

A phone call that saved a dozen lives

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There is light at the end of the tunnel – Vinod Singh and his 11 colleagues lived this reality on Sunday.

Mr. Singh, 33, a welder, was the first to be rescued from one of the two blocked tunnels at Tapovan. A video where he is seen wriggling out of the tunnel, overwhelmed, chanting slogans in ode to the famous Badrinath temple, has since gone viral.

Mr. Singh, a resident of Joshimath, recalled the seven gruelling hours he spent in the tunnel with his colleagues, till they were rescued by a team of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel. "The tunnel, about four metres high, was covered in a mix of debris and water for up to three metres," he said on the phone from the ITBP's hospital in Joshimath.

Mr. Singh said it was a faint network on his phone that saved them. "We managed to drag ourselves up to 350 metres to the end of the tunnel, where we saw some light... I noticed that my BSNL phone had network. I first called my office manager and then my brother," he said. An ITBP team, deployed 15 km away, was rushed to the tunnel.

Efforts are on to rescue those stuck in the second tunnel at Tapovan.

the Chamonix area, most probably a landslip and not a glacial lake burst.

A glacial lake outburst flooding (GLOF) occurs when a breach in the glacial lake causes a sudden surge downstream. Such lakes are formed when glaciers erode land, melt and over time become a large mass of water in the depression formed, and these can be breached, causing floods downstream. However, several scientists, based on an analysis of satellite images, have failed to spot any such lakes.

The Central Water Commission (CWC) monitors and prepares monthly reports on the state of glacial lakes and waterbodies measuring 10 hectares and above via satellite. Nothing out of the ordinary was observed. However, it is possible that smaller pockets of water that have not been caught in the satellite images may have flooded. "There is a bit of a mystery and it will be some time before the causes can be determined," CWC Director Sharat Chandra told *The Hindu*. The commission constituted a team of experts on Monday to investigate the deluge.

Other experts opine that a large mass of rock or debris might have impacted the glacier and triggered an avalanche.

'Extremely steep'

Kalachand Sain, Director, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, said apart from glacial lakes not being observed, the glaciers were extremely steep and prevented water from accumulating