

JOSHIMATH SINKING

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A torchlight demonstration by residents of Joshimath on January 5, 2023 demanding action by the government after several houses developed deep cracks leaving them in a panicked state. | Photo Credit: ANI

With residents of the Joshimath town reporting an increase in landslides and hundreds of [houses at the hill town in Uttarakhand developing cracks](#), the district administration has issued orders to stop work on the National Thermal Power Corporation's (NTPC) Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower project and all other construction activity in the area, including the Helang bypass road. The operation of Auli ropeway, one of Asia's longest ropeways, was also stopped.

With houses in Joshimath developing dangerous cracks, allegedly due to the construction activity, residents are in panic.

Continuing land subsidence in Joshimath town is causing major cracks in many houses, people are vacating their houses and are in search of safe places. | Photo Credit: ANI

On Thursday, many locals under the banner of Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (JBSS), staged a day-long protest. Traffic was severely affected on the Badrinath national highway till 4 p.m., leaving tourists stranded. The locals took out a march demanding their immediate evacuation from the town and stoppage of NTPC construction work.

The Chamoli district administration, later, pacified the protestors by ordering a ban on construction work related to the hydropower project and even the Helang bypass being built by the Border Road Organisation (BRO).

Bhuvan Chandra Uniyal, chief priest of Badrinath temple situated next to Joshimath, called for help from the government. "The Joshimath town is now breathing its last. Spread the voice of this Himalayan region across the country," he said.

Additional District Magistrate Abhishek Tripathi told [The Hindu](#) that four families were moved to safer locations on Thursday and all types of construction activity has been banned in the town.

Many locals in Joshimath town vacated their houses after cracks appeared on January 4, 2023. | Photo Credit: ANI

"So far, the administration has evacuated 38 families from their damaged homes and they have

been moved to a rehabilitation centre operating in a community hall,” said the official.

The district administration has also issued orders to NTPC and Hindustan Construction Company (HCC) to set up 2,000 pre-fabricated buildings - to act as shelters for families being shifted - as a precautionary measure.

Protestors alleged that the government had ignored their warnings about rapid construction work undertaken by NTPC.

“Why has the government now banned construction work when we are on the verge of sinking? Why didn’t they pay heed to us earlier?” asked JBSS convener Atul.

The Uttarakhand Chief Minister’s Office has sent a team of officials from the Disaster Management Department to take stock of the situation which is also being monitored by the Prime Minister’s Office, said sources.

A Joshimath resident’s house with cracks on January 4, 2023. Photo: Special Arrangement

The team of Garhwal Commissioner Sushil Kumar, Disaster Management Secretary Ranjit Kumar Sinha, Disaster Management Executive Officer Piyush Rautela, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) Deputy Commandant Rohitas Mishra, Landslide Mitigation Centre scientist Santoon Sarkar, and experts from IIT Roorkee reached Joshimath on Thursday to take the stock of the situation.

It should be mentioned that a similar team, comprising experts from Wadia Institute Of Himalyan Geology and IIT Roorkee, among others, constituted by the government last year had mentioned in its report that large chunks of Joshimath, situated at a height of over 6,000 feet, are sinking.

“The report which was submitted by the Disaster Management Department to the State government said Joshimath was built on unstable foundation. It also said a poor drainage system and erosion by rivers have compounded the situation in the past few years,” informed an official involved in compiling the report last year.

The report had recommended that construction in certain parts of the town be stopped. It also recommended steps such as regulated development and constant monitoring of the affected areas, apart from preparing an effective drainage and sewage plan for the town.

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