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Uttarakhand floods: Ham radio gives ray of hope to families of missing

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Press Trust of India

Jun 30, 2013 at 10:32am IST

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New Delhi: "Help us", "Can you find my aged parents" -- distress messages like these are flooding ham radio operators assisting in efforts to reunite families in disaster-hit Uttarakhand. Immediately after the mayhem, some ham radio volunteers rushed to the affected areas and were supported by fellow operators across the country. Soon this mode became an important lifeline of communication in the disaster-affected areas where telecommunication networks were extensively damaged during the rains.

Radio amateurs use a variety of voice, text, image and data communication modes and have access to frequency allocations throughout the radio frequency spectrum to enable communication across a city, region, country, continent, the world, or even into space. National Institute of Amateur Radio, Hyderabad, has sent a team with radio equipment to the hill state and is operating in co-ordination with Bharat Scouts and Guides, Dehradun.

Jose Jacob, VU2JOS, is operating from Dehradun as the emergency communication base station. "We are flooded with distress messages of relatives of those who are missing in Uttarakhand. We are daily getting calls from Kolkata, Delhi, Kerala, Rajkot," Jacob said. "We pass on the missing list received to the state secretariat," he said.

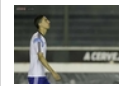


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Another ham station has been set up in Barkot in Uttarkashi where Mukesh Gola, VU2MCW, is being assisted by three more ham operators collecting information about missing persons through local ham radio VHF network. "Usually, we establish two-three master control rooms linking the entire country and have local network for relief operations like providing assistance for medical camps, movement of food and other requirements. And also getting and passing on information to their relatives, providing communication for district administration to



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monitor smooth movement of relief operations," S Sathyapal, Director, Indian Institute of Hams, told PTI.

Though mobiles and satphones are in use, Ham communication, which is recognised as second line of communication, plays additional and important role in getting information for speedy relief operations, Sathyapal said. Sometimes, mobile towers cannot take the required load and satphones are not enough or reachable to the victims. These Ham communications are not restricted to few kilometres, these travel to thousands of kilometres through ionosphere, he said.


Sandeep Baruah, VU2MUE, a senior scientist at Vigyan Prasas, Department of Science and Technology, is also operating the ham radio station at Vigyan Prasas, New Delhi as a relay station for messages of field stations. There are 32 ham radio volunteers trained by Vigyan Prasas, who would be helping the government agencies in Uttarakhand in establishing a second line of radio communication network throughout the 13 districts of the state, he said.


As a part of the disaster mitigation effort, an automated high altitude (10,000 ft) ham radio repeater station would be established at Dhanaulti which would provide line of sight communication support to the hams using low power handheld VHF radio equipment in Uttarakhand, he said.


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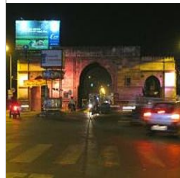
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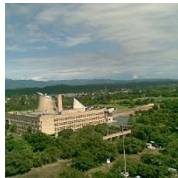
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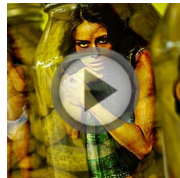
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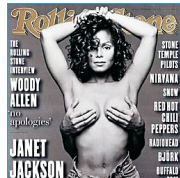
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