

## Environment Minister releases India's National Redd+ Strategy

Reiterating India's commitment to Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan emphasised that the cooperation and involvement of the tribals, other forest dwelling people and the society as a whole, is crucial for the implementation of the REDD+ strategy (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation). Dr.Vardhan also underlined the importance of new innovations and ideas. The Minister stated that the well-being of our forests is essential for a healthy living environment in the country. The Minister further emphasised that REDD+ activities will help in sustainable livelihood of local communities and also in conservation of biodiversity.

Appreciating the work of Expert Committee members, Dr.Vardhan invited experts & all others to contribute to the implementation of the National REDD+ Strategy. He also acknowledged the efforts put in for coordinating the preparation of this document. The Minister stated that India's National REDD+ strategy is one of the tools to achieve India's commitment to Paris Agreement.

REDD+ strategy will help the country to fulfil its NDC commitments and will also contribute to the livelihood of the forest dependent population. A National Governing Council of REDD+ chaired by the Union Environment Minister at the national level and two technical committees, headed by DG, Forest Survey of India and DG, ICFRE are being established for supporting the REDD+ implementation in the country. There is an increasing need to enhance efforts for forest conservation and enhance productivity of forest eco-systems.

In simple terms, REDD+ means "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation", conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. REDD+ aims to achieve climate change mitigation by incentivizing forest conservation. The strategy seeks to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and also developing a roadmap for enhancement of forest carbon stocks and achieving sustainable management of forests through REDD+ actions. The National REDD+ Strategy will soon be communicated to the UNFCCC.

Paris agreement on climate change also recognizes role of forests in climate change mitigation and calls upon country Parties to take action to implement and support REDD+. India has communicated in its Nationally Determined Contribution under Paris Agreement, that it will capture 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Carbon dioxide through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. India's first biennial update report to UNFCCC has revealed that forests in India capture about 12% of India's total GHG emissions. Thus, forestry sector in India is making a positive cost effective contribution for climate change mitigation.

Complying with the UNFCCC decisions on REDD+, India has prepared its National REDD+ Strategy. The Strategy builds upon existing national circumstances which have been updated in line with India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, Green India Mission and India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to UNFCCC.

## India at the 18<sup>th</sup> Asian Games

The 2018 Asian Games (Indonesian: PestaOlahraga Asia 2018, Asian Games 2018), officially known as the 18th Asian Games and also known as Jakarta-Palembang 2018, was a pan-Asian multi-sport event being held from 18 August to 2 September 2018 in the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang. China led the medal table for the tenth consecutive time, followed by Japan and South Korea.

India ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and its final tally at the 18th Asian Games read 69 medals – 15 gold, 24 silver and 30 bronze to surpass the medal count from 2010 Games in Guangzhou, China and match the gold medal tally from the first-ever Asian Games in 1951. The games saw India create new national records, register some firsts – first medal in sepaktakraw, RahiSarnobat became first Indian woman to win Asian Games gold in shooting and VineshPhogat became first Indian woman to win gold in wrestling. The Games got underway with Neeraj Chopra as the flag bearer at the opening ceremony, Ravi Kumar/ApurviChandela winning the first medal, India men's hockey team the last and culminated on September 2 with Rani Rampal as the flag bearer at the closing ceremony.

Following is an account of India's performance:

### **Athletics**

Athletics has been the biggest contributor to medals tally for India across the Asian Games. Track and field events have contributed to 233 medals for India at Asian Games and in Indonesia, that tally moved to 240 with 7 golds, 10 silvers and 2 bronze medals. This is better than how India fared at the 2014 Incheon Asian Games where they picked 13 medals in total. Neeraj Chopra and Swapna Barman's gold medals in javelin throw and heptathlon went alongside India's continued dominance in women's team relay (gold). Jinsons Johnson winning gold was first 1500m medal in 20 years, Manjit Singh's 800m gold was after 32 years and Arpinder Singh's triple jump gold came after 48 years.

Medals: 17 (7 gold, 10 silver and 2 bronze medals)

### **Archery**

Archery remains a mixed-bag for India, despite the two silver medals. The powerhouse South Korea proved to be the agonising downfall of India's compound archers team. Poised to win the gold in Compound Archery, India Men's team comprising of RajatChauhan, AmanSaini and AbhishekVerma, failed to grab the yellow metal after a rare stroke of bad luck. India Women's Team won the Silver in Compound Archery. India Women's Compound team, comprising JyothiSurekhaVennam, MuskanKirar, and MadhumitaKumari, too fought the good fight against the likes of top sides such as the Philippines and Chinese Taipei to set up a summit clash against South Korea. India did not win any medals in Recurve events, nor any in Individual Archery competitions.

Medals: 2 (2 silver medals)

### **Badminton**

It was a historic badminton campaign for India at the Asian Games 2018 with two female shuttlers – PV Sindhu and SainaNehwal – securing a medal each in the individual event. It is for the first time in Asiad history that female shuttlers won medals in the individual event at the Games for India. The last time any shuttler won a singles medal at Asiad for India was Syed Modi, who won the bronze in 1982 in Men's Singles. Both Nehwal and Sindhu lost to Tai Tzu Ying and failed to grab the yellow metal. Apart from the two female shuttlers adding medals

for India, the remaining badminton contingent, that featured the likes of KidambiSrikanth, HS Prannoy disappointed.

Medals: 2 (1 silver and 1 bronze medals)

### **Boxing**

Indian boxers amassed nine medals at the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast earlier this year. Move to the Asian Games and the tally dwarfed to two with AmitPanghal saving face on the final day. His gold medal, in the 49kg category, achieved India's milestone for best-ever medal count at Asian Games.

Medals: 2 (1 gold, and 1 bronze medals)

### **Hockey**

In all fairness, neither men's or women's hockey teams would be exceptionally proud of the outcome at the Asian Games. The women's team reached their first final in 20 years even as other Asian teams are on the rise. The men's team, and their bronze medal finish, can only be termed as a disaster.

Medals: 2 (1 silver and 1 bronze medals)

### **Kabaddi**

India's biggest disappointment at the Asian Games 2018 came in Kabaddi – a sport in which they have dominated since it was introduced for the first time in the tournament in 1990. India Men's team, who defeated Iran 44-26 to win the Kabaddi Masters not long ago, suffered a 27-17 defeat at the hands of the same opponents in the semifinal match and had to settle for the Bronze medal. It is for the first time India Men's team had not won the Gold medal in Kabaddi at the Asian Games. To add to the disappointment, India Women's team also failed to grab the gold and had to settle for a silver medal after losing 27-24 against Iran.

Medals: 2 (1 silver and 1 bronze medals)

### **Rowing**

Rowing served India a mixed bag at the Asian Games 2018. DattuBhokanal, who was expected to win a medal in Men's Singles Sculls had a horrible final, in which he finished in the last position. Luckily for India, the rowers bounced back on the final day of the sport to secure a Gold and two Bronze medals. While Dushyant won the Bronze in Men's Lightweight Single Sculls, Rohit Kumar and Bhagwan Singh won the same prize in Men's Lightweight Double Sculls. The team of Sawarn Singh, DattuBhokanal, Om Prakash and Sukhmeet Singh also secured the Gold in Men's Quadruple Sculls.

Medals: 3 (1 gold, and 2 bronze medals)

### **Squash**

The infighting and internal turmoil within the Indian squash contingent had already put them on the backfoot. The promise was there with SauravGhosal in singles and then women's squash team later but neither worked out to garner a yellow metal.

Medals: 5 (1 silver and 4 bronze medals)

## **Shooting**

India delivered yet another strong performance in Shooting at the Asian Games 2018 with a total of 10 medals to the tally. There were a number of big surprises for India in the sport at the Games with teenagers Saurabh Chaudhary and Shardul Vihan making big strides. While the 16-year old Chaudhary won the gold medal in 10m Air Pistol, the 15-year old Vihan struck a silver medal in Men's Double Trap. Rahi Sarnobat secured the second gold medal for India in Women 25m pistol event. While Veteran shooter Sanjeev Rajput continued his form from the Commonwealth Games and managed to win a silver in 50m Rifle 3 Positions Men, while another CWG gold medalist Heena Sidhu secured 10m Air Pistol in Women. The team of Ravi Kumar and Apurvi Chandela won the bronze in 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event, and the youngster Abhishek Verma won the bronze in 10m Air Pistol men. Lakshay brought a surprising silver for India in Men Trap while Deepak Kumar added a silver in 10m Air Rifle. The biggest disappointment for India in Shooting at the Asian Games 2018 was the 16-year-old Manu Bhaker, who failed to win a single medal.

Medals: 10 (2 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze medals)

## **Table Tennis**

After a successful stint in Commonwealth Games 2018, Indian fans were hopeful the Table Tennis contingent can end the 60-year drought of an Asiad medal. The squad, comprising the likes of Sharath Kamal, G Sathiyan and Manika Batra did not disappoint. India secured two medals in Table Tennis in Asian Games 2018 with Kamal, Sathiyan along with Manav Vikash, Anthony Arputharaj and Harmeet Desai winning the bronze in Men's Team event and Kamal combining with Batra to win the bronze in mixed doubles. In singles' competition, the CWG gold medallist Manika Batra went down against world number five Wang Manyu. The 23-year old managed to win a game, proving her mettle and her ability to make unexpected comebacks. But it was not enough in the end to beat the Chinese.

Medals: 2 (2 bronze medals)

## **Tennis**

India's dominance in the men's doubles event continued with Rohan Bopanna and Divij Sharan. The medal count from tennis could have been higher but for Leander Paes opting out late due to his demand of a specialised doubles partner not being met. In singles, Prajnesh Gunneswaran won bronze medal while Ramkumar Ramanathan faltered early. The projection was of five medals and the Indian tennis team fell short.

Medals: 3 (1 gold, 2 bronze medals)

## **Weightlifting**

Another big disappointment for India at the Asian Games 2018 were the weightlifters. After bagging a total of 9 medals at the Commonwealth Games 2018, which included 5 Gold medals, much was expected from the weightlifting contingent. But things did not go as per planned at the Asian Games as Indian weightlifters failed to win a single medal. Sathish Kumar Sivalingam, who was one of the gold winners in CWG, finished in the 10th position in Men's 77kg Weightlifting event. Ajay Singh finished in the 5th position in the same event. Vikas Thakur, who won the Bronze in CWG, finished in the 8th position in Men's 94 kg Weightlifting. Female lifters did little to redeem with Rakhi Halder getting disqualified for the Clean and Jerk after failing to complete her Snatch attempt in Women's 63kg event.

Medals: 0

### **Wrestling**

With several big names from India's Wrestling contingent included in the squad at the Asian Games, India were expected to make it big in the discipline. But a series of unexpected results saw them winning only three medals in freestyle wrestling, while no medal came from Graeco-Roman format. India secured two gold medals in the Wrestling, with BajrangPunia winning the yellow metal in 65 kg Freestyle wrestling and VineshPhogat winning the top prize in Freestyle 50kg wrestling. The biggest miss for India in Wrestling was the gold medal prospect Sushil Kumar getting eliminated in the first round suffered a stunning 3-5 loss in the first qualification round bout against Bahrain's Adam Batirov in Men's 74kg category. The 2016 Rio Olympic Bronze medallist Sakshi Malik also failed to grab a medal.

Medals: 3 (2 gold, and 1 bronze medals)

## Floods in Kerala

Having killed at least 370 people, displaced 780,000 and caused ₹ 50,000 crore worth of damage, Kerala witnessed the worst floods in nearly a century. Back in 1924, a combination of heavy rain and a breached dam triggered deadly floods that claimed 1,000 lives. In 2018, history may have repeated itself. Under relentless downpours, poor dam management may have aggravated the floods, raising questions about the role of dams in Kerala and other states.

In India's quest to control water, dams have always loomed large. India is home to more than 5,000 large dams (over 15 metre high), the third largest number in the world, behind the US and China. While only a handful of these dams (28) are built explicitly for flood control, in theory, they all have the properties to minimize flood damage. Dams can manage rivers, storing their water, adjusting flows and redirecting channels. Devastating floods in Odisha (2011), Uttarakhand (2013), Tamil Nadu (2015), Bihar (2016) and now in Kerala prove that reservoir dams on rivers, contrary to claims, cannot prevent floods. In fact, they create devastating floods.

Often dams are claimed to be multi-purpose projects, and prevention of floods is cited as one of the purposes of dams because they have something called a flood cushion, which gets filled only when a river is in spate. But floods don't have any uniform dimension. There are low floods, medium floods, high and very high floods. Many of these are cyclical in nature with high floods taking place in 25, 50 or 100 years. But in this era of climate change, these cycles have gone awry: high to very high floods visit us far more often than before.

Thanks to their flood cushions, dams subsume low and medium-level floods. But these harmless floods should not be controlled because they replenish floodplains with fresh nutrient-rich soil, boost fisheries and rejuvenate the riparian flora and fauna. Such floods also recharge aquifers. Farmers, too, welcome floods for these reasons. The prevention of low and medium-scale floods also provides a false sense of security to the State and people, leading to occupation of flood plains for raising housing colonies, highways, schools, colleges, commercial establishments and even airports as has been done in Mumbai, Chennai and Kochi.

But when high to very high floods come, the flood cushion proves ineffective and counterproductive, necessitating the dam manager to release as much water as possible in as little time as possible to save the structure from damage. Such emergency releases from the dam result in mayhem downstream, since the real flood cushion — the flood plains — are occupied. Flood waters have no place to spread and so they destroy whatever lies in their path. Unfortunately, rainfall, river and nature are blamed for the mess.

The pro-dam lobby often cites the example of Tehri dam in Uttarakhand. They claim it successfully controlled the very high flow in the river Bhagirathi in 2013. Yes, that's a fact. But it is also a fact that the event took place in June, when the dam reservoir did not have much water, and so could accommodate the sudden high inflows!