

Joshimath in Uttarakhand is sinking

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In news— With cracks appearing within the span of a week in 46 more houses of Joshimath, the “sinking town”, petrified locals have found themselves caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The subsidence of Joshimath-

- For the past few weeks though, Joshimath has a dangerous new identity for its 20,000 residents – a town that they fear is sinking.
- **The reasons for this subsidence, experts believe, is not new; they are-**
 - Haphazard construction on fragile mountain terrains that have loose rock.
 - The seepage of water subsurface.
 - An erosion of top soil, and
 - Local streams changing their course because of man-made factors that block their natural flow.
 - The town is **geologically sensitive, situated on an east-west running ridge** to the south-west of Vishnuprayag, the **confluence of the Dhauliganga and Alaknanda rivers.**
 - The **gneissic rocks in Joshimath are highly weathered with low cohesive value.**
- The subsidence itself is not new either, **first flagged in the 1976 state government-appointed Mishra Commission report.**
- But its aggravation over the past two years, causing cracks in homes, rendering them unstable and prompting some to flee, calls for urgent action.
- In August 2022, the state government set up a multi-institutional team to conduct a joint geological and

geotechnical survey of Joshimath to ascertain the causes of ongoing subsidence and suggest remedial measures.

- In its findings, the committee found that unplanned developmental activities, periodic seismic activities, and absence of the assessment of the carrying capacity of the ground have burdened the fragile mountain slopes on which the town rests.

About Joshimath-

- For decades on end, the town of Joshimath has been a centre of faith, and a spiritual getaway in the mighty Himalayas. Located on National Highway 7, at a height of 6,150 feet, it is the doorway to the holy shrines of Badrinath and Hemkund Saheb, and the picturesque Valley of Flowers, and Auli.
- It is home to one of the four cardinal *pīthas* established by Adi Shankara.
- Between 7th and 11th centuries C.E., Katyuri kings, ruled the area of varying extent from their capital at “Katyur” (modern day Baijnath) valley in Kumaon. The Katyuri dynasty was founded by Vashudev Katyuri. The ancient Basdeo temple at Joshimath is attributed to Vasu Dev.
- It has strategic significance too; home as it is to the Joshimath Cantonment, permanent station of the Garwhal Scouts, close to the Indo-Tibetan Border.
- Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, which houses the township of Joshimath, falls in zone V of the seismic zonation map of India and is particularly vulnerable to landslides.

