

Survival of the toughest..... :Where there is a will there is a way”

“I will never forget that fateful day. We were all at work in the dam site and had just started to return to our camp site at *Dubang* (extreme North of Sikkim). It was around 6 in the evening. Suddenly we felt that the earth is violently shaking and huge boulders started rolling down the mountain towards us. Every one of ran for cover, dumb struck. It was a lifetime experience, which we would never like to relive ! We saw some of our co-workers were crushed to death under the boulders. We wanted to flee the place towards the district headquarters – Mangan. However, we all soon realized that we are trapped . Roads were cut off in several places. After a painful wait for 2-3 days, we could only see occasional choppers flying above us. We feared for life. At night we did not sleep in our houses fearing the return of the devastating earthquake and also fearing a possible flash flood. Further up the north on the high rise mountains, there is a natural lake and on the foothill, our village is situated. Since the earthquake there is constant seepage of water from below the lake. What if, at night we are a sleep and the lake bursts and the water swallows us?¹



(Mintu pal with his friends are trekking back to safety)

On the 4th day we decided to walk down all the way upto mangan, district headquarters, around 40 kms away. We started early in the morning carrying

¹ The experts have ruled out the possibility of the breach in the embankment of the lake and therefore no such situation of flooding arises. But the rumour continues !

some water and some eatables. It was a tiresome journey. It was not walking , but it was indeed trekking... we had to somehow manage climbing rocks, boulders and even using ropes to jump the ditches. It took 1 full day to finally reach tung village. We were dying to drink some water, as our water stock had exhausted long ago. Walking over the debris and the fear of landslide was making all of us to earn for a safe hand who would rescue us from this grave danger. Our families back home in bankura, west Bengal are counting days for our return, since the fateful day of 18th. It's the time for *Durga puja*, the biggest festival of the Bengalis. We long to go back to our dear ones and bring back smile on their face. We thank God that we are still safe. It felt like a paradise, when we reached tung and saw the army and you people who gave us water to drink and food to eat. Thank you for giving us lift upto mangan.” - **Mintu Pal**

(At Tung, North Sikkim, our CASA staff Mr. Debojyoti Chakraborty and Mr. Anup Sinha met Mintu Pal and his friends and gave them a lift from Tung to Mangan. On the way he narrated his horrific experience of the dreaded earthquake. Mintu is originally a resident of Kabisunda, under Indus Police Station of Bankura District, West Bengal. As a construction worker Pal went there to North Sikkim with his friends but was trapped after the earthquake of 18th . He lost some of his friends to the killer quake.)

- **By Dinesh Suna & Debojyoti**