

**Important and Urgent**

27.01.2022

To,  
The Secretary General,  
Hon'ble Supreme Court of India,  
Bhagwan Das Road, New Delhi 110001.

**RE: Resignation as chairman and member of the High Powered Committee (HPC) for the Char Dham Pariyojana**

Dear Sir:

I am writing to inform the Hon'ble Supreme Court of my decision to resign as chairman and member of the High Powered Committee for the Char Dham Pariyojana. I shall be obliged if you will kindly place this letter before the Hon'ble Judges.

Let me say at the outset that it was an honour to be asked by the Hon'ble Court to head the HPC by its order dated 8.8.2019. I had already submitted a report to the Hon'ble Court on the 2013 Kedarnath tragedy and therefore, considered it as an opportunity to extend the difficult task of protecting the fragile Himalayan ecology during the widening of the Char Dham Pariyojana (the Project) national highways.

The Hon'ble Court's order dated 08.09.2020 accepting my final report was a reassurance that the balanced approach therein would be helpful in protecting the Himalayas to a great extent, while allowing the disaster-resilient road width, fulfilling the needs of both pilgrims and defence.

By the judgment dated 14.12.2021, while recognizing the hard work put in by the HPC, the Hon'ble Court has accepted the wider DL-PS configuration, instead of what the order dated 08.09.2020 envisaged. The judgment has also confined the role of the HPC to overseeing the implementation of its recommendations for the Project on the *two Non-Defence roads only*. As elaborated in the HPC Final Report of 13.07.2020, the directions and recommendations made by the HPC in the past have either been ignored or tardily responded to by MoRTH. This experience does not inspire confidence that the response of MoRTH will be much different even in relation to the *two Non-Defence roads*. The Hon'ble Court has also permitted the respondents to seek legal relief for widening of the *Non-Defence* highways. In the circumstances, I do not see any purpose in continuing to head the HPC or indeed, even to be a part of it.

The Himalayas are a marvel of Nature. I am reminded of the wonder expressed by the historian A.J. Toynbee in 1929 on a flight over the snow-clad Himalayan peaks. Toynbee wrote, "The splendour that shines through Nature is imparted to her from a source which is beyond Nature and which is the ultimate reality. If there were not this invisible spiritual presence in and beyond the visible universe, there would be no Himalayas and no mankind either; **for mankind is part of Nature, and, like non-human Nature, we owe our existence to the reality that is the mysterious common source of non-human Nature and ourselves.**" (Emphasis added)

I have long been aware that development in the Himalayas must be respectful of the sacred status that these mountains have in our country. Sustainable development demands approaches that are both geologically and ecologically sound. Such development also enhances disaster-resilience and

hence national security, especially when climate challenges to slope stability are becoming far more unpredictable.

As a member of the HPC, however, I saw at close quarters the desecration of the once impregnable Himalayas. In the present context, paraphrasing Toynbee, I have seen engineers armed with modern technological weapons assaulting the Himalayas. They have slashed through pristine forests, wounding vulnerable Himalayan slopes to widen highways. Ever-increasing numbers of tourists speed along them, their vehicles spewing noxious gases that cover the towering peaks ahead in an unsightly haze. The engineers exult and circulate photographs proving their conquest of Nature, little realizing that they too are a part of Nature and cannot survive if their own natural environment is destroyed.

Nature, however, neither forgets nor forgives such willful wrongs inflicted on her treasures. Already we have witnessed stretches of roads disappear that have later taken months to repair. Nature sounded warning bells in June 2013 and February 2021 with disastrous consequences. They ought to remind us of John Donne's words:

*Each man's death diminishes me,  
For I am involved in mankind.  
Therefore, send not to know  
For whom the bell tolls,  
It tolls for thee.*

In September 2019, when asked to accept the assignment to chair the HPC, I deliberated whether my age would permit me to fulfill the strenuous responsibilities the assignment entailed. I was compelled to accept by an inner voice born out of a 40-year commitment to help restore the degraded Himalayan environment and the livelihoods of its people.

That same inner voice now compels me to move out. The belief that the HPC could protect this fragile ecology has been shattered. I can do no more. I therefore choose to resign.

With due regards,

Sincerely,



(Ravi Chopra)

Ravi Chopra  
107/3 Vasant Vihar Enclave  
Dehra Doon 248006  
[rachop@gmail.com](mailto:rachop@gmail.com)  
Mobile: 9411135976