Action Plans for Mitigating Harsh Summers

What is the issue?

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- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has warned of an exceptionally hot summer this year. Click here to know more.
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- This calls for advance planning to mitigate its adverse consequences.
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What are the predictions of IMD?

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- Maximum temperature in most parts of the country is projected to remain over 1 degree Celsius above normal.
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- Frequent and relatively more intense heat waves are expected between March and May.
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- There are signs of a moderate La Nina condition (deemed favourable for the monsoon.
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- However, the IMD has refrained from drawing any conclusion about its impact on the coming monsoon.
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- This is perhaps because it is likely to start weakening from May-end, prior to the onset of the monsoon.
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- Even if the moderate La Nina leads to good rainfall, the relief will accrue only in the rainy season.
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- It is less likely to help in the pre-monsoon dry season, when it is needed the most.
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What are the implications for India?

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- If IMD’s forecast holds true, it will be the third consecutive year of unbearably hot summers.
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- Notably, India witnessed back-to-back droughts in 2014 and 2015.
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- In fact, the temperatures have already begun to shoot up, hovering around 2.5 degrees Celsius above normal in several regions.
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- The total water stock of the 91 main dams monitored by the Central Water Commission is now short of last year’s corresponding level and below average.
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- Moreover, the total winter rainfall has been deficient by as much as 64% in the country as a whole.
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- The deficiency is 67% in the key north-western agricultural belt.
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What are the concerns with harsher summers?

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- Excessive heat can have wide-ranging consequences, costing the **economy** dearly.
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- It can lower the **crop yields**.
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- Especially, that of **wheat** which is highly sensitive to a premature spike in temperature in March.
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- Harsh summers would deplete **water resources**, which are already stressed due to poor winter rainfall.
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- It would affect **power** availability by pushing up demand and curtailing hydel power production.
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- Besides, it could depress **milk yield** of cattle.
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- It could also threaten **human health**, causing heat-induced illnesses and

death.
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- **Labour productivity**, too, tends to dwindle during acute summers.
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What action plans need to be taken?

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- Area-specific action plans are, therefore, imperative to combat heat-related contingencies.
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- Ahmedabad had prepared a “heat action plan” in 2010 when a 47-degree Celsius heat wave had taken 700 lives.
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- Implementation of this plan helped restrict casualties to 20, under similar conditions in 2015.
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- Civic authorities in other states could take a cue from such measures.
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- Putting up drinking water kiosks in public places, setting up day shelters, changing school timings, etc are some of them.
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- Water release from reservoirs need to be rescheduled to facilitate its judicious and economical use.
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- The work timings of labour, too, can be readjusted to provide longer breaks during blazing afternoons.
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- The science of genetic engineering can help prepare Indian agriculture to face unkind summers, without any significant erosion in productivity.
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Source: Business Standard

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