

A call for integrated flood management

What is the issue?

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- Due to the onset of northeast monsoon, Chennai is seriously worried with flooding concerns.

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- It is clear that Chennai needs integrated flood management, especially the revival of lakes and water tanks.

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What is the present scenario?

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- Chennai is a lower elevation coastal city with a very high population density.

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- The torrential rains are exceeding the normal by 93% in the period of four days from November 1 leaving residents in a state of despair.

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- Flood waters stranded people in the rapidly growing suburban housing clusters, with many having to flee to safer places fearing a deluge as in 2015.

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- There have been efforts to alleviate immediate misery through the distribution of relief materials in some places.

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- The larger issue of how the city deals with flood and drought cycles remains unaddressed.

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What are the shortfalls in planning?

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- Many traditional lakes and canals that existed in the city's core a century ago

to absorb the intense downpour are left unpreserved.

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- Successive governments have allowed the mindless draining of wetlands and their conversion into expensive real estate, with catastrophic consequences.

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- Regrettably, the great flood two years ago has not yielded a policy course correction.

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- Poor waste management is exacerbating the problem by blocking drains, canals and lakes.

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- At the same time it is also noted that ill-planned road projects are blocking smooth flow of excess water.

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What should be done?

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- The state government must move beyond the creation of weak storm water drains to an integrated flood management system.

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- Chennai should return to the traditional wisdom of creating tanks and lakes for water storage.

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- More importantly, old silted ones have to be rejuvenated, in order to harvest the floods and replenish the depleted groundwater.

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- Involving the community to monitor the health of the tanks and lakes can keep out encroachers, who are often protected by patron-politicians.

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- The deficit of good housing and civic infrastructure must actively be addressed and remedial structures should be built for existing localities.

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Source: The Hindu

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