

Regarding Tunnel collapse in the Himalayan Region

SHRI ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY (BAHARAMPUR): Sir, I would like to flag the attention of the House to the fact that we all have witnessed with bated breath the rescue operation on NH-134 at the Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel. About 41 workers were trapped for 17 days in the tunnel. So, still, the horrible episode has been haunting us.

What I would like to highlight before you is that it is not an isolated incident. There have been recent incidents of collapse that have taken place in Himalayas. Those are (i) Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric project damage (ii) Teesta River flash floods (iii) Kiratpur-Nerchowk Tunnel collapse in Himachal Pradesh in 2015 (iv) Tehri Hydroelectric project tunnel collapse in 2004.

Sir, I would also like to state the reasons for the same over here that have been cited by the experts. Those are (i) Fractured or fragile rock (ii) Water seepage (iii) Landslide-prone Himalayan rock system (iv) Lack of geological and geo-technical studies (v) Improper study of shear zone (vi) Failure to design an escape tunnel.

Sir, at the last moment, the rat-hole miners were engaged to rescue those ill-fated labourers who were trapped. What I feel is that this kind of situation which took place in the Uttar Kashi could have been averted provided the Government paid heed to the views of those geologists who had earlier red-flagged that this kind of tunnel could be disastrous. Also, the Government is still not responding to such incident. Even there is an ambiguity and a contradiction between the statement of the media and the statement made by the Minister concerned. It was stated by the experts that there was no escape route. But the Minister has stated that yes, there was an escape route. I want the issue to be clarified by the Government. Thank you.