# CSR TODAY

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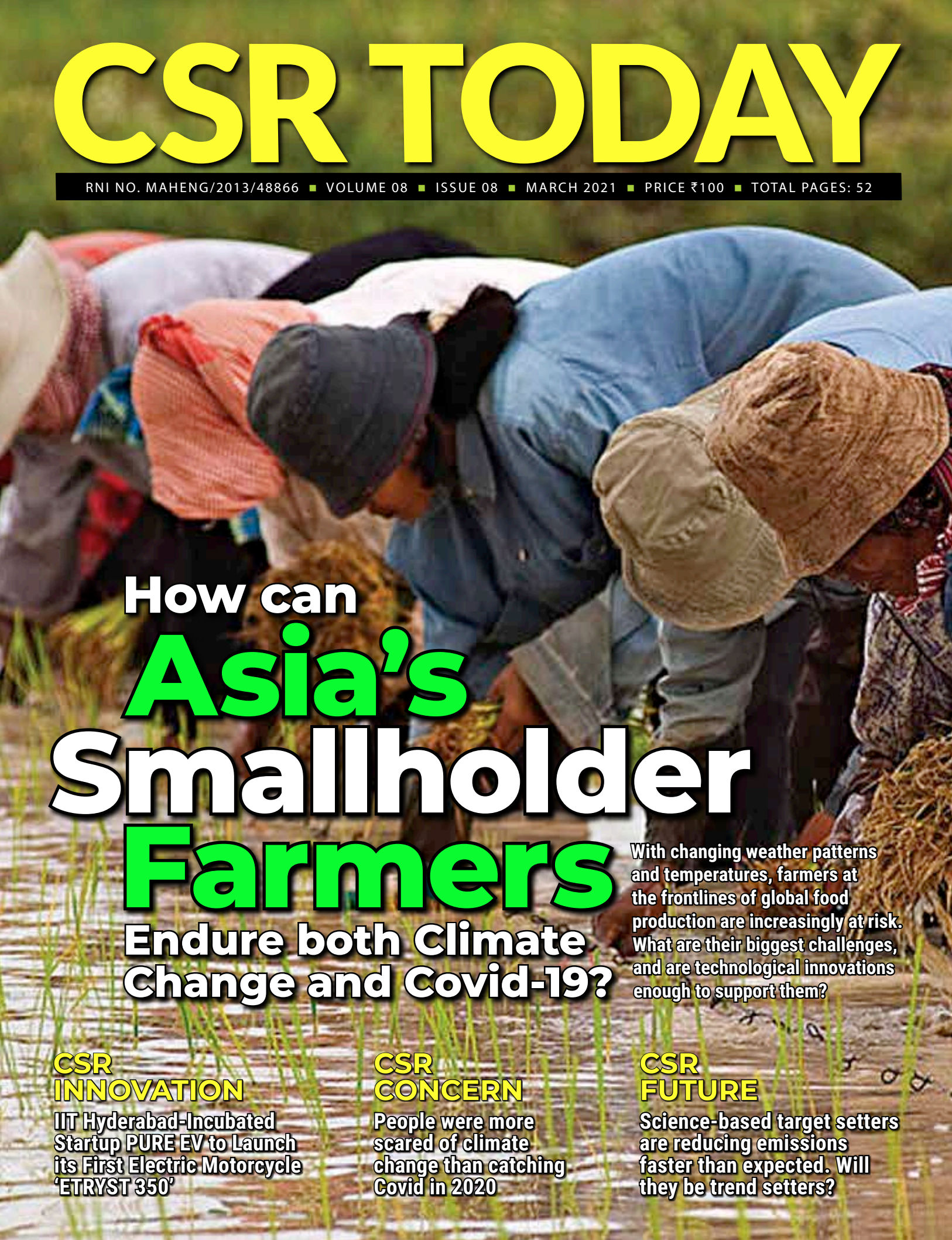

## How can Asia's Smallholder Farmers Endure both Climate Change and Covid-19?

With changing weather patterns and temperatures, farmers at the frontlines of global food production are increasingly at risk. What are their biggest challenges, and are technological innovations enough to support them?

### CSR INNOVATION

IIT Hyderabad-Incubated Startup PURE EV to Launch its First Electric Motorcycle 'ETRYST 350'

### CSR CONCERN

People were more scared of climate change than catching Covid in 2020

### CSR FUTURE

Science-based target setters are reducing emissions faster than expected. Will they be trend setters?


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# WWF online campaign right initiative

**Rajesh Tiwari**
Publisher
*rt@iccsr.org*

**THE OVERALL CAMPAIGN MESSAGE INDICATES THAT ILLEGAL POSSESSION OR CONSUMPTION OF PROTECTED WILDLIFE OR THE PRODUCTS MADE FROM THEM IS SIMILAR TO 'STEALING' A HIGHLY VALUABLE ARTICLE.**

At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic is sweeping the globe in waves, here comes a great initiative – that's worth replicating in other parts of the world.

TRAFFIC and WWF India's latest online campaign to help #EndWildlifeTrafficking urges people to refrain from buying, consuming, owning or wearing protected wildlife species in India. The campaign highlights threats to five protected wildlife species that are illegally traded in India, but have not received their share of conservation focus.

Otters Lutrinae, Red Sand Boas Eryx johnii, Monitor Lizards Varanus, Seahorses Hippocampus and Tokay Geckos Gekko gecko – are often extracted from their natural habitat to be sold as curios, pets or for the aquaria trade. Their body parts and derivatives are used for clothing, food or medicine, despite these species being protected under India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 that prohibits their sale and trade.

The overall campaign message indicates that illegal possession or consumption of protected wildlife or the products made from them is similar to 'stealing' a highly valuable article.

The first campaign message "Wearing is Stealing" informs people that products made from otters' fur and other body parts, are prohibited for sale and purchase in India, and any kind of indulgence can lead to imprisonment, a fine or both. It reminds about the important role played by otters in maintaining the nutrient cycle of the ecosystem. TRAFFIC's studies have found all three otter species found in India - Eurasian Otter Lutra lutra, Smooth-coated Otter Lutrogale perspicillata and Small-clawed Otter Aonyx cinereus- being traded illegally.

The second campaign message "Owning is Stealing" enlightens people that not every animal belongs in their home; urging them to not keep species like Red Sand Boa and other protected wildlife as pets. Red Sand Boa, like any other snake species, is important for our ecosystem as it helps in maintaining a healthy population between prey and the predator.

The third campaign message "Possessing is Stealing" highlights the plight of protected marine animals such as seahorses and others in aquarium trade. It informs people that seahorses don't belong in their aquarium and urges them to not buy such species as their purchase will have a detrimental impact on the wild populations. Seizure reports indicate that seahorses are victims of large-scale curios and aquaria trade in India.

The fourth campaign message "Eating is stealing" aims to enlighten people that species like monitor lizards and other protected wild animals should not be killed for food, urging the public against buying or consuming protected wildlife species. Reports show that monitor lizards are extensively poached for meat in the country being considered a delicacy and also believed to have medicinal properties. They are also targeted for their copulatory organs (male's hemipenes) that is structurally similar to "Hatha Jodi" the root of the Tiger's Claw Martynia annua; a plant with diverse traditional uses in Ayurveda.

The fifth campaign message of "Buying is Stealing" warns people against buying medicines and other products made from Tokay Gecko and other protected wildlife species. Tokay Geckos are heavily exploited for their use in traditional Asian medicines, especially to meet the demand for their internal organs, meat and tongues, used as a perceived cure for various ailments. In 2009, poaching and illegal trade of Tokay Geckos rose sharply after the tongue and internal organs began to be targeted as a potential, though unproven, remedy for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and cancer.

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**Editor:** Rajesh Tiwari

# Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Inaugurates IIT Madras' 'Discovery Campus'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Discovery Campus of Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras), located at Thaiyur near Chennai, to accommodate the growing research infrastructure requirements of students and faculty.

The virtual inauguration was held in the presence of the Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu Banwarilal Purohit, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Edappadi K. Palaniswami and a host of other dignitaries. Thanks to the generosity of the late Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. J. Jayalalithaa, IIT Madras was allotted 163 acres of land in 2017 at Thaiyur, which is located about 36 km from the main campus at Guindy.

This satellite campus of IIT Madras will host state-of-the-art standalone Research Centres with large dedicated facilities and will have its own support infrastructure such as hostels for the research scholars and fellows, common instrumentation laboratories, and conference facilities, among other amenities.

Research activities at IIT Madras have grown exponentially during the last decade. These activities got a boost after it was declared an 'Institution of Eminence' in 2019. Fuelled by the research successes in several fields, large research centres are being funded by various ministries and agencies of the Government of India as well as industry sponsors. Many of these centres require dedicated facilities to be created, which in turn require space.

Given the rapidly expanding research footprint of IIT Madras, and the need to create world-class research facilities quickly over the next decade, the satellite campus at Thaiyur has been planned primarily as a research campus. After the pioneering IIT Madras Research Park established in 2010-2017, the IIT Madras Discovery Campus will be next iconic facility to be created by IIT Madras. Two research centres have already been planned for the Discovery Campus and would be operational by end of 2021.

These include the National Technology Centre for Ports, Waterways and Coasts, which is funded by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India. It will house the country's first large (95mx65m) 'Shallow Water Basin' facility for coastal and estuarine research and industrial applications. This basin can emulate the entire Gulf of Kutch or the mouth of the River Hoogly, for example. The Centre will also have a 360-degree (ship's) bridge simulator dedicated for studies involving operations at all major Indian ports. The second research centre to come up in the Discovery Campus is the 'Solid Propellant Combustion Modelling Facility' of the Centre of Propulsion Technology, which is funded by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). This Modelling Facility will be the first facility to be established under the Centre of Propulsion Technology at IIT Madras.

These research infrastructures will make the Discovery Campus a magnet for the most exciting advanced research being carried out anywhere, and a beehive of discovery. The campus will see a steady stream of international scientists and students.

Along with the unique Main Campus and the IIT Madras Research Park, the Discovery Campus of IIT Madras will take IIT Madras to the top of the league among the universities of the world.

# SIDBI partners with National Skill Development Corporation to launch Junior Skills, a first of its kind skill championship

**Aims to create wider awareness about the importance of skill development amongst the youth of the country at an early age**

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), the principal financial institution engaged in the promotion, financing and development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises(MSME), has joined hands with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to launch JuniorSkills, a first of its kind skill championship with an objective to create a wider awareness about the importance of skill development amongst the youth of India at an early age. Under the partnership, SIDBI shall steer innovative business ideas.

V Satya Venkata Rao, Deputy Managing Director of SIDBI who was the guest of honour at the virtual launch event said, "With JuniorSkills, we hope to create a better tomorrow for the future generations who will play a key role in the growth of our nation. This is a platform that emphasizes practical learning and encourages students to showcase their talent and gives them the opportunity to be groomed by experts to evolve as an entrepreneur. "

The dignitaries gracing the virtual launch of event included Atul Kumar Tiwari, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Manoj Ahuja, Chairman, CBSE, Dr. Joseph Emmanuel, Director – Academic, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Biswajit Saha, Director (Skill & Education), CBSE and Dhanpreet Kaur, MD, NFDC. Jaikant Singh, Senior Head, State Government, Citizen Engagement and WorldSkills India, NSDC rendered vote of thanks.

JuniorSkills is an incredible opportunity for students from standard VI to XII to explore and exhibit their passion for a particular skill and receive the appropriate technical and vocational education training (TVET) to harness their passion. The championship platform aims at giving students practical insight into established and emergent skill categories, and access to industry experts who will guide them throughout JuniorSkills. The process and interactions with experts are also designed to help students make informed career choices.

The championship has been envisioned in accordance with the latest National Education Policy 2020 wherein the emphasis has been laid upon integration of vocational courses in schools. CBSE will play an important role in promoting and setting benchmarks for the skill competitions among schools affiliated with it.

The championship will be conducted at four levels - Screening, Qualifying, Pre-National and National. Amidst current COVID-19 situation, the three-level of competitions will be organized online, and the finale is proposed to be conducted on-ground in Delhi. SIDBI shall be the skill partner to run a complete domain on Innovative Business Ideas. SIDBI shall share design study material for this particular competition and develop the various competitive rounds (four rounds) to judge the entrepreneurial zeal of this young potential entrepreneurs. SIDBI shall also reward the winners in terms of exposure visits, capacity building, laptops, etc.

The national level skill championship will be for 10 skills which are, Web Technologies, IT Software Solution (Business), Visual Merchandising, Graphic Design, Fashion Technology, Mobile Robotics, Painting & Decorating, Solar Energy, Innovative Business Ideas and Digital Photography.

## Highlights:

- Students from class 6th to 12th from CBSE affiliated schools can participate.
- School authorities can submit bulk entries in the prescribed format on JuniorSkills portal
- Registrations have commenced from 15th January 2021
- Last date of registration is 19th February 2021
- To apply for participation, one can fill registration form on https://worldskillsindia.co.in/juniorSkills2021
- Screening and selection will be done by National Skill Development Corporation
- Competitions will be held online; finale to be organized on-ground in Delhi on April 25, 2021

# CSR INDIA UNITED

## Mi India and Sonu Sood join hands for #ShikshaHarHaath initiative to empower the future of tomorrow


Mi India, country's leading smartphone and Smart TV player has announced a new initiative - #ShikshaHarHaath, in collaboration with the popular actor and real life hero, Sonu Sood. This partnership is in continuation with the brand's efforts of enabling the student community from underprivileged sections to pursue their education without any roadblocks.

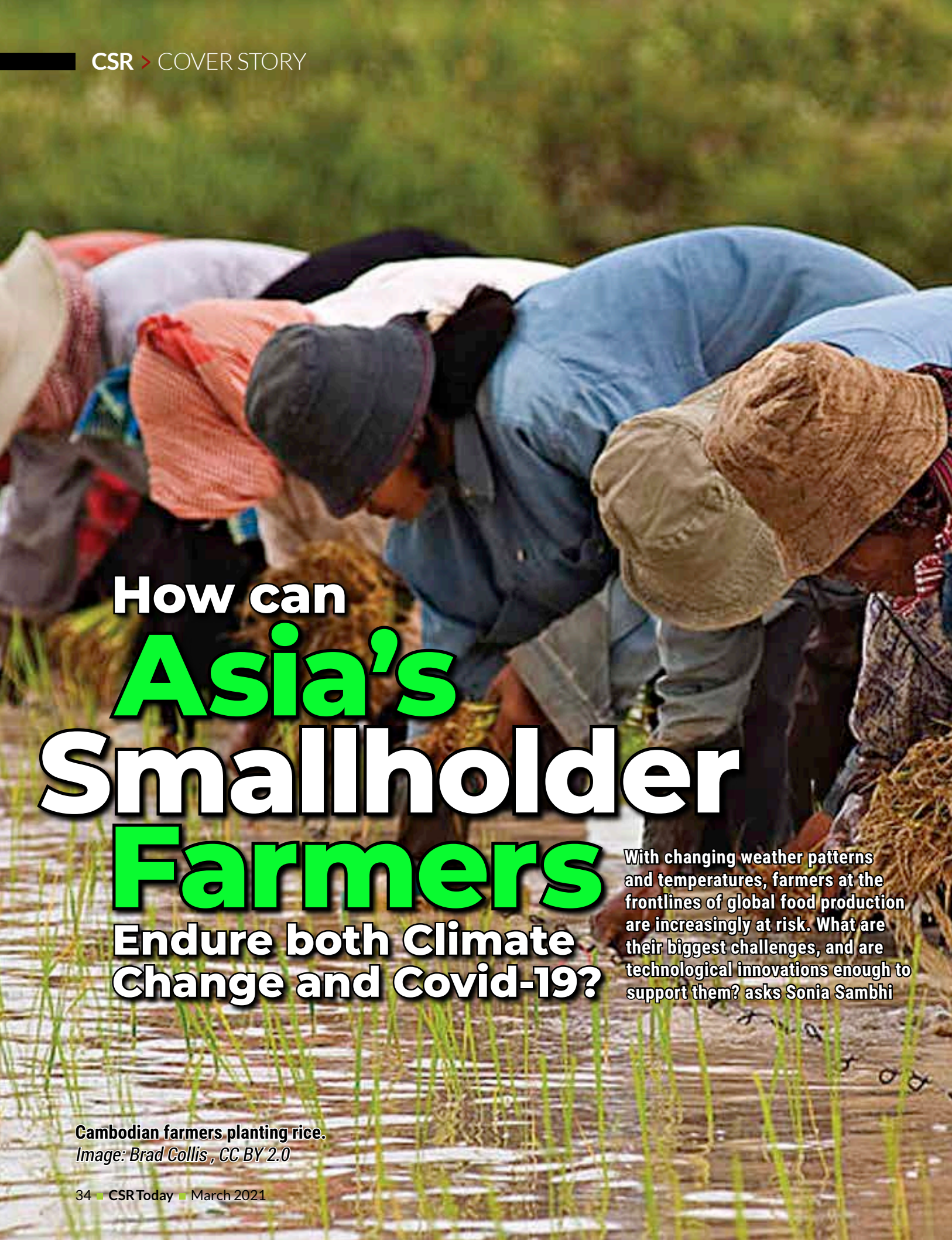
The movement will look at helping underprivileged kids across the country who are unable to access online education due to the unavailability of smartphones. As part of the collaboration, Mi India has pledged to empower thousands of students by donating Redmi smartphones. Additionally, the brand has launched a microsite allowing consumers to pledge their old smartphones. Consumers can visit https://shikshaharhaath.com/ and pledge their phones across the country. In addition to this, consumers can also contribute by dropping their working condition smartphones at nearby Mi Home, Mi Studio, Mi Service Centre. These second hand smartphones will be further refurbished at Mi India's service centers and prior to donation.

Speaking on the partnership, Manu Kumar Jain, MD at Mi India said, "At Mi India, we believe in making technology accessible to all. Education is a key enabler that can empower and secure the future of the coming generations. In the times of COVID, we firmly believe that no child should miss education due to the lack of a smartphone. The #ShikshaHarHaath initiative reinforces our commitment towards education for all. We are extremely proud to partner with Sonu Sood to take this initiative ahead. With his tremendous contribution through the times of COVID, Sonu has not only helped the needy but has also sparked a movement that makes giving joyful. We hope that this movement sparks joy of giving and learning amongst the ones who need it most".

Speaking on the partnership, Sonu Sood adds, " The pandemic has threatened our morale and we have not only tackled it, but emerged stronger and united. The lockdown changed the dynamics of education and it specifically affected the under resourced communities. Hence, with a mission to allow children access to online classes and ensure continuity in their education, our partnership with Mi India is a step to help build a better future. This initiative is our step towards increasing literacy and online education in the country."

Prateik Das, CSR Lead, Mi India added, "We have always believed in doing something unique which matches with our mission, creates a better world and serves the nation. #ShikshaHarHaath is an extension to our mission of educating and empowering the future heroes of India. We are very excited to have Sonu Sood help us reach the most needy across the country. With a two pronged approach, this initiative is about donating smartphones and also encouraging people to donate their old smartphones towards the needy."

This movement is in continuation of Mi India's efforts undertaken earlier to make sure that the children can avail these smartphones for online learning and education. Mi India, started their mission of providing accessible education in 2020 with its Mi Scholarship program. The brand pledged 2 crore towards students' education in partnership with Teach for India as well as Buddy4study to help build a brighter future.



# How can Asia's Smallholder Farmers Endure both Climate Change and Covid-19?

**With changing weather patterns and temperatures, farmers at the frontlines of global food production are increasingly at risk. What are their biggest challenges, and are technological innovations enough to support them? asks Sonia Sambhi**

**Cambodian farmers planting rice.**
*Image: Brad Collis , CC BY 2.0*

In Asia, over 450 million smallholder farmers support the bulk of food supplies. Despite their small land size, they produce up to 80 per cent of the food consumed in the region.

But these farmers currently face a double crisis: climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic.

"One of the impacts of the pandemic is that it has sharpened our focus on the priority areas that have long been of importance to agriculture in Asia. The key to protecting our food supplies lies in protecting our farmers," said Chris Argent, head of business sustainability, Asia Pacific, at international agribusiness Syngenta.

Speaking at a webinar entitled Agriculture's Brave New World: Empowering Asia's farmers in an era of Climate Change, he said that on top of erratic rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures, the pandemic has deepened existing challenges that smallholder farmers face in accessing finance.

"Banks are taking a more cautious approach to loans during the pandemic. In India, lending to the agricultural sector has contracted by 1.8 per cent during the pandemic, forcing farmers to turn towards informal private money lenders who can often exploit the situation by charging interest rates as high as 60 per cent," he added.

But at the same time, the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of food security, which in turn has played a positive role for farmers in the Philippines, said Cherrie Atilano, founding farmer and president of Agrea, an agriculture company that supports Filipino farmers.

"The pandemic has changed how the government responds to farmers. Despite all the challenges that the agriculture sector faced, it contributed positively to our GDP, from negative 0.5 per cent to a positive 1.6 per cent," Atilano said.

As a result, the agriculture sector is finally seen as a priority and has been allocated a bigger fiscal budget. The pandemic also brought together stronger partnerships between public and private actors for agriculture, she added.

## TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

To support farmers against the threats of climate change, the speakers agreed that technological innovation and smart agriculture techniques will be among the biggest drivers. But at the same time, these advances cannot be standalone solutions to the climate crisis.

"There are no silver bullets. It will be a gradual uptake of various technologies, and that together will gain momentum and improve things," commented Mark Shepherd, principal scientist at AgResearch, a New Zealand research agency.

Many digital technologies have been developed on larger farms, but they have benefits on smaller farms too, he added.

"For the small farms, they still need to demonstrate that the technologies deliver results. But when they do deliver, the volumes of data that we collect can aid decision-making and improve the efficiency of their systems," he said.

# IIT Madras Researchers show the way to more effective drugs to treat HIV-AIDS

Indian Institute of Technology Madras researchers are working on a revolutionary new idea that can pave the way to effective drugs for treating HIV/AIDS. Using molecular dynamics simulations, the research team have shown that introducing electrostatic interaction sites on potential drug molecules can enhance the efficacy of the antiviral drug against the HIV virus.

This research was led by Prof. Sanjib Senapati, Department of Biotechnology, IIT Madras, along with his research scholars, Mohammed Ahsan and Chinmai Pindi. The results of their ground-breaking work have recently been published in the prestigious peer-review Journal of the American Chemical Society – Biochemistry.

AIDS is one of the most devastating diseases and is a major cause of death among youth in many parts of the world. Since its outbreak nearly four decades ago, tremendous efforts have been directed towards development of antiretroviral therapies that target different stages in the life cycle of the virus that causes this deadly disease.

The pressing need for better drugs to combat drug-resistant HIV strains led researchers such as Prof. Sanjib Senapati to delve into the molecular structure of the protease to identify weak sites that can offer a handle for better inhibitor development.

One of the routes that drug developers work on is to attack is HIV-1 protease (HIVPR), an essential enzyme that is used by the AIDS virus for growth and maturation. Drug designers have aimed at developing efficient inhibitors of the enzyme – inhibitors are molecules that bind with the enzyme, thereby making it unavailable to the virus for growth and maturation.

Prof. Sanjib Senapati (C), Dept of Biotechnology, IIT Madras with his Research Scholars, Ms. Chinmai Pindi (L) & Mr. Mohammed Ahsa

Elaborating on this research, Prof. Sanjib Senapati, Department of Biotechnology, IIT Madras, said, "Current inhibitors that target HIVPR make use of the weak forces of attraction called 'van der Waal's forces' to attach themselves to the protease molecule. Given that these forces are weak, the efficacy of the drug is variable and the virus will soon become resistant to them."

Recent useful data obtained using analytical techniques such as neutron diffraction and NMR, on the molecular structure of the target HVPR enzyme, have encouraged Prof. Sanjib Senapati to re-visit the patterns of HVPR-inhibitor binding. By using state-of-art computational techniques his team has uncovered vital data that can be used for design of more efficacious drugs.

The Molecular Dynamics (MD) simulation studies conducted by IIT Madras Researchers showed the presence of a strong and asymmetrical electric charge in the active site of the HIVPR. If a drug molecule can be designed with a complementary charge, so that it can bind tightly with this active site through electrostatic attraction, it can permanently deactivate/inhibit the enzyme.

"Current drugs lack this electrostatic complementarity. This must be investigated because it is well-known that electrostatic forces between molecules are much stronger than van der Waals forces," added Prof. Sanjib Senapati.

Thus, Prof. Sanjib Senapati and his team propose that drug design strategies should embrace both electrostatics and van der Waals interactions to complement the HIVPR active site architecture. Further, the team believes that such compounds will be effective against both wild type and resistant HIV variants. This is a paradigm-shifting idea and will offer a whole new approach to the development of drugs for HIV-AIDS.

Prof. Chandra Verma, who has a Ph.D. from Bioinformatics Institute, A*STAR, Singapore, and is not involved in this IIT Madras Research, predicts a bright future for HIV drug development, with such knowledge base.

"This is a remarkable discovery," says Prof. Chandra Verma of Prof. Senapati's work, "and one that will hopefully open a new window into novel screening/designing efforts that will lead to the availability of drugs that can combat both the wild type and the resistant protease, satisfying to an unmet need in the arsenal of drugs used to treat the disease."

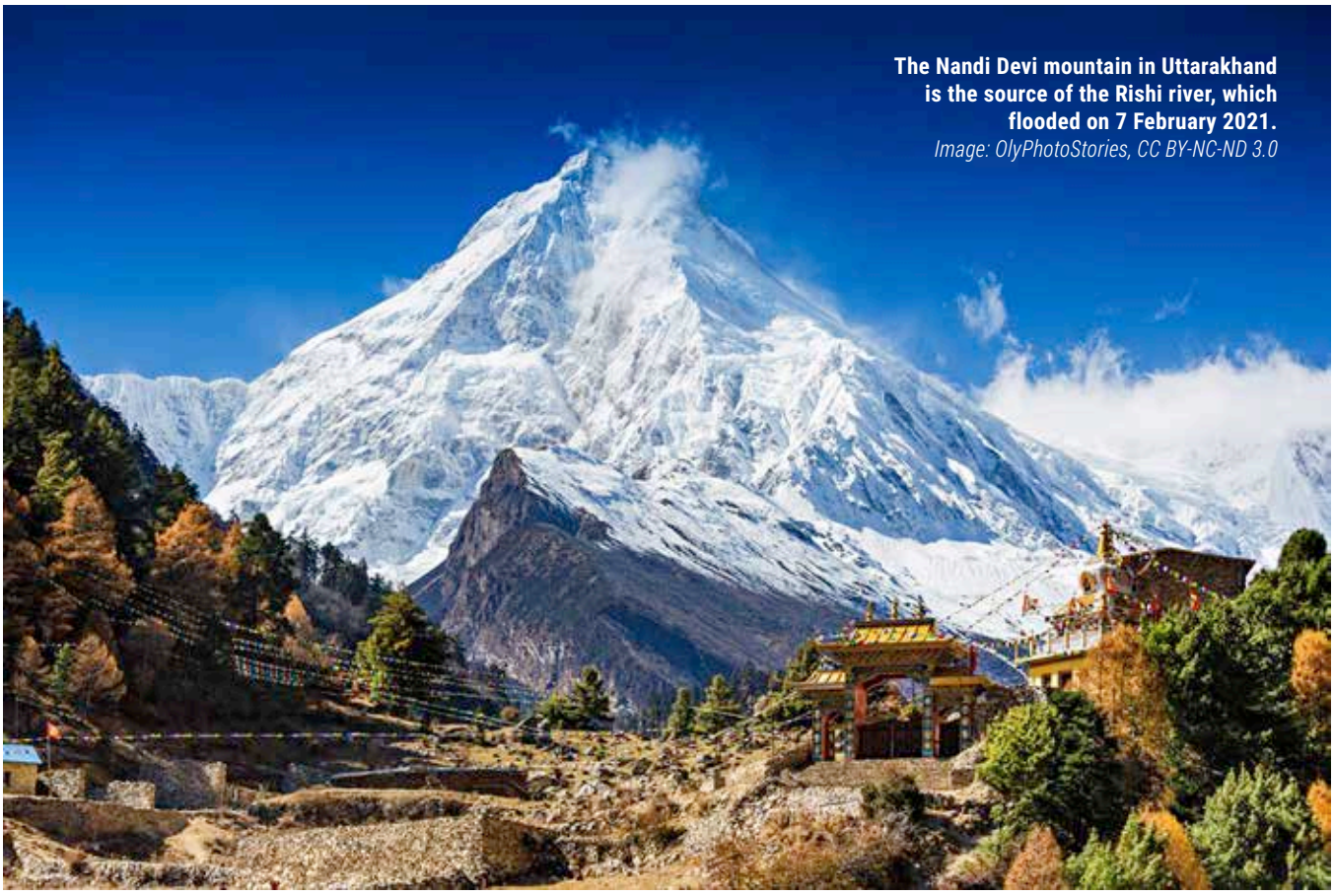
# IIT Hyderabad-Incubated Startup PURE EV to Launch its First Electric Motorcycle 'ETRYST 350'

## Its flagship Electric Motorcycle, completely designed, developed and manufactured in India, will come with a range of 120 KM and will be equipped with a 3.5 KWH patented battery system

IIT Hyderabad-incubated startup PURE EV is all set to launch its first electric motorcycle - ETRYST 350. This flagship product is completely designed, developed and manufactured in India and represents a major leap in the Indian Electric Vehicles sector.

The company will deploy 50 demo vehicles by end of March 2021 across Pan India to make them available for test drives at specific outlets. ETRYST 350 is scheduled to hit the roads on 15th of August this year at a price that would be economical in comparison with conventional motorcycles in Indian markets with similar pickup and power. PURE EV will first launch the product in the metropolitan cities of Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune, that have the highest sales numbers, after which it would expand to more outlets by the end of 2021.

ETRYST 350 has been designed and developed at PURE EV's tech-



**The Nandi Devi mountain in Uttarakhand is the source of the Rishi river, which flooded on 7 February 2021.**
*Image: OlyPhotoStories, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0*

# Did climate change contribute to India's catastrophic 'glacial flood'?

In this factcheck, Carbon Brief unpacks how the events of 7 February unfolded and speaks to scientists who suggest that a landslide was, in fact, the most likely primary cause.

By **Robert McSweeney** and **Ayesha Tandon, Carbon Brief**

On Sunday 7 February, a sudden flood devastated a Himalayan valley in the Indian province of Uttarakhand. It tore through two hydroelectric dams, killing dozens of people and trapping hundreds more in construction tunnels.

Media coverage has speculated about the cause of the devastation, with glacial lake "outbursts", broken glaciers and avalanches all put forward as possible explanations.

In this factcheck, Carbon Brief unpacks how the events unfolded and speaks to scientists who suggest that a landslide was, in fact, the most likely primary cause. And while further analysis is needed to assess the role of climate change, one scientist tells Carbon Brief that rising temperatures are causing "more of these big slope collapses".

## What happened?

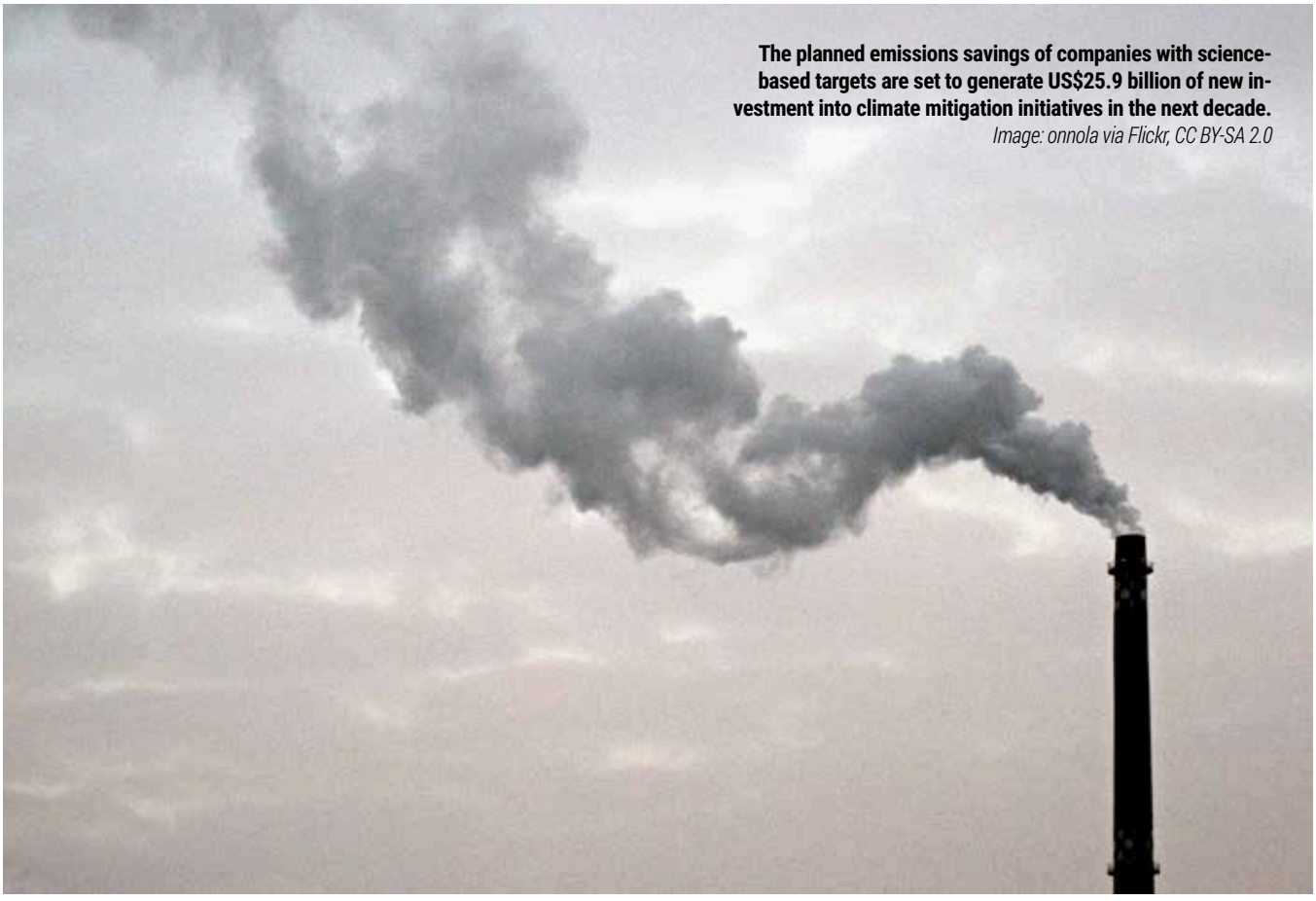
According to police in Uttrakhand, the flood hit around 05:30GMT (11:00 local time). The torrent of water, ice and debris first destroyed the Rishiganga hydroelectric project – a small dam of roughly 13.2MW. BBC News reported that "the impact catapulted water along the Dhauliganga river" where it hit the much larger 520MW Tapovan Vishnugad hydropower construction project 5km downstream.

The floodwater was first noticed by residents of Raini village, which

**Wildfires ravaging the American west coast. Climate change was a scarier prospect than contracting Covid-19 for most people in 2020, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer.**
*Image: NPS Climate Change Response, Public Domain Mark 1.0 via Flickr*

# PEOPLE WERE MORE SCARED OF CLIMATE CHANGE THAN CATCHING COVID IN 2020

A global study also found that people now regard businesses as more ethical and competent than governments in a year in which trust in institutions plummeted globally – nowhere more so than in China, writes **Robin Hicks**



**The planned emissions savings of companies with science-based targets are set to generate US$25.9 billion of new investment into climate mitigation initiatives in the next decade.**
*Image: onnola via Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0*

## Science-based target setters are reducing emissions faster than expected.

# Will they be trend setters?

Companies that set science-based targets have successfully reduced their emissions by 25 per cent since 2015, according to a new report. But much work lies ahead, according to **Arabesque**

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