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# Toy train services on UNESCO Kalka- Shimla Railway line may remain disrupted for months



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**In the history of 120 years of this rail line, it has never remained closed for such a long period of time ever**

**VISHAL SARIN**  
SHIMLA

In the heart of the picturesque Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh, a challenging dilemma has unfolded, one that pits the preservation of nature against the safety and security of its inhabitants. The recent onslaught of heavy rains has compelled the government to reassess its age-old policy of imposing a blanket ban on green felling; creating a contentious debate that underscores the complex interplay between ecology and human lives.

For the better part of seven to eight decades, Himachal Pradesh has zealously adhered to forest management practices that strictly protected its vast natural wealth. However, in the

wake of this year's devastating rain fury, the state government is confronted with the difficult task of simplifying rules to allow for the felling of certain scheduled species of trees in habitable areas, by implementing exigency measures.

Of course, the decision is not without its share of controversy, as environmental activists vehemently oppose the uprooting of green wealth. These activists argue that the unique ecology of a place, teeming with diverse wildlife, insects, and microorganisms, takes thousands of years to develop. While replanting trees elsewhere might seem like a viable solution, it cannot replicate the intricate ecosystem of the original site. The new trees

need time to grow, establish symbiotic relationships with microorganisms and wildlife, stabilize the soil, and preserve water in the area. What may take only a few minutes to cut down can erase centuries of ecological nurturing. A more thoughtful and harmonious approach to development is the need of the hour, they contend.

However, the other side of the coin reveals a stark reality. The recent uprooting of a large number of Deodar, Oak, and other trees across the state has led to severe damage to homes, vehicles, and, tragically, several lives lost. Civil authorities have been compelled to exercise extraordinary

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**ML VERMA**  
SHIMLA

The famed UNESCO-listed Kalka-Shimla Railway line, renowned for its heritage toy train services, remains paralyzed for almost a month due to extensive damage caused by flash floods and landslides.

The services on the heritage toy train track may remain closed

for some more time, as it has suffered a historic disaster due to this year's devastating rains. The track which was closed since July 12 this, year may get reopened in a few months, confirmed a Railway employee." The track is affected at more than a dozen places, he confirmed.

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# INDIA alliance pressures Modi Government to reduce LPG prices after nine years

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
SHIMLA

In a scathing attack, the Council of Ministers in the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led government criticized the Central government, accusing it of pushing the people to the brink during its nine-year rule. However, in the last three months since the formation of the INDIA Alliance, the Modi government has been compelled to slash LPG prices by Rs 200.

Speaking to the media today, Congress leader and Revenue and Horticulture Minister Jagat Singh Negi described the last three months as a turning point, with the INDIA Alliance compelling the Modi government to reduce LPG prices after

a nine-year hiatus. Negi emphasized the urgency of the INDIA Alliance and suggested that the Modi government was now hastening to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold early elections in the country, given the impact of the Alliance.

Negi, who represents the Kinnaur district on the India-China border in the state assembly, emphasized the perturbing effect of the INDIA Alliance on the Modi government, highlighting its effectiveness in addressing the pressing needs of the nation. He also criticized the BJP as a divisive force, questioning the necessity of promoting the "One Nation, One Election" agenda when India has always been a united nation. He argued that such

agendas are used to divert attention from critical issues such as unemployment, inflation, development, and law and order, all of which the Modi government has failed to address. These divisive tactics, he suggested, were being employed in anticipation of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections next year.

Negi pointed out that India has remained united since 1947, with the leadership of Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel successfully integrating numerous princely states into one unified India, even as 600 princely states had the option to join either India or Pakistan after British colonial rule ended

# Toy train services on UNESCO Kalka-Shimla Railway line may remain disrupted for months

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In the history of 120 years of this rail line, it has never remained closed for such a long period of time ever, they informed. "Even some heritage structures like 'Bailey bridges' enroute have also got damaged this year, which was never seen before. Moreover around a dozen trees have fallen on the UNESCO Kalka-Shimla Railway line between Kalka and Shimla have also been damaged.

The railway official also confirmed that the track has been damaged at a number of places due to erroneous construction done by NHAI.

Major losses to the track were observed during the rains between August 12 to 14. The IMD recorded around 230 to 250 mm rain during those 48 hrs.

Railway officers on the scene disclosed that a section of the track, measuring approximately 150 meters, is left hanging in a precarious state near Shiv Bau-

di, where the flash floods and landslides triggered extensive damage. The historic Indian Institute of Advanced Study also bore the brunt of the calamity, compounding the difficulties in track restoration.

Further exacerbating the situation, a landslide struck near Tak-sal at Tunnel No. 1 in Solan district on Thursday night. Multiple other locations along the route also reported track damage due to the combined impact of flash floods and landslides. The gravity of the situation prompted the Shimla district administration to issue advisories to railway booking centers situated at scandal points, urging them to remain closed temporarily. These centers, housing reservation and booking facilities, were deemed vulnerable to the ongoing heavy rainfall.

As the authorities grapple with the enormity of the challenge, no railway official has been able to provide a definitive timeline for the resumption of the cherished toy train services

along the narrow gauge 96 km heritage line. This disruption marks the first instance in over a century when the historic route has remained devoid of train services for such an extended period.

The railway track has also fallen victim to uprooted trees at various points, exacerbating the restoration process.

Notably, the British-built track, known for its resilience, has rarely faced such extensive devastation, even during harsh snowfall. This saga of disruption and destruction casts a shadow over the historic significance of the Kalka-Shimla Railway line. Opened to the public on November 9, 1903, the railway line celebrated its 120th anniversary just last year.

A moment of pride for India, the railway was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site on July 10, 2008, and stands as a testament to the nation's rich rail-roading history under the label "Mountain Railways of India."

# Protecting people: Himachal's ecological irony

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powers to remove old trees that have outlived their natural lifespan and now pose a danger, with many of them tangling on roads, houses, schools, and public spaces.

The menace posed by these trees extends to the winter season, where falling branches and tops during snowstorms wreaks havoc on power and cable lines. Particularly vulnerable are areas in Capital Shimla are like Oak over, Rajbhawan, US Club, IGMC, Summerhill, Chaura Madan, Kaithu, Annandale and Richmond to Ramchander Chonk, where the threat of devastation looms large.

Noteworthy here that the lifespan of a tree, spans upto 100 to 1000 years. However in urban areas like Shimla, where these trees have given their shadow and bliss for years the story is now different. In lack of any fixed development plan, rapid urbanization and mindless cutting of these hills has taken toll on the far spreaded roots of these trees under the ground, thus making them more vulnerable during heavy rains and landslides. Now since the conservation of such trees is beyond repair especially in urban areas of the State, the need for removal becomes evident, if human lives have to be given priority over the rest of the concerns.

Infact many citizens opine that if soon the city does not gets its own final Development plan now, the other trees which are left to keep the green cover here, may also meet a similar fate in days to come.

Noteworthy here that it's not just urban areas grappling with this issue. Rural bodies have

started also invoking exigency provisions to rid themselves of dangerous trees that threaten the lives of both humans and animals. Euclaptous and Pines, among others, are being singled out for removal.

In a noteworthy development, the Gram Panchayat Kakkar of Development Block Boranj in Hamirpur district issued a public notice on August 24, 2023. They urged the public to cooperate in the removal of trees hovering over houses or cowsheds, a move driven by concerns for public safety. Their resolution underscores the urgency of the matter, making tree owners directly responsible for any damage caused by falling trees.

As Himachal Pradesh grapples with this intricate issue, it finds itself at a crossroads. The choice between preserving its rich ecological heritage and safeguarding the lives and property of its residents is not an easy one. Striking the right balance will require a measured approach that considers both sides of the argument.

In the end, the solution may lie in a pragmatic blend of conservation efforts and strategic tree removals, with a focus on planting new trees and nurturing them to maturity. The path forward must prioritize long-term ecological sustainability while ensuring the immediate safety of the people who call this breathtaking state their home.

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# Himachal Pradesh experiencing unprecedented monsoon season, 33 per. excess

ML VERMA  
SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh, known for its picturesque landscapes and serene beauty, has witnessed an extraordinary monsoon season this year, bringing both blessings and calamities. While the state received a staggering 816.4 mm of cumulative rainfall until the end of August 31, compared to the normal average of 613.8 mm, this abundance of rain came at a high cost. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has reported that the state experienced a remarkable 33 percent excess rainfall this year, contrasting sharply with other regions of the Indian Peninsula grappling with deficient rainfall conditions, this year.

The monsoon season, which is expected to persist for at least 25 days, has already etched unforgettable tragedies in the annals of the season's history. Solan district stands out as one of the most impacted areas, having recorded a staggering 99 percent excess rainfall compared to the usual 728.5 mm, with a cumulative rainfall of 1447.8 mm. Shimla district closely follows with a 91 percent surplus rainfall, receiving 987.5 mm compared to the norm of 517 mm.

Other districts in Himachal Pradesh have also faced the brunt of this intense monsoon. Bilaspur saw a 76 percent excess rainfall with 1212 mm compared to the standard 691 mm. Kullu experienced a 65 percent surplus, recording 744 mm against

the typical 451 mm. Mandi district had a 58 percent excess with 1510 mm versus 953 mm, and Sirmaur district faced a 56 percent surplus with 1568.8 mm against 1004 mm. Hamirpur received 52 percent more rainfall than usual, totaling 1283 mm compared to the typical 843 mm, while Kinnaur experienced a 40 percent excess, recording 258 mm compared to 185 mm.

August brought a mix of normal and extreme rainfall patterns to the state. Notably, Sirmaur witnessed an 89 percent surplus, receiving 597 mm of rainfall against the expected 316.8 mm. Mandi district had a 72 percent excess, with 681.5 mm compared to 395.3 mm.

Solan recorded a 62 percent surplus, totaling 466 mm as opposed to the standard 287 mm, while Hamirpur had a 61 percent excess, receiving 646.5 mm versus the norm of 400 mm. However, Lahaul Spiti suffered a severe deficit of 96 percent in August, while Kinnaur and Sirmaur faced deficits of 58 percent and 39 percent, respectively.

The state experienced a diverse range of precipitation patterns in August, with most days marked by normal activity. However, on the 14th and 23rd of August 2023, Himachal Pradesh bore the brunt of two days of vigorous monsoon activity, leading to extremely heavy rainfall at isolated locations.

In total, five Western disturbances influenced the state during the month.

In historical context, Himachal Pradesh ranked 49th in terms of the highest rainfall received during the August period from 1901 to 2023. The most rainfall ever recorded during August in the state occurred in 1927, with a remarkable 542.4 mm.

Scanning the August monsoon rain at micro level, Kataula where IIT Mandi is located remained epicenter as got highest ever rainfall in duration of 24 hrs. Shimla Met Office said in a weather bulletin that Kataula made new rainfall records having 210.2 mm rainfall on the August 23, 2023 compared to previous 165 mm records of same duration in August 20, 2022.

Pandoh Dam in Mandi district landlocked Mandi, Kullu and Lahaul Spiti district cutting apart from rest of world due to washing down of four lanes having record 178 mm rainfall in 24 hrs on August 23, compared to previous 137 mm highest rain in August 13, 2011.

Bijahi also in Mandi district had highest 102 mm rainfall on August 14, 2023 compared 99.2 mm of August 18, 2019. Kangra Aero had highest 273.4 mm rain on August 14, Kahu in Hamirpur had 213.6 mm rainfall on August 23.

While this year's monsoon season has brought both abundance and devastation to Himachal Pradesh, it serves as a reminder of the region's vulnerability to extreme weather events and the need for proactive measures to mitigate their impact.

# Food inflation hits record high at 11.87%



HIMACHALSCAPE DESK  
SHIMLA

India's food inflation has shattered all previous records, surging to an all-time high of 11.87% in July 2023. This alarming spike can largely be attributed to a staggering 36% increase in vegetable prices during the month, wreaking havoc on the budgets of households. Among the hardest-hit regions was Gurugram, the industrial hub of India, where the Consumer Price Index skyrocketed by a significant 8.3 points, rising from 138.6 to 146.9.

Economists have identified several key culprits behind this relentless inflationary surge. Prices of essential commodities such as tomatoes, onions, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) have been the primary drivers, despite the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the union government implementing measures like banning vegetable and rice exports. This crisis is not an isolated incident, as food inflation had already reached alarming levels in September 2022.

The year-on-year inflation rate for July stood at a daunting 7.54%, a stark contrast to the 5.57% recorded in the previous month and 5.78% during the corresponding period in the previous year. Similarly, food inflation soared to an astonishing 11.87%, a drastic increase from 6.00% in the previous month and 5.96% during the same period a year ago.

According to global market data, the unprecedented July 2023 inflation figures reveal that vegetable prices surged by an astonishing 36%, while food group prices increased by 11.87% compared to the previous year.

Digging deeper into the data, it's evident that a wide range of essential items contributed to the rising inflation index. Rice, Arhar Dal (Tur Dal), apples, mangoes, brinjals, garlic, ginger,

gourds (lauki), green chilies, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, cumin seeds (jira), supari, cotton sarees, readymade shirts and t-shirts, school uniforms, leather sandals, chappals, canvas shoes, house rents, auto-rickshaw and scooter fares, repair and service charges, utensils, and allopathic medicines all played their part in driving up prices.

However, this inflationary surge was partially offset by lower prices for electricity (domestic) and kerosene oil, which exerted downward pressure on the overall index.

The All-India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) for July 2023 rose by 3.3 points, reaching 139.7, signifying a 2.42% increase compared to the previous month. This is in stark contrast to the 0.90% increase recorded during the same period the previous year. The largest upward pressure on the current index came from the Food & Beverages group, contributing a substantial 2.86 percentage points to the overall increase.

At the center level, Gurugram recorded the most substantial increase at 8.3 points. Other regions also experienced significant jumps, with 3 centers seeing an increase between 7 to 7.9 points, 4 centers between 6 to 6.9 points, 10 centers between 5 to 5.9 points, 15 centers between 4 to 4.9 points, 14 centers between 3 to 3.9 points, 25 centers between 2 to 2.9 points, 9 centers between 1 to 1.9 points, and 4 centers between 0.1 to 0.9 points. In contrast, Keonjhar recorded a decrease of 1.0 point, while two centers' indices remained stationary.

Also, the Labour Bureau office responsible for compiling the Price Index for All India has been moved to Chandigarh from Shimla. This marks a historic shift, as was established by the British over a century ago, had always operated from Shimla until now. The Labour Bureau, an attached office of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, compiles the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers on a monthly basis, collecting retail prices from 317 markets spread across 88 industrially important centers throughout the country.

# SJVN achieves all-time high energy generation

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
SHIMLA

In a remarkable feat, Satluj Jal Vidhut Nigam Limited (SJVN), a prominent Himachal-based mini blue-chip public sector power company, has achieved an all-time high monthly energy generation of 1590 million units in August 2023, surpassing all previous records.

Nand Lal Sharma, CMD of SJVN, proudly announced this achievement in a press release, highlighting that the power company managed to increase its energy generation by an impressive nine percent compared to the previous year.

The 412 MW Rampur Hydro Power Station achieved an outstanding all-time high monthly generation of 337.165 million units since its commissioning, setting a new benchmark. The 1500 MW Nathpa Jhakri Hydro Power Station and the 50 MW Sadla Wind Power Station also contributed significantly to this milestone, registering their highest-ever energy generation for the month of August. Nathpa Jhakri produced 1215.326 million units, while Sadla Wind Power Station generated 15.938 million units during the current fiscal.

During the first quarter of

the current fiscal year, SJVN recorded a remarkable 73.04% increase in total generation from its solar and wind power stations compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. Sharma extended his heartfelt congratulations to all the employees for their dedication and hard work. Sharma emphasized that SJVN has been on a consistent growth trajectory since the commissioning of its first power station while ensuring uninterrupted energy supply to meet the nation's growing power demands.

SJVN has set ambitious targets aiming to achieve 'Mission 12000 MW by 2026'.



# Waterborne diseases pose a looming threat to lives in Himachal Pradesh - health advisory

## OUR CORRESPONDENT SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh is facing a new threat as waterborne diseases surge in the wake of recent natural disasters, according to a health advisory issued by the state government.

Health Minister Dr. Dhaniram Shandil expressed concerns on Friday about the outbreak of waterborne diseases during the rainy season, presenting a new challenge to the health department. In the past 24 hours, the state has reported 2,740 cases of eye flu, 322 cases of diarrhea, 59 cases of high fever Typhoid, 34 cases of mysterious fever or Scrub Typhus, and five cases of Jaundice.

Hamirpur district has been particularly affected, with 160 reported cases of diarrhea and numerous patients seeking treatment in the district. The most fatal waterborne disease in the state is Scrub Typhus, with 34 confirmed cases and reports of two fatalities so far.

During a meeting with state health officers, Minister Shandil urged authorities to respond urgently to the outbreak in order to save lives. Instructions have been given to Primary Health Centers (PHC), Community Health Centers (CHC), and district-level hospitals to make appropriate arrangements to manage these diseases.

Recognizing that waterborne diseases are an annual occurrence, the health department is implementing advanced strat-

egies and launching a public awareness campaign on social media to address the issue. Excessive rainfall in the state has also led to an increase in cases of diarrhea and eye flu.

Minister Shandil emphasized the importance of the medicine department coping with the emergency situation by deploying highly trained medical staff and providing prompt medical care.

Additionally, the Health Department plans to run an awareness campaign at the village level to educate people on how to protect themselves at home during the rainy season and deal with disease outbreaks.

While the state has experienced Dengue outbreaks in recent years, no cases have been reported during this year's mon-

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# India's G20 presidency initiates Global effort to tackle forest fires

## OUR CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

A groundbreaking initiative was unveiled today during India's G20 presidency as the nation takes a stand against the escalating threat of forest fires worldwide. Recent research highlights that forest fires have surged, resulting in the loss of over 3 million hectares of tree cover annually, contributing significantly to carbon sink damage.

Climate Change Fueling Fires: The surge in forest fire activity is attributed to climate change, which has led to more frequent extreme heatwaves. These conditions create ideal environments for larger, more destructive fires, exacerbating climate change through increased emissions.

India's Response: India, with 25% of its forests highly vulnerable to fires, is leading the way in forest fire management. The Forest Survey of India has launched the Van Agni Geo-portal, enabling real-time monitoring of forest fires. Additionally, forest fire management will fall under the jurisdiction of the National Disaster Management Authority, ensuring efficient responses.

Community-Based Solutions: India is harnessing collec-

tive action through Joint Forest Management (JFM) committees, involving local communities in fire prevention and management. There are now over 36,000 JFM committees nationwide, covering more than 10.24 million hectares. Community-based fire management practices have led to significant reductions in fire alerts and burnt areas.

Combining Tradition and Technology: India blends traditional forest fire control expertise with modern technology, such as GPS-tracked management and alert systems, resulting in reduced forest fire incidents and losses.

G20's Crucial Role: Recognizing the global urgency, India's G20 presidency introduced the 'Gandhinagar Implementation Roadmap (GIR) and Gandhinagar Information Platform (GIP)' to strengthen the G20 Global Land Initiative. This ground-



breaking initiative fosters international collaboration in restoring forest fire-impacted areas and mining-affected regions.

Global Cooperation: The GIR-GIP initiative seeks to implement sustainable forestry practices, community involvement, and indigenous knowledge sharing on a global scale.

This fosters cooperation among nations and facilitates the exchange of critical knowledge to enhance restoration efforts worldwide.

India's proactive stance and the G20's commitment to collective action signal a significant step towards addressing the pressing issue of escalating forest fires and their far-reaching environmental consequences.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I write this letter with deep concern and a heavy heart regarding the recent spate of landslides that have wreaked havoc upon the beautiful city of Shimla. It is imperative that we shed light on the gravity of the situation and call for immediate action to address the underlying causes of these devastating events.

Shimla, known for its enchanting landscapes and serene charm, has been grappling with an increasing frequency of landslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains. These landslides have not only disrupted daily life but have also left a trail of destruction, impacting homes, infrastructure, and the environment.

The root causes of these landslides are complex, often stemming from a combination of natural factors and human

activities. Rapid urbanization, unchecked construction, and poor land-use planning have all contributed to the vulnerability of the region. Additionally, changing climatic patterns may be exacerbating the situation, demanding a comprehensive understanding and response.

It is high time that local authorities, experts, and citizens collaborate to find sustainable solutions. First and foremost, a thorough assessment of vulnerable areas is essential to identify high-risk zones and guide future development. Strict regulations on construction in these areas must be enforced to prevent further degradation of the natural landscape.

Furthermore, investment in early warning systems and advanced monitoring technologies can provide critical data for predicting and mitigating landslides. Community educa-

tion and awareness campaigns can empower residents with the knowledge needed to safeguard their homes and lives during such emergencies.

As a responsible society, we must acknowledge that the landslides in Shimla are not isolated incidents but part of a larger pattern with potentially dire consequences.

Immediate action is needed to protect our environment, heritage, and the lives of our fellow citizens.

I urge the concerned authorities to take proactive steps in collaborating with environmental experts, urban planners, and the local community to address the root causes of these landslides. Let us work together to ensure that Shimla's charm and safety are preserved for generations to come.

Sincerely, **Panikka Sood, Shimla**