

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI
EXECUTION APPLICATION NO. 27 OF 2023
IN
ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 561 OF 2022**

IN THE MATTER OF:**URVASHI SHOBHNA KACHARI****...APPLICANT****VERSUS****UNION OF INDIA & ORS.****...RESPONDENTS****IN THE MATTER OF:****SHASHIKANT PUROHIT****...APPLICANT IN E.A. NO. 27/2023****INDEX**

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DELHI

DATED: 01.10.2024

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183 deaths during Chardham Yatra so far this year in Uttarakhand: State government data

More than 33 lakh pilgrims have visited the Himalayan temples over a period of more than three months so far

PTI | Dehradun | Published 28.08.24, 09:40 PM



file picture

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A total of 183 pilgrims have died since the start of Chardham Yatra in May this year in Uttarakhand, the State Emergency Operations Centre said on Wednesday.

Out of 183 deaths, 177 died due to health related issues and six in natural disasters along the pilgrimage route, the SEOC said.

Chardham Yatra began this year on May 10 with the opening of the Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri temples for pilgrims in the Garhwal Himalayas. The portals of Badrinath opened on May 12.

More than 33 lakh pilgrims have visited the Himalayan temples over a period of more than three months so far.

"There has been a sharp drop in the number of pilgrims going to Kedarnath since July 31 due to extensive damage caused by heavy rain to the trek route to the temple."

"Though the yatra to Kedarnath through the trek route has remained largely suspended in August, arrival of pilgrims in Kedarnath by helicopters continues. According to the figures issued by the SEOC, natural disasters damaged 86 houses fully, 242 severely and 1,229 partially across the 13 districts of Uttarakhand since June 15.

Except for the headline, this story has not been edited by The Telegraph Online staff and has been published from a syndicated feed."

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Heavy rain causes land subsidence in Uttarakhand, poses threat to Kund bridge connecting Kedarnath valley
After conducting an inspection, officials expressed concern that the strong water currents are eroding the foundation of the bridge pillars, posing a threat to the local population



Debris being cleared from a highway following a landslide, in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district (Photo | PTI)

Narendra Sethi

Updated on: 11 Aug 2024, 10:46 pm · 2 min read



DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand is reeling under the impact of monsoon rains, with roads and residential buildings suffering extensive damage. The state's hilly regions have been experiencing non-stop rainfall since the onset of the monsoon, leading to persistent weather challenges

According to the Rudraprayag District Disaster Management Office, multiple landslides have occurred on the Kund-Ukhimath-Chopta-Gopeshwar highway, while the iron bridge over the Mandakini River in Kund, which connects Rudraprayag-Gaurikund National Highway to Kedarghati and Kedarnath, is under threat due to strong river currents.

"Cracks have appeared on the bridge, and the foundation of one of its pillars is being eroded rapidly, posing a risk of a major accident", said District Disaster Management Officer Nandan Singh Rajwar.

The recent land submergence brought back memories of the Joshimath landslides that occurred earlier in the year 2023. The situation remains grim, with no respite from the rains in sight.

Officials from the Public Works Department, after conducting an inspection, expressed concern that the strong water currents are eroding the foundation of the bridge pillars, posing a threat to the local population and alarming the administration and NH authorities.

On Sunday, officials from the National Highway Construction Division, PWD, inspected the bridge site and immediately imposed a ban on the movement of heavy vehicles on the bridge.

"Jai Singh Rawat, an analyst who has been consistently researching and pondering over Uttarakhand's environmental and geological issues, told The New Indian Express, ""The disregard for suggestions and warnings from scientists and environmentalists can be held responsible for these incidents every time. The prediction of Joshimath's subsidence was made by the Mishra Committee as early as 1975.""
 Rawat further said, ""The wounds of the 2013 Kedarnath disaster, one of the most devastating monsoon tragedies in recent Indian history, have not yet healed, and similar conditions were witnessed on July 31, 2024, due to cloudbursts, landslides, and flash floods. Over 15,000 pilgrims stranded in Kedardham and the valley were safely evacuated through a joint rescue operation by the Army, NDRF, SDRF, DDRF, and YMRF, including ground and air forces. Three bodies were also recovered from the debris.""
 The Uttarakhand government has sounded a high alert in the affected areas, with emergency services on standby to respond to any further emergencies. The situation is being closely monitored, and residents are advised to exercise extreme caution."

711

Uttarakhand monsoon mayhem: Death toll mounts to more than a dozen, 16 feared missing after Kedarnath. The disaster has left over 1,000 pilgrims stranded at the Kedarnath Dham. According to data from the State Meteorological Center, the state has broken its 58-year rainfall record.



Relief teams navigate treacherous terrain to reach stranded pilgrims. Photo | Express
Narendra Sethi

Updated on: 02 Aug 2024, 4:17 pm · 3 min read



DEHRADUN: After Wednesday's devastating monsoon rains in Uttarakhand which claimed 13 lives, the toll continues to rise. In a fresh incident, 16 people went missing after a cloudburst triggered landslides on the Kedarnath pedestrian route late Wednesday night. According to data from the State Meteorological Center, the state has broken its 58-year rainfall record.

The disaster has left over **1,000 pilgrims stranded at the Kedarnath Dham**. Police Superintendent Rudraprayag, Dr Vishakha Bhadane, ensured that search and rescue operations are underway to locate those missing in the tragedy.

In an exclusive interview with *The New Indian Express*, Commandant of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Manikant Mishra, said, "SDRF personnel from Uttarakhand conducted rescue operations late into the night to evacuate 450 stranded pilgrims from the Munakatiya area to Sonprayag in the Kedarnath yatra route. The rescue operations will continue unabated on Thursday until all pilgrims are safely evacuated."

SDRF Commandant Manikant Mishra deployed drones to assess the situation and plan next steps after a landslide and boulder fall damaged a 2-kilometer-long alternate rescue path on the Sonprayag-Gaurikund hill route.

"The last day of July saw a record-breaking rainfall in Dehradun, with the 24-hour downpour shattering a 58-year record. Additionally, Haridwar also witnessed the highest rainfall in the past 40 years, breaking the previous record," said Director of the State Meteorological Center, Dr Bikram Singh, citing Meteorological Department data.



Cloudburst in Himachal Pradesh: Rescue operation underway to trace 45 missing people



Experts urge enhanced early warning, evacuation systems amid landslide disasters

Relief teams navigate treacherous terrain to reach stranded pilgrims. Photo | Express

Director Dr Bikram Singh told *The New Indian Express*, "There is a possibility of one or two spells of heavy rainfall on Friday as well. An orange alert has been issued for Uttarkashi, indicating heavy to very heavy rainfall. Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Dehradun, Bageshwar, and Nainital may witness thunderstorms accompanied by heavy rainfall."

712
According to the sources at MET department, Dehradun witnessed a record-breaking 175 mm rainfall between Wednesday and Thursday mornings, the highest since 1966 when 487 mm rainfall was recorded. Haridwar also saw the highest single-day rainfall in 40 years, with 242 mm downpour, surpassing the previous record set in 1984. Dr Bikram Singh further added that Dehradun received 35 per cent more rainfall than usual in July.

Vinod Kumar Suman, Secretary of Disaster Management in Uttarakhand, told this newspaper, "Only the route between Gaurikund and Kedarnath is blocked. Yesterday, we evacuated 2300 people from Gaurikund to Sonprayag and 700 people from Bhimboli and Lincholi to Guptkashi. 1000 people are safe in Kedarnath. Relief and rescue operations are underway using four helicopters from Lincholi and Bhimboli."

The State has received an **MI-17 aircraft and a Chinook helicopter from the Centre for rescue operations**, which will resume once the weather clears. While Yamunotri, Gangotri, and Badrinath pilgrimages continue, the Kedarnath pilgrimage has been temporarily suspended.

Central Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah spoke to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami over the phone to inquire about the disaster situation in various parts of the state. Dhami briefed Shah on the large-scale relief and rescue operations underway in the affected areas. Shah assured all possible assistance for the safety of the state's residents and pilgrims.

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Uttarakhand to seek central assistance to manage growing pilgrim population

With the rising floating population due to pilgrims and tourists the state government expected assistance to manage the population in the budget the state requested compensation for landslides and forest fires.



Devotees offers prayers at the Kedarnath Temple after its portals opened, marking the start of the 'Char Dham Yatra' File Photo | PTI

Narendra Sethi

Updated on: 25 Jul 2024, 3:05 pm · 2 min read



DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand, renowned globally for its spiritual and domestic tourism, is facing an unprecedented challenge with its floating population surging eight-fold annually. The state government will approach the Center via NITI Aayog for help in coping with the massive tourist influx, which strains infrastructure and resources disproportionately.

Finance Minister Premchand Agarwal had requested Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to address the state's key issues, including the challenges posed by the floating population, but the budget made no mention of it. The omission has left the state government dismayed, as it had hoped for support to cope with the infrastructural strain caused by the large influx of tourists and pilgrims.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama, in a media interaction, appealed to the NITI Aayog for central assistance to manage the state's massive tourist population. He stated, "We request the c to provide us with central aid to cater to the millions of people who visit us every year."

Highlighting the scale of the challenge, Dhama said, "Our state's population is multiplied eight times due to the arrival of people from across the country for Char Dham Yatra, Kanwar Yatra, and other religious pilgrimages, putting a massive strain on our resources."

According to sources, the Uttarakhand government had requested the Center to include compensation for damages caused by devastating forest fires and high-voltage transmission line losses in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) norms. However, the latest budget has made no mention of this demand.

In a conversation with *The New Indian Express*, social activist Anoop Nautiyal expressed disappointment, stating, "The budget barely mentions or neglects the severe environmental and climate challenges in its nine key priorities. While there are assurances for Uttarakhand, Himachal, and Sikkim, there is nothing significant for the Indian Himalayan region in the budget."

Anoop expressed dismay, stating, "Uttarakhand has been overlooked with no allocation for green bonus or floating population. Rudraprayag and Tehri districts, are among the 147 most landslide-prone districts in the country, we had hoped for some relief. We expected the budget to announce the establishment of glacier or landslide research centers in Uttarakhand, but that hasn't happened."

Uttarakhand Congress chief spokesperson Garima Dasoni said, "The NDA government's budget this time has been the most disappointing, especially considering that Uttarakhand is severely affected by forest fires and disasters. Despite this, the Centre has chosen to ignore the state's needs and failed to make provisions in the central budget for this purpose."

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Uttarakhand grapples with heavy rains, two fatalities in landslide-prone area; Char Dham yatra suspended
The IMD has issued a fresh alert for the next 36 hours, predicting heavy rainfall and landslides in certain areas.



The Badrinath Highway has been blocked at several locations due to landslides and boulder falls, leaving hundreds of pilgrims stranded. (Photo| EPS)

Narendra Sethi

Updated on: 07 Jul 2024, 11:24 pm · 2 min read



DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand has been grappling with incessant and intense rainfall over the past four days, particularly in the hilly regions, throwing normal life into chaos. In response to the Meteorological Department's warning, the state government has temporarily suspended the Char Dham Yatra for two days.

The torrential rains have caused widespread destruction, with three bridges collapsing in the state. The Meteorological Department has issued a fresh alert for the next 36 hours, predicting heavy rainfall and landslides in certain areas. Residents in these regions have been advised to stay indoors and avoid travel.

According to the Disaster Management Office, a car was heading from Karnaprayag towards Adibadri when it lost control near Chandpur Gadhi due to poor road conditions and fell into a gorge, resulting in the tragic deaths of two women. Three others sustained injuries in the incident.

Devendra Singh, a police official at Simli police Chowki, confirmed that Binsari Devi, 85, succumbed to her injuries at the accident scene. Four others - Vikram Kunwar, 52, Rohit, 18, Mohan Prasad, 57, and Usha Devi, 52 - all residents of Kansuwa, were injured in the tragic incident. Later, Usha Devi succumbed to her injuries during treatment.

In the meantime, three bridges in the state have collapsed due to the massive water flow, and the Meteorological Department has issued a fresh alert for the next 36 hours, predicting heavy rainfall and landslides in certain areas. Residents in these regions have been advised to stay indoors and avoid travel.

According to information received from the Disaster Management Office, a total of 142 roads were blocked across the state on Saturday, leaving commuters stranded for hours. Additionally, 56 roads had been blocked since Friday.

"The Public Works Department (PWD) has managed to reopen 89 roads, but 109 roads remain blocked, including one national highway, seven state highways, 11 major district roads, two other district roads, and 88 rural roads. Dr. Bikram Singh, Director of the Meteorological Center Dehradun told this daily, "A high alert for heavy rainfall in Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar, Champawat, Pithoragarh, and Almora districts has been issued". In response, police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), and forest department teams have been deployed in sensitive areas to mitigate any potential disasters.

"Residents have been advised to stay indoors and avoid travel through loudspeakers in various police stations since Saturday night", said a spokesperson of the state disaster management authority.

Dehradun State Highway bridge was partially washed away due to heavy rainfall on Sunday morning. Meanwhile, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Kaladhungi, Reka Kohli, along with teams from the Public Works Department and Revenue Department, inspected the affected areas and appealed to the public to exercise caution.

The Badrinath Highway has been blocked at several locations due to landslides and boulder falls, leaving hundreds of pilgrims stranded. Heavy boulders have fallen on the highway at Totaghati, Safed Pahad, and Vishnu Prayag, damaging parts of the road and blocking the way. The pilgrims are waiting for the highway to reopen."

This story is from June 24, 2022

Uttarakhand: 220 Mules Die In 46 Days Of Char Dham Yatra On Routes To 4 Shrines

CITY | TNN | Jun 24, 2022, 08:50 IST



A total of 220 mules have died in the past 46 days of the Char Dham yatra since it started on May 3.



DEHRADUN: A total of 220 mules have died in the past 46 days of the Char Dham yatra since it started on May 3. According to data available with the animal husbandry department, the maximum of 176 of these mules died on the 16-km Kedarnath trek route, followed by 32 on the Gangotri and Yamunotri trek routes in Uttarkashi and 12 on the Badrinath route. As reported by TOI, most equine deaths are caused by exertion and exploitation of the mules by owners looking to earn profits after losses incurred in the last two years.

The district administration has earned around Rs 29 lakh so far with the registration of over 8,000 mules. With every mule, three workers are deployed, which means livelihood of 24,000 depend directly on trips made by the animals. Now with the government cracking the whip on animal cruelty on yatra routes and putting in place curbs on use of the animals, some mule owners said it's affecting business.

"We try to provide food and rest to the animals as the administration has asked us to but deploying a mule only alternate days is taking a huge toll on business. Not just mules, even humans die but who can tell the exact cause? How do we know it's exertion and not a health condition? Plus, there are no medical or stay facilities to help us take care of ourselves and our animals," said Asfaq Miyan who is now heading back to Uttar Pradesh with his mules as the monsoon is just round the corner. Meanwhile, the animal husbandry department has already penalised some mule owners for violating rules. Meanwhile, development of facilities for the equines is underway on the yatra routes. As reported by TOI earlier, several mules are made to work by thrashing them with sticks, injecting steroids, etc. Mules often drop dead and the carcasses are tossed in the Mandakini river.

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Char Dham Yatra: Mules used on Kedarnath route dying due to overwork; 60 die in just 20 days

At least 60 mules have died in just 20 days due to the treacherous terrain of the Kedarnath route as handlers are burdening them with work and beating them.

MIRROR NOW Mirror Now Digital

Updated Jun 3, 2022, 10:57 IST



The handlers are mandated to make only one trip for a mule. However, they are freely defying the rules.

Rudraprayag: The mules being used for Char Dham yatra's Kedarnath route are dying to be to being overworked. A report suggests that 60 mules died in just 20 days due to the treacherous terrain of the Kedarnath route.

It is alleged that mule owners and handlers made the animals overworked due to heavy footfall caused due to the backlog created by the COVID pandemic in the last two years.

The animal husbandry minister Saurabh Bahuguna had recently advised the mule handlers not to burden the animals but to no avail, said a report in Times of India.

Pilgrims and local residents alleged that the mules are given drugs to keep them going and are even mercilessly beaten up to make them work.

The handlers are mandated to make only one trip for one mule. However, they are freely defying the rules. Before the 2013 Uttarakhand floods, there were four stop and rest areas for animals on the earlier route. But there is none on the new route.

"It is a common sight to see the animals slipping especially on the way down due to rains and terrain," the report quoted a traveller from Rajasthan as saying.

Meanwhile, veterinary staff from Rudraprayag chief veterinary office has been deployed along with police and administration officials to check on any sick or tired animals. Officials say they are working tirelessly to check on animals' health on the route.

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Thousands missing in Kedarnath, death toll may zoom



IANS

Last Updated : 19 June 2013, 18:41 IST

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What's Brewing



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Houses are partly submerged in the flooded River Ganges in Uttarakashi district, in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, India, Tuesday, June 18, 2013. Monsoon torrential rains have caused havoc in northern India leading to flash floods, cloudbursts and landslides as the death toll continues to climb and more than 1,000 pilgrims bound for Himalayan shrines remain stranded. (AP Photo)

Thousands of people are missing following the devastating floods in Uttarakhand, officials said Wednesday, adding the death toll may run into frightening figures.

While the Uttarakhand government has confirmed the death of 110 people, officials privately concede that the number of fatalities may be much more than what is now known.

The dead include two policemen and three troopers of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

One official involved in the evacuation and rescue work told IANS on telephone that they feared that thousands might have perished in the rains and flash floods that lashed the state since Friday.

One official involved in the evacuation and rescue work told IANS on telephone that they feared that thousands might have perished in the rains and flash floods that lashed the state since Friday.

"We are not sure of the number of people who have died in the rains but for sure the numbers are much higher as more than 15,000 people are reported missing," a senior official said.

Uttarakhand Director General of Police Satyavrat conceded that two policemen and three ITBP troopers had perished and that an entire police outpost at Ram Bada had gone missing.

Moreover, whereabouts of a section of the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) posted there was not known.

Survivors returning from the disaster hit areas told IANS that they had seen bodies on roadsides and in the temple compound of Kedarnath - a sacred destination for Shiva followers.

Kedarnath, one of four highly revered shrines in Uttarkhand, is located at a height of 3,581 metres above sea level in the Rudra Himalayan range. The over 1,000-year-old temple was said to be built by Adi Shankara.

Officials admit that all of the 250 plus government and private hotels and lodges and more than 100 shops around the temple have been flattened.

The district magistrate of Rudraprayag, V.K. Dhaudhiyal, said he feared that the death toll in Kedarnath could be much higher.

At any given time, officials said 700 to 1,000 people were always at Ram Bada, which is now a heap of debris.

With 380 mm of rainfall, 450 percent more than usual, battering the area, aerial surveys have confirmed the worst fears.

Official records point out that during the June 14-16 rain fury, more than 13,000 people were at Kedarnath. And while officials confirm evacuation of more than 1,000 people, the fate of the remaining 12,000 remains uncertain.

Other than this, officials fear massive loss of livestock. More than 5,500 mules are registered on the 14-km walking stretch from the base camp to the shrine. Police and other officials have no information on either the mules or the people they were carrying or of their runners.

Other than this, the whereabouts of more than 1,000 people employed at the Ram Bada market, several hundred government employees, over 100 priests in the Shiva shrine are also not known.

The extent of damage in and around Kedarnath can be gauged by the fact that even Uttarakhand Chief Minister Vijay Bahuguna admits it is "a calamity that has numbed him by its sheer magnitude".

Bahuguna told IANS that more than 18 km of trek to the shrine has been ripped apart and it would not be possible for the pilgrimage to Kedarnath to resume before one year.

www.deccanherald.com

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 mules die in Kedarnath in 15 days of yatra, mostly due to colic

TNN | May 26, 2024, 02:21 PM IST



DEHRADUN: At least 19 mules deployed to ferry pilgrims and provisions for officials have succumbed to health issues and various other reasons in Kedarnath in the 15 days since the Char Dham yatra began on May 10.

Officials said 11 mules died due to equine colic (a general term for abdominal pain in mules), six died after slipping off the trail, and two due to pneumonitis. Of the 9,000 registered mules at Kedarnath yatra, 34 were found unfit for ferrying pilgrims after they underwent treatment and medical screening.

Dr Ashish Rawat, Rudraprayag's chief veterinary officer (CVO), said, "A 24x7 warm drinking water supply has been started for mules and horses on the trail this year. Equine colic is related to indigestion and stomach pain. Warm water would help mules stay hydrated at all times. Since the yatra began, 2,137 mules underwent health screening, 34 were found unfit for the journey, and 437 were treated for medical issues they suffered."

MULE LOSSES RAISE YATRA CONCERNS

REASONS BEHIND DEATHS

11 mules died due to equine colic (a general term for abdominal pain in mules)

6 died after slipping off the trail

2 died due to pneumonitis

Of the **9,000** registered mules at Kedarnath yatra, 34 were found unfit for ferrying pilgrims after they underwent treatment & medical screening



“A 24x7 warm drinking water supply has been started for mules & horses on the trail this year. Equine colic is related to indigestion and stomach pain. Warm water would help mules stay hydrated at all times”

—DR ASHISH RAWAT | RUDRAPRAYAG'S CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER (CVO)

According to official data, no mule deaths have been reported from Badrinath, Yamunotri, and Gangotri- the other three Char Dham shrines- so far. Last year, 16 mules died in the first fortnight of the yatra. In 2022, 60 equines died in the yatra's first 20 days, raising concerns over the working conditions of the animals along the route.

On May 13, an FIR under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, was registered against a mule owner for flouting the norms, Rawat said. TOI had reported last year that most mules were dying due to dehydration, which results in fatal colic issues. After seeing "cruelty against the equines", wildlife lovers moved the high court demanding "directions for protecting the animals from exertion and exploitation".

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This story is from June 02, 2022

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Mules In Kedarnath Overworked, Beaten, Drugged & Dying

CITY | Tanmayee Tyagi | TNN | Jun 2, 2022, 09:39 IST



A check by TOI revealed that equines on the Char Dham yatra's Kedarnath route were being worked to death, flogged and often drugged... [Read More](#)

RUDRAPRAYAG: A check by TOI revealed that equines on the Char Dham yatra's Kedarnath route were being worked to death, flogged and often drugged to make them carry more load and with greater frequency. TOI had earlier reported that over 60 mules had died in the first 20 days of the yatra due to strenuous conditions, as handlers and owners were in a rush to make the most of the unprecedented footfall due to the "backlog" created by two years of the pandemic.

After the report, animal husbandry minister Saurabh Bahuguna had sent an advisory to all mule-handlers to spare the animals from overexertion, but nothing seems to have changed on the ground. Local residents, even some pilgrims, said that the animals were often "beaten mercilessly with sticks and given narcotics" to keep them going. Many of the animal handlers were finding ways to bypass rules that mandated only one trip on the trek for each equine. The earlier route -- before the 2013 floods -- had four rest and check-up stops along the way for animals. The new route has none, an official said. "It is a common sight to see the animals slipping, especially on the way down, because of the rains and the terrain. Yesterday, a horse slipped, hit its muzzle on the ground but the handler just hit the animal with a stick so that it wouldn't stop," said Manoj Semwal, a traveller from Rajasthan's Kota.

Officials from the Rudraprayag chief veterinary office (CVO) have now been posted at the beginning of the trek along with police and administration personnel. They are checking registrations and are on the lookout for tired or sick animals.

"We are working hard to keep a check but some cases slip through. Our focus should be on the animals' health but there is a severe lack of personnel. Sometimes we get to know about the death of an animal but it takes up to a day to retrieve the body. They are indeed being overexerted," said an official from the CVO office.

Meanwhile, the animal welfare board raised concerns about the spread of Glanders (a zoonotic disease that can affect humans as

well). It demanded construction of sheds across the route, quarantine and isolation centres, and mandatory Glanders test. They have requested a policy for working equines and want the state to notify the Prevention of Cruelty to Draught and Pack Animal Rules 1965, along with Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Licensing of Farriers) Rules, 1965 as well.

This story is from May 26, 2022

Carcasses Of Dead Mules In Kedarnath Thrown Into Mandakini River, Allege Locals

CITY | Shivani Azad | TNN | May 26, 2022, 04:41 IST

Dehradun: In 20 days of Kedarnath yatra, almost 60 mules, used for ferrying pilgrims and provisions to the shrine, have succumbed to "exertion" and poor diet.

What is shocking is that some of these carcasses are being allegedly dumped into the Mandakini river which emerges from the Chorabari glacier in Kedarnath and goes on to merge with the Ganga as it progresses downwards.

Equine colic and accidental injuries have been cited as the major causes of the mules' deaths, as per Dr Ashish Rawat, Rudraprayag's district veterinary officer. These mules ferry pilgrims from Gaurikund to Kedarnath -- a 19-km trek.

Rawat further said, "We have around 8,500 mules and horses on duty at present. Since May 5, at least 60 of them have died -- 53 from acute abdominal issues and the rest due to accidental injuries. In fact, exertion and inadequate food is causing their death. Some of them are used for two trips a day, although only one trip is allowed. In sub-zero temperatures this can prove fatal."

According to data available with the animal husbandry department, the maximum of 176 of these mules died on the 16-km Kedarnath trek route, followed by 32 on the Gangotri and Yamunotri trek routes in Uttarkashi and 12 on the Badrinath route. As reported by TOI, most equine deaths are caused by exertion and exploitation of the mules by owners looking to earn profits after losses incurred in the last two years.

Talking about the mules' diet, Dr Rawat said, "The mules should be kept hydrated and fed soaked grams. And they should not take more than one trip a day. After Covid slowdown, owners are probably pushing themselves as well as the mules hard to earn more money, thereby flouting guidelines."

Most of these mules are brought from Uttarkashi, Champawat, Pauri, Pithoragarh and Bijnor, especially for the Char Dham yatra. Rawat added: "Each of the licenced mules has a tag on its ear to know it is disease-free. We have sector officers deployed on the route to penalise unlicensed mule owners."

Meanwhile, an official at the animal husbandry department claimed that they have received insurance claims for 57 mules which means their "burial took place as per the rules". "In two cases, dead mules may have been thrown into the river while in another case, a carcass was left abandoned near a road. Insurance amount is anywhere between Rs 60,000 and Rs 70,000, which the mule owner usually gets provided they follow the burial rules properly," the official added.

So far, Kedarnath has hosted 3.2 lakh pilgrims since the opening of shrine's portals on May 6.