

## **FLOOD 2014 – A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW**

Notwithstanding the human efforts to mitigate the suffering caused due to the occurrence of calamities, forces majeure are *ultra vires* of human control. We the fallible are manipulating the nature in numerous ways and the nature is repaying us for our vagaries manifold. One such event exhibited by the nature was the recent flood in the vale of Kashmir. Much has been written about the recent flood in Kashmir since the time it left the valley trampling every inch of it. Many things were told and retold. Many paragraphs are tinted with prejudice and ignorance oblivious of the good work having been done so far since Maharaja Partap Singh. Despite many constraints, the process of such work is positively evolving with time. Be it the construction of flood spill channel as the first major flood controlling work in 1903 or the measures viz. strengthening of Jhelum bunds in the city reach and constructing regulating gates at Ram Munshi Bagh, Gaw Kadal and Dalgate, advised by the then Government of India lent British engineers headed by Mr. D. G. Harris which upon their implementation gave appreciable relief to the city, or the creation of a full-fledged 'Flood Control Department' in the state in 1953-54, or the formulation of Master plan for the valley for flood control measures in 1957 which envisaged improving upon the out fall channel from Ninglee to Khadinyar, or the appointment of a high level Flood Committee in 1975 to suggest the different probable measures to control the floods in future to minimize the magnitude of damages caused by floods, or the efforts to enhance the carrying capacity of flood spill channel and the river from Sopore to Baramulla reach since 2009 or the ongoing Wullar Conservation Project --- the list conspicuously shows that the state planners assisted by experts from the Central Water Commission are not sleeping over the matter.

The recent flood in the valley created a lot of confusion. The very seat of the governance was inundated. However, the flood fury did not hamper functioning of the government particularly the department during initial stages when the spate was building up into a monstrous deluge of water nor did it dampen the spirit of field workers during the flood when the department was making efforts (on 5<sup>th</sup> September) in collusion with R&B Department for making the approach of Wahibugh bridge across Romshi nallah trafficable which remained the only road link between Srinagar and Pulwama/Shopian during the flood. The Chief Engineer remained in constant touch with the public through all the available media via various programmes viz. Good Morning Kashmir, Sheharbeen, Big 92.7 and Social Network page of Irrigation & Flood Control providing necessary instructions to the public to follow as a sequel to the rising water levels in the river. A lot of air needs to be cleared to

provide an un-prejudicial picture of the events which took shape during the flood. All Zonal Flood Committees (having flood related jurisdiction over one or more districts working with district administration) were alerted right on 3<sup>rd</sup> September after 'Flood Control Room' was established at Chief Engineer's Headquarters at Rajbagh which was later shifted to Police Control Room, Srinagar. By noon the same day, announcement regarding declaration of flood was made through media after a meeting with Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir for alarming the general masses. Again on 4<sup>th</sup> September, the people in south and central Kashmir were advised to move to safer places through Doordarshan Kendra Srinagar, Radio Kashmir and Social Network page of the department after a meeting taken by the Chairman, Central Flood Committee, Kashmir Division (Hon'ble Minister for PHE, Irrigation & Flood Control Department, Govt. of J & K). By 11.00 am on the same day, massive breaches had developed at Kandizal and the Dogripora river side was spilling over. The general notion about not breaching the river at Kandizal is factually incorrect as the huge discharge had pre-empted any such action. There is no recorded instance of officially breaching the river side at Kandizal, *albeit*, the breached Kandizal might have alleviated the flood situation in the city in the past. Even the army authorities were informed about the breach at Police Control Room set up in the office of I.G.P. Kashmir, as the confirmation regarding the same had come directly from the Zonal Flood Committee, Kakapora on 4<sup>th</sup> September. The Daily "Greater Kashmir" dated 5<sup>th</sup> September published the statement of Chief Engineer, Kashmir Irrigation and Flood Control Department regarding the breach having occurred on 4<sup>th</sup> September at Kandizal. On 5<sup>th</sup> September, the people residing in Mehjoor Nagar area were alerted for moving to safer places. Likewise, on 6<sup>th</sup> September, the residents of Rajbagh, Shivpora etc. were advised to shift to safer place as the gauge at Ram Munshi Bagh had crossed the danger mark. Again on 7<sup>th</sup> September, people of Srinagar were informed through divisional administration to move to safer places. On the same day, Vice Chairman, Lakes and Water Ways Authority was dispatched an SMS to open gates of Dal Lake. A message was aired through Radio Kashmir in the live Helpline programme for the people of north Kashmir to move to safer places.

There is a lot of talking making rounds about absence of procedural mode of alarming the general masses in flood situation in the valley. The general masses need to have some awareness about disasters like earthquakes, floods, avalanches, fires etc. How many of us know how to use a fire extinguisher in case of eruption of a mild fire? We see such things in almost all public buildings and we pass by them without caring to know their utility. Similar is the case with flood alerts. There is proper and established procedure for flood alerts in the

department. The water levels in the river are observed at many places, the prominent among them are: Sangam, Ram Munshibagh, Shadipora, Asham and Sopore. In fact, the department has a 70 year record of such observations which are shared with the Central Water Commission and Pakistan (under Indus Water Treaty, 1962). There is a prefixed set of levels in case of river Jhelum at which two alarms viz. 'Flood Alert' & 'Flood Declaration' are sounded. In recent flood, the alerts have been given to general public at proper times commensurating with the water levels in the river and there has been no deviation from the established procedure in this regard.

The deluge has not caught us un-aware as it was in the offing as per 'return period' of such events but it caught us unprepared. The steps had been initiated by the department for meeting such an eventuality in the form of 'Integrated Flood Management and Drainage Development Project of River Jhelum and its tributaries' as an all-encompassing flood in the valley had been gauged by the department well in seventies. The department is preparing a detailed report about "Floods in Kashmir – Future Initiatives" which will be made public very shortly.