

Rescue 'dangerous', may take a 'long time': NDMA

With the auger machine stuck, horizontal drilling has not proceeded in 48 hours; manual drilling mulled for last 10 metres; plasma cutter being brought in from Hyderabad to cut out stuck auger

Ishita Mishra
SILKYARA

Multiple hurdles are now delaying the rescue of 41 labourers, who have been trapped inside the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakashi of Uttarakhand for two weeks now. With no sign of rescue in the next one or two days, the kin of the trapped workers are getting restless, even as Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami promised the workers that their safe evacuation was the government's "top priority".

For the past 48 hours, there has been no forward movement in the efforts to drill through the tunnel horizontally, as the auger drilling machine stopped working after it reached the 48-metre mark on Thursday, with its blades stuck in the debris, which is full of rocks and iron girders. A plasma cutter machine is being brought in from Hyderabad, likely by Sunday, to cut out the stuck auger.

The rescue teams then plan to manually drill through the last 10 metres of debris to reach the trapped workers, a "dangerous" process, which is likely to take a "long time",



Other option: Efforts being made to take the vertical drilling machine atop the mountain in Silkyara on Saturday. Narrow roads affected the machine's movement to the drilling site. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

according to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Vertical drilling 'risky'

Efforts to drill vertically through 86 metres of mountain have also been stalled, as the approach road to the drilling site is too narrow for the movement of the gigantic vertical drilling machine; the Border Roads Organisation is now working to widen the road.

However, officials also warn that vertical drilling is risky as it can cause vi-

brations in the already fragile mountain; they are mulling ways to do it cautiously.

NDMA member Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain told journalists that there has been some breakage in the auger machine. "Advanced machinery is required to cut and remove the broken parts of the auger stuck inside the tunnel, and the assistance of the Indian Air Force is being sought to airlift this machinery," he said. After these stuck parts are cleared, the auger machine

will be used only to push forward the 900 mm rescue pipe and not for the actual drilling, which means that the process will be slower than earlier, Mr. Hasnain said.

Workers at the rescue site warn that manual drilling is a herculean task, as the drilling will have to be done from within the cramped 900 mm pipe, with very little oxygen or space, and too much dust and debris.

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With regard to vertical drilling, Mr. Hasnain said the machinery has to be first transported to the drilling site above the roof of the tunnel. "Once this machinery is placed there, vertical drilling from this point can begin. This machine will have to traverse a depth of 86 metres, and then break the tunnel crust which is beneath," he said. A third option was a drift tunnel, he added.

Noting that the rescue process was "dangerous", the NDMA member said that whichever method is used, "everyone will need to keep their patience and not put pressure on the rescue workers". Efforts are being made to maintain the morale and motivation of the relatives of the trapped men, as this rescue operation may go on for a "long time", he added.

Top priority: CM

The Chief Minister also told journalists that all possible options are being explored. "PM Modi is concerned about the situation and the condition of the workers. We are expecting and hoping that the operation is completed as soon as possible," Mr. Dhama said.

He entered the tunnel to take stock of the rescue work and check the quality of food being sent to the trapped workers. Using a temporary communication channel, he assured them that rescue efforts are being undertaken on a war footing. Mr. Dhama told journalists that all the trapped workers are fine and hopeful.

Devender Kissu could not hold back his tears after speaking to his brother Virender, who is stuck inside, on Saturday. He told *The Hindu* that his brother has stopped eating as he is now facing depression. "It's the toughest time of our life and we don't know how long it will last," said Mr. Kissu who is not considering returning to his village in Bihar until Virender comes out.

A BSNL landline facility has been set up inside the tunnel to keep the trapped workers connected to their family members, and the telecom firm is also planning to send in a handset.

'Networking charges for rooftop solar panels discourage investments'

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Networking charges collected from industries that install rooftop solar energy panels for captive use discourage investments, say industrialists in Coimbatore.

The Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) collects ₹1 a unit from High Tension (HT) consumers as networking charge. Some of the HT consumers have gone to the court in this regard, says a textile mill owner in Coimbatore.

The Tangedco was collecting ₹1.53 a unit from low tension industrial consumers. Following protests by Micro, Small and Medium scale Enterprises (MSMEs), the government recently announced a 50% reduction in networking



Tamil Nadu has 6,000 MW of installed solar energy capacity. About 1,000 MW is added every year because it is cheaper for industries, says energy consultant. FILE PHOTO

charge for the sector.

A.D. Thirumoorthy, energy consultant, says Tamil Nadu has almost 6,000 MW of installed solar energy capacity. Every year about 1,000 MW is added mainly because solar energy is cheaper for industries compared to grid power. Several industries that had invested in wind energy are now going in for solar

panels, he said.

According to the president of Coimbatore District Small Industries Association V. Thirugnanam, the number of MSMEs that have installed rooftop solar panels at present is less. However, with power costs likely to go up annually, the industries have to invest in renewable energy to be competitive.

The government should encourage investments in solar energy rather than discourage them with network charges. "That is why MSMEs are asking for zero charges for rooftop solar energy generation," he said.

A HT consumer, who did not want to be named, said larger industries are thinking twice before investing in solar energy now. "An industry cannot go in for higher capacities when installing solar panels on the rooftop. Yet, these installations do give relief and the industries that consume all the energy generated have no need to pay the government. Those who export excess power can do so," he says.

The HT consumers have approached the government many times but but to no avail, he adds.

Where does India stand on Israel-Hamas war?

What is India's stance vis-a-vis the West and the Global South? Is it now closer to Western countries than the Global South, and how will this impact India's relations with different powers in West Asia? What about India's relations with Iran, Israel's chief rival?

Subasini Haidar
Kallol Bhattacharjee

The story so far:

Over the past weeks, India has expressed itself in statements, joint statements, and votes at the United Nations on the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, that saw a temporary pause for the exchange of hostages which began on Friday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted two separate virtual summits, the concluding session of India's G-20 and the second edition of the 'Voice of Global South' Summit, and spoke about the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, as well as the importance of heeding the concerns of the developing world. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar travelled to the U.K. for talks, held along with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh "2+2" dialogues with their counterparts from the U.S. and Australia where joint statements reflected the West's position much more.

What is the position India has articulated?

India's position, as articulated since the October 7 terror attacks along the Israel-Gaza border by Hamas that killed more than 1,200 people, and then on the bombardment of Gaza by Israel where more than 13,000 have been killed, has been multi-layered. The Modi government has condemned terrorism in the strongest language and stood with Israel over the attack, although it

Experts suggest that India is being watched closely to see if its stance favours Israel over all other ties with the Gulf and the Arab world

hasn't thus far designated Hamas as a terror group. The government has called on Israel for restraint, dialogue and diplomacy and condemned the death of civilians, and along with the U.S. and Australia, called for "humanitarian pauses" in bombardment, but has not so far called for a "ceasefire". At the same time, India has reaffirmed its support for a "two-state solution" including a sovereign, viable state of Palestine existing in peace alongside Israel, supported the "socio-economic welfare" of the Palestinian people, and has sent 70 tonnes of humanitarian assistance including 16.5 tonnes of medicines and medical supplies via Egypt to Gaza in the past month. Mr. Jaishankar said at the BRICS emergency meeting chaired by South Africa this week.

Mr. Modi, however, skipped the BRICS plus summit attended by all other leaders of the 11-nation grouping, indicating a discomfort with the tough line taken by South Africa that has asked for the International Criminal Court to investigate Israel for alleged "war crimes" in Gaza. Meanwhile, at the United Nations, India abstained at a UNGA vote on October 26 that called on Israel for a ceasefire, but voted in favour of other draft resolutions at the UNGA's "Fourth Committee" on November 9 against Israel's settler policies in the occupied territories including the West Bank and Syrian Golan.

Is India's position closer to the West or the Global South?

Traditionally, since its leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, India's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict has always aligned with the Global South, offering full support for the Palestinian cause. It has called for talks to end the conflict, while building a stronger strategic, defence, counter-terrorism cooperation and trade ties with Israel since 1992, after they established full diplomatic ties. Since the Kargil war, where Israel provided India crucial and timely shipments of weapons and ammunition, a study of India's statements at the UN showed a softening of language against Israel, including toning down "condemnation" of Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, although it voted regularly with the developing world to stop the violence. India's vote on October 26, however, was a departure from that, where it lined up alongside 45 abstentions, mostly from European

countries, rather than the 120 countries, mostly from the Global South, which included nearly all the countries of West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and South America that voted for the resolution. India also joined the U.S.-led formulation of total condemnation of the October 7 terror attacks and for "humanitarian pauses", ostensibly to allow food, fuel and water into Gaza in between periods of Israeli bombardment, language that appeared in both its joint statements after the 2+2 dialogues with the U.S. and Australia.

India has stood apart from Western countries in that it has not thus far banned Hamas, or designated it a terror organisation as the U.S., U.K., Switzerland and Germany have moved to do. In an effort perhaps to push India to do so, Israel this week announced it was banning the Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group responsible for the Mumbai 26/11 terror attacks that included Israeli victims, 15 years later.

How will this impact ties in West Asia?

While India's relations with Israel have been increasingly "de-hyphenated" from its ties with Palestine, many experts have suggested that any change in its stance favouring Israel over all other ties with the Gulf and Arab world, will be watched closely. Each country has a rich history of ties with India. For several years, India has built special ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, calculating that the normalisation of ties between them and Israel is only a matter of time, as the Abraham Accords showed. As a result, the India-Israel-UAE-U.S. (I2U2) trade initiative and the recently launched India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor hinging on this normalisation could be one casualty of the Israel-Hamas conflict which has led to a strong reaction from the Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. When asked this week, the U.S. Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, accepted that the conflict could pause infrastructure initiatives, but that in the long term, the logic of such plans would prevail.

India's ties with Iran, Israel's chief enemy, that have been strengthened by initiatives like the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor to Central Asia and Russia could also be affected, if it seems that the Modi government is choosing one side more clearly than the other. Israeli companies have expressed interest in bringing in nearly a lakh of Indian workers to replace Palestinian workforce in the construction industry. New Delhi has thus far not jumped at the idea, keeping in mind the more than eight million Indians working in Gulf countries that could be impacted as well.



A second departure: Palestinians leaving the north, in the Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City on November 25. AFP

SEBI approves rules for index providers

The market regulator introduces a regulatory framework for index providers with the objective of fostering transparency and accountability; SEBI also amends rules to encourage Small & Medium REITs with an asset value of at least ₹50 crore and to strengthen investor protection in AIFs

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The board of the Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Saturday approved a regulatory framework for Index Providers with the objective of fostering transparency and accountability in governance and administration of financial benchmarks in the securities market.

"The regulations will provide a framework for registration of Index Providers which license 'Significant Indices' that shall be notified by SEBI based

on objective criteria," SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said.

The regulatory framework which is in accordance with IOSCO Principles for Financial Benchmarks will now only be applicable to 'Significant Indices'.

Further, in order to facilitate ease of compliance and to strengthen investor protection in Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), SEBI stipulated that any fresh investment made by an AIF beyond September 2024 would be held in dematerialised form.

As per the decision,

New market norms

SEBI gives its nod to new regulations that aim to ease fundraising and improve the administration of indices

- New regulations provide a framework for registration of Index Providers which license 'Significant Indices'
- SEBI stipulates that any fresh investment made by an AIF beyond September 2024 would be held in demat form
- Market regulator also approves flexible Social Stock Exchange rules to provide an impetus to fundraising by NPOs



AIFs may now appoint a custodian who is an associate or manager or sponsor of the AIF, subject to conditions similar to those prescribed under SEBI

(Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996 for permitting related party of sponsor of a Mutual Fund to act as its custodian.

The Board also noted

that the cost of compliance to the schemes coming under the said mandate was an average of approximately ₹88,000 per annum for availing custodial services.

The Board also approved amendments to SEBI (Real Estate Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 to create a regulatory framework for facilitation of Small & Medium REITs (SM REITs), with an asset value of at least ₹50 crore vis-à-vis minimum asset value of ₹500 crore for existing REITs.

SM REITs will have the ability to create separate scheme(s) for owning real

estate assets through special purpose vehicle(s) constituted as companies, Ms. Buch said.

The board also approved flexibility in the framework for Social Stock Exchange (SSE) to provide impetus to fundraising by Not for Profit Organisations (NPOs) on the Social Stock Exchange.

"The board approved changing the nomenclature of 'Social Auditor' with 'Social Impact Assessor' to provide comfort to NPOs and convey a positive approach towards the social sector," Ms. Buch said.