

# Drilling resumes to rescue 41 Indians stuck in tunnel

Workers have been trapped since Nov. 12, when landslide caused portion of 4.5-km tunnel to collapse, 200 meters from entrance

AP Uttarakashi

**Rescue teams resumed drilling on Friday to reach 41 construction workers who have been trapped in a collapsed tunnel in northern India for nearly two weeks after a mechanical problem the day before delayed the evacuation effort, officials said.**

The platform of the drilling machine became unstable while boring through rock debris on Thursday, temporarily halting the final phase of digging at the accident site in Uttarakhand state for about 20 hours, state government spokesperson, Kirti Panwar said.

Panwar could not say how long it would take to complete the drilling and to bring the construction workers out. They have been trapped since Nov. 12, when a landslide caused a portion of the 4.5-km tunnel they were building to collapse about 200 meters from the entrance.

As the rescue operation stretched into a 13th day, teams had drilled through 46 meters and needed to excavate up to 12 meters more to create a passageway, Panwar said.

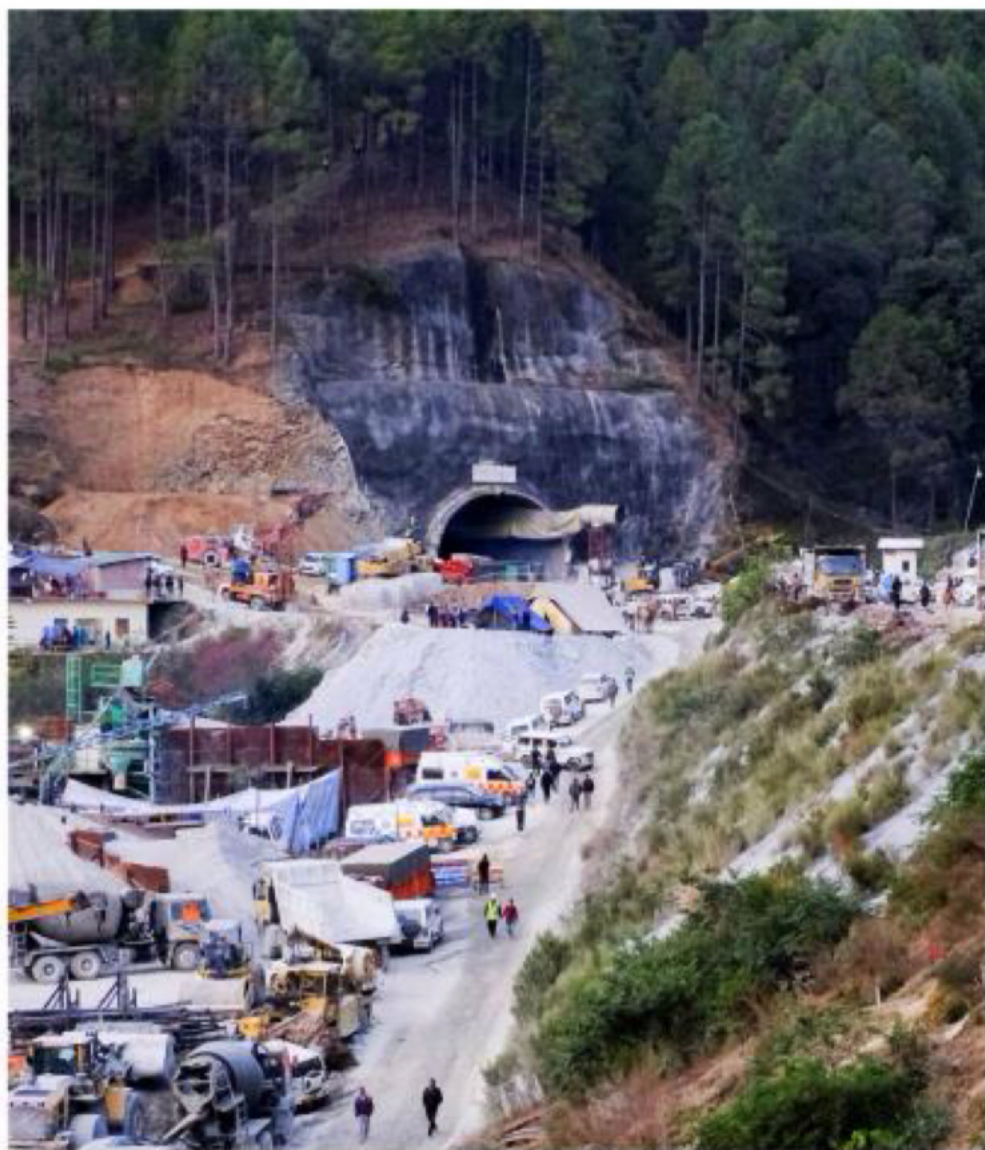
Before the work resumed, rescuers manually dug through debris to remove pieces of metal and prevent further damage, he said.

The rescue teams also are inserting pipes into the dug-out channel and welding them together to serve as a passageway. About 46 meters of pipes have been put in so far, according to Panwar. Members of the National Disaster Response Force plan to bring the workers out one by one on stretchers that have been fitted with wheels.

Mountainous terrain in the area has proved a challenge for the drilling machine, which broke down last weekend as rescue teams attempted to dig horizontally toward the trapped workers. The machine's high-intensity vibrations also caused more debris to fall.

The drilling had to stop again on Wednesday after the boring machine hit a metal girder, causing some damage to its blades.

Authorities have supplied the trapped workers with hot meals



Mountainous terrain has proved a challenge for the drilling machine, which broke down last weekend. Reuters



**The tunnel was designed as part of the Chardham all-weather road, which will connect various Hindu pilgrimage sites.**

made of rice and lentils through a 6-inch pipe after days in which they survived on dry food sent through a narrower pipe. Oxygen is being supplied through a separate pipe.

Most of the trapped workers are

migrant laborers from across the country. Many of their families have traveled to the accident site, where they have camped out for days to get updates on the rescue and in hopes of seeing their relatives soon.

"We are all waiting here, hoping they come out," Haridwar Sharma, whose brother, Sushil, is among the workers, said. "It is not in our hands ... the administration is at it, the machinery is there. With God's blessing, we are hopeful."

Officials earlier released a video from a camera pushed through

the pipe that showed the workers in their construction hats moving around the blocked tunnel while communicating with rescuers on walkie-talkies.

The tunnel the workers were building was designed as part of the Chardham all-weather road, which will connect various Hindu pilgrimage sites.

Some experts say the project, a flagship initiative of the federal government, will exacerbate fragile conditions in the upper Himalayas, where several towns are built atop landslide debris.