

To face heavy monsoons, States must preserve the integrity of rivers and mountains

Even as the Southwest monsoon retreats along parts of northern Karnataka, Telangana, Odisha, Bengal and the northeastern States in October, it is leaving a trail of destruction in several districts.

Significant loss of life has occurred in Kerala. While the heaviest recent downpour has been reported from west Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, east Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, with as much as 31 cm in Sheopur on Monday, there has been very heavy rain in Kerala and Gangetic West Bengal.

The Indian monsoon is an invaluable resource that sustains hundreds of millions of people, but variations in its patterns and intensity pose a rising challenge. Kerala, which hosts a vast stretch of the Western Ghats, is having to contend with these changes with almost no respite between severe spells. The recurrent bursts show that anomalies in precipitation over the State, spectacularly demonstrated by the inundation of idyllic towns in 2018 and by mudslides that killed many a year later, require a comprehensive adaptation plan. This year's torrential rain in the State, which has killed at least 35 people so far, is causing alarm as large reservoirs in mountainous reaches start filling up fast, while the Northeast monsoon lies ahead.

The Government has responded by issuing alerts for several dams, including Idukki, and put in place plans to release water to avoid a repeat of the flooding witnessed three years ago. Significantly, the IMD has issued an alert for more heavy rainfall in Kerala from October 20.

The precarity of living conditions in much of the country make the annual monsoon a persistent threat for millions, and governments should do more to reduce the risk to life and property. Nurturing the health of rivers and keeping them free of encroachments, protecting the integrity of mountain slopes by ending mining, deforestation and incompatible construction hold the key.

The ecological imperative should be clear to Kerala with successive years of devastation, echoing the warnings in the Madhav Gadgil committee report on the Western Ghats. Land may be an extremely scarce resource, but expanding extractive economic activity to montane forests is certain to cause incalculable losses. One estimate by researchers in 2017 put quarrying area in Kerala at over 7,157 hectares, much of it in central districts that were hit later by mudslides.

It should be evident to governments that it is unconscionable to allow the pursuit of short-term profits at the cost of helpless communities.

A more benign development policy should treat nature as an asset, and not an impediment. Accurately mapped hazard zones should inform all decisions. There is a similar threat from extreme weather, breaking glaciers and cloudbursts to Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Several States face climate change impacts and extreme weather, and the response must be to strengthen natural defences.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

- Q. Under whose chairmanship the committee related to the conservation of Western Ghats was constituted?**
- (a) Madhav Gadgil
 - (b) K. Kasturirangan
 - (c) Jairam Ramesh
 - (d) Both a and b

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

- Q. 'The recent rains across the country in the months of September and October have created a flood problem in many areas especially in Kerala.' What are the reasons for this flood in Kerala according to you? What innovative efforts are being made by the governments to avoid it? need to? (250 Words)**

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.