Orissa floods blamed on NH-60
Biswajit Padhi
Bhubaneswar

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blamed for causing north Orissa's most furious
floods. "Never before have we witnessed floods of
such magnitude," said Sudarshan Das, a develop-
ment activist. "More than 1,200 villages in the three
districts of Balasore, Bhadrak and Mayurbhanj have
been swept away"
According to the Orissa State Disaster
Management Authority (OSDMA) over 887 villages
were marooned. Balasore district was the worst
affected. Around 900. 000 people in 165 gram pan-
chayats of 14 blocks found themselves stranded.
Relief efforts were tardy The district administration
found it hard to use country boats because of fast
moving currents of water. Powerboats were in short
supply. Most rescue efforts ended in failure as did
the dropping of food from the air.
The National Highway-60 was breached in three
places. An important bridge which connected north
Orissa to Kharagpur in West Bengal was swept away
Arun Dey the vocal MLA from Balasore district, went
from village to village to organise relief and rescue
operations. He is angry that the local administration
could not handle floods of this magnitude.
But, he says, the main culprit is the National
Highway-60. At many places the height of the road
was raised to 30 to 40 feet by implementing agen-
cies just to increase the amount of work and there-
by mint profits, he alleges. The old Grand Trunk
(GT) Road used to run almost parallel to paddy
fields on both sides and it never created floods of
this nature, he says.
The NH-60 connects north Orissa to Kolkata and
Chennai. After entering Orissa it continues over the
old GT road till Nidhipanda. From Nidhipanda to
Basta, it takes a detour from the original road.
"There were many causeways and culverts on the
old GT road allowing water to flow freely," said Dr
Priyanath, a scholar from Balasore.
In many places water used to flow above the road
thereby facilitating drainage. But the National
Highway authorities without doing a proper feasi-
bility study not only raised the height of the road
but also left few options for the water to cross from
one side to the other.
The old GT road had drains at least 25 to 30
meters wide. But the National Highway authorities

BISWAJIT PADHI

A bridge that caved in

closed down those drains. As a result thousands of
cusecs of water accumulated on both sides of the
road and created strong currents.
"The NH-60 should have carefully made drains to
allow free flow of water without damaging the
crops of farmers," said Dr Priyanath. Farmers on
both sides of the road had strongly protested
against the construction of culverts. "But if there
had been provision of drains farmers would not
have objected to culverts or small bridges," he said.
The irrigation department had spent more than
Rs 15 crore to construct the Hullia nullah, a small
offshoot of the Budhabalanga River. But the
National Highway authorities closed the nullah.
"The nullah would have helped ease some water
into the sea," said Nishakar Parida, a farmer.
The local media played up the story and the
blame game started. The National Highway author-
ities blamed the executing agency, Larsen & Toubro.
Then the state government issued a press state-
ment pointing fingers at Sheladia International,
the American company which did the feasibility

report The truth is all three were involved in car-
rying out the project.
Breaches caused by last year's floods were not
repaired. The district administration did not look
into what caused flooding last year. "They did not
even do the basic operation of identifying the most
vulnerable areas," said an angry Bhanu Prasad
Panigrahi of Unnayan, an NGO. To top it all politics
got into relief work. The state's revenue minister
belongs to Bhadrak district and there were allega-
tions that major relief operations had been divert-
ed to Bhadrak.
The Budhabalanga, Subarnarekha and Jalaka
rivers run through these districts and disgorge into
the sea. Laxmikant Sethi, BDO of Bhogorai said that
the Jalaka River rose to a massive height of 8.15 m.
The highest it has risen in the last 60 years is 7.4 m.
Similarly Budhabalanga broke a 40-year record of
12.38 m to rise to a height of 13.80 m. Subarnarekha
rose to 12.7 m. It rained copiously during the full
moon when the sea experiences high tide. So the
rivers could not drain out the water.

<title>Orissa floods blamed on NH-60</title>
<author>Biswajit Padhi</author>
<keywords>TS1-D</keywords>
<publication>Civil Society</publication>
<pubDate>01/08/2008</pubDate>
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<classif>Y01</classif>
<entrydt>14/08/2008</entrydt>
<sd>PG</sd>