people's miseries. "Had there been effective handling of the situation, the impact of the flood could have been much less severe."

Ganjam flood causes Rs 334 cr irrigation infra loss

SUNIL MOHAN PATNAIK
BRAHMAPUR



THE devastating floods in Ganjam district have caused extensive damage to irrigation infrastructure estimated at Rs 334 crore, with 933 major and medium irrigation projects, 66 minor irrigation points and 2,103 lift irrigation points bearing the brunt of the disaster. The Water Resources Department has estimated that Rs 274 crore will be required to restore the damaged major and medium irrigation projects.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, Water Resources Department Chief Engineer Dilip Rout said the floods were triggered by excessive and unprecedented rainfall, which caused a sudden rise in reservoir levels and river flows. He ruled out any negligence or operational lapses in dam management, asserting that reservoir levels were regularly monitored and water released whenever necessary.

A high-level technical team, led by the Chief Engineer, inspected flood-hit infrastructure at Janibili, Suramani, Tatabali, Padma Barrage, Jahada and Jayamangala to assess the damage and expedite restoration. Nearly 900 metres of the Rushikulya Right Canal at Suramani and another 800 metres at Tatabali have been washed away. Restoration work is underway on a war footing.

The department has submitted proposals to the State Special Relief Commissioner seeking funds for the restoration of damaged irrigation facilities. However, preliminary repair work will begin without waiting for fund approval to ensure early restoration.

Ensuring uninterrupted drinking water supply to Brahmapur city from Janibili reservoir has also emerged as a priority. Temporary embankments have been constructed at damaged stretches to maintain normal water supply, while a permanent solution is expected within 10 to 12 days.

The department has simultaneously prioritised kharif irrigation to prevent further hardship to farmers. Water supply through the Ghodahada, Baghalati, Kalangadola, Dah, Baghua, Dhanai and Jayamangala canals has already commenced, while irrigation through the Rushikulya and Hiradharbatia canals is expected to resume shortly. Rout said reservoir levels, rainfall and river flows were continuously monitored. As on October 27, water levels ranged from 40.7 per cent at Ghatakeswari to 88.3 per cent at Sorada, while Dhanai reservoir had an automatic gate-opening mechanism to release excess water.

Cyclone relief to all blocks in 3 districts

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR



THE Odisha government on Wednesday decided to extend emergency relief assistance to all blocks in Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamala districts to support households affected by cyclone Arnab. The decision follows the relief package announced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, under which every affected family in all blocks of the three districts will receive 50 kg of rice and financial assistance of Rs 2,500.

In a statement, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Rajesh P Patil said the district collectors of Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamala had been directed to immediately undertake enumeration and verification of eligible families to ensure smooth, transparent and timely distribution of relief. The SRC also instructed the district administrations to coordinate with District Civil Supplies Officers (CSOs) and the Odisha State Civil Supplies Corporation (OSCSC) for immediate requisition and lifting of rice stocks.

The financial assistance of Rs 2,500 per family will primarily be transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to beneficiaries' bank accounts. In areas where banking services have been disrupted, authorised alternative modes of disbursement will be used, with proper records maintained, the statement said.

To ensure accountability and speedy implementation, the three district collectors have been asked to submit daily block-wise progress reports on rice and cash distribution to the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) until the relief exercise is completed.

Earlier, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik had alleged that the relief package announced by the State government was inadequate and demanded immediate rehabilitation of affected families.

Backed campus polls upon ABVP assurance: CM



HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday said his government gave the go-ahead for students' union elections across colleges and universities in the state only after the ABVP assured him of victory. Majhi made the remarks while addressing a state-level conference of the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), attended by more than 8,000 delegates.

Colleges and universities across Odisha held students' union elections last month after an eight-year gap. The BJP promised in its 2024 election manifesto to resume campus elections, which were stopped by the previous BJD government.

"A number of questions were raised over holding students' union elections in the state. There were different views on whether the ABVP was prepared for the campus elections. I granted permission for conducting the campus polls only after the state ABVP leaders assured me of their victory. Finally, the ABVP registered a grand success in the campus elections. This is called the power of organisation," Majhi said.

Describing the youth as "game changers", the Chief Minister said the large gathering reflected growing faith among students and young people in the organisation. He urged the ABVP leaders to put "nation first" and work accordingly. "I also suggested students and youths to become job creators instead of seeking jobs anywhere," he said. Majhi also spoke about several initiatives undertaken by his government for students and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's priorities included youth, women and farmers.

He also urged young people to remain alert about forces allegedly working against the country's interests. ABVP national general secretary Virendra Singh Solanki said the outfit's "historic victories" in 208 colleges and a clean sweep across eight universities mark a new chapter in Odisha's student politics.

Former Ranchi University Vice-Chancellor Kshiti Bhusan Das, who was also present at the conference, said ABVP should continue working towards meeting students' aspirations and expectations.

Odisha inks biodiversity pact

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR



THE Odisha government and the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) have signed an MoU, aiming to strengthen nutrition security, women's empowerment and biodiversity conservation, officials said on Wednesday. The agreement was signed on Tuesday in the presence of Chief Secretary Anu Garg and Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson of MSSRF.

Through this collaboration, scientific research, traditional knowledge, and government policy will be coordinated in the fields of agriculture, nutrition, health, environment, and livelihoods, Garg said. The MSSRF will act as the knowledge partner, with the State government providing technical support to various departments in areas like policy formulation, programme planning, research, skill development and innovation, she said.

The agreement will prioritise climate-resilient agriculture, agro-environmental farming practices, promotion of millets and other alternative crops, protection of traditional seeds and agricultural biodiversity, and development of sustainable food systems, Garg said.

"To review the effectiveness and progress of the action plan, a steering committee will be formed under the chairmanship of the Development Commissioner. This will include the secretaries of the departments concerned and representatives from MSSRF. The committee will hold regular meetings to review the progress, results, and effectiveness of various programmes," Garg said.

Swaminathan said the partnership will create opportunities for joint efforts towards sustainable management of natural resources. "The collaboration will focus on innovation in solving various development issues, green technologies, gender equality, women's empowerment, promotion of millets, and the development of agricultural processing technologies," she said.

Man gets 25-yr jail for raping minor

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KENDRAPADA

A court in Kendrapada district on Tuesday sentenced a man to 25 years' imprisonment for raping and impregnating a 17-year-old girl in 2023. Additional District Judge-cum-Special Judge (POCSO) Pragyan Paramita Roul pronounced the verdict and imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the convict, with an additional one-year jail term in default of payment of the fine, said special public prosecutor Nehru Kumar Sahu. The court convicted Arjun Sethi on the basis of the testimonies of 17 witnesses, including the victim, and medical evidence, Sahu said. According to the prosecution, the girl was returning home from a nearby market when the convict and two others allegedly took her to an isolated place, gang-raped her and threatened her with dire consequences if she disclosed the incident. The assault came to light after her mother noticed physical changes and suspected that she was pregnant. The girl was subsequently found to be five months pregnant, the prosecution said. Later, the victim's mother lodged an FIR on September 9, 2023, police registered a case and arrested the accused.

Earlier, on September 24 this year, the court had sentenced another convict in the case to 25 years' imprisonment. The trial of the third accused is yet to begin as he remains at large.

Schools reopen in Ganjam

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BRAHMAPUR

SCHOOLS in flood-hit Ganjam district reopened on Monday after 23 days, officials said. The schools were closed for the Durga Puja vacation and the subsequent flooding triggered by cyclone 'Arnab'.

The district administration, however, extended the closure of six government-run schools – five in Asika block and one in Sorada block till Tuesday – as restoration activities were still underway, the officials said. Classes in nine schools were temporarily being held in nearby educational institutions to facilitate the restoration efforts, said Ajay Kumar Patra, District Education Officer, Ganjam.

The restoration activities will be completed soon, he said. A total of 498 out of 3,890 government-run schools across the district have been damaged due to the floods, the officials said.

Guv urges youth to make millets part of daily diet

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Governor Brajmohan Ram on Tuesday urged people, particularly youth, students and government employees, to include Shree Anna (millets) in their daily diet, saying their promotion will benefit public health, farmers and the environment.

"Every household should include Mandia, Bajra, Jowar and other millets in its meals. Adopting healthy food habits is not just about personal well-being but also reflects our respect for farmers and agricultural traditions," he said while inaugurating the Symposium on Shree Anna and Strengthening of Traditional Seed Systems–2026 in Bhubaneswar.

Highlighting the importance of millets in India's agricultural heritage, the Governor said these crops had been an integral part of traditional food habits for centuries. In Odisha, particularly in tribal and rainfed regions, millet cultivation is closely linked to local livelihoods and cultural traditions. Promoting Mandia (Ragi) would help improve farmers' incomes while preserving this heritage.

Referring to climate change, erratic rainfall, rising temperatures and water scarcity, he said millets offered a sustainable farming option as they required less water, involved lower cultivation costs and could withstand adverse climatic conditions. He also highlighted their nutritional value, including high dietary fibre and essential nutrients, saying their regular consumption could encourage healthier food habits amid rising lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension.

The Governor stressed the need to strengthen processing, packaging, value addition and marketing facilities to help Odisha's millets reach wider domestic and international markets. Emphasising traditional seed conservation, he called for establishing community seed banks, documenting indigenous varieties and encouraging their exchange.

He said local seed varieties represented generations of farmers' knowledge and were vital for preserving agricultural biodiversity. Describing tribal communities and women farmers as important custodians of traditional seeds, he advocated combining indigenous knowledge with modern science, technology and better market linkages.

Appreciating the Odisha government's Shree Anna Abhiyan and the Centre's initiatives to promote millets, he said collective efforts to conserve traditional seeds, protect agricultural diversity and enhance farmers' incomes would contribute to Viksit Odisha 2036 and Viksit Bharat 2047.



Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, ICAR Director General Dr Mangi Lal Jat, MSSRF chairperson and former chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan, and OUAT Vice-Chancellor Prof Pravat Kumar Roul also addressed the symposium.