Addressing Changing Trend in Monsoon

What is the issue?

The drastic change in the monsoon pattern in recent years calls for a holistic and quick policy response.

What is the change of trend in Indian monsoon?

- The monsoon, which, since the Indian Meteorological Department started recording it, has been arriving in India by June 1 and departing by September 30 like clockwork, is no longer behaving.
- While the pattern itself has been changing for the past several years, this year perhaps saw the most severe deviations from "normal."
- After the hottest summer on record (each month of the Indian summer was the hottest ever recorded for that month), the monsoons were delayed.
- Although they hit the Kerala coast with a delay of just three days, the monsoon didn't progress much after that, leading rise to fears of drought.
- While the season total now is in excess of normal and monsoon it is set to retreat only by mid-October (the most delayed withdrawal on record).
- Large swathes of the country, particularly in the North, are in deficit, while there has been late and massively excessive rainfall in other areas, triggering floods.

What are havocs caused by changing monsoons?

- As late as the beginning of August, several parts of India were running a deficit of over 30 per cent from the long season average.
- Kerala wiped out its deficit in just one week (from August 1-8), triggering massive floods for the second year in succession and landslides killed dozens.
- Neighboring Karnataka was worse hit, in the same week (August 1-8), Karnataka as a whole received 128 per cent of normal rainfall but it was highly concentrated.
- On August 8, Mysuru received 3000 per cent of its long-term average rain for that day.
- Kodagu (Coorg) received 700 per cent excess, wiping out large chunks of its plantation economy.

How change in monsoon affects policy making holistically?

- Official machinery is yet to wake up to the altered reality of Indian Monsoons, The IMD has been talking about changing the dates for the official monsoon for five years, but is yet to do it.
- This means the Agriculture Ministry's advisory (as well as those from its State counterparts) hasn't changed.
- Due to this farmers are not planting shorter duration crops, so delayed onset is killing early sowings, while late floods are destroying harvested or harvest-ready produce.
- Banks are still releasing (or not, depending on whom you ask) credit as per the timetable set in 1941.
- The Food Corporation of India's procurement machinery kicks into action when crops have either not arrived or long since been sold at distress prices to traders.
- Policy continues to focus on the kharif crop while the reality is that the rabi or the winter crop is now accounting for half the food grain output for the year and almost all of the oilseeds and pulses.

What is the way forward?

- In recent time sit is proved that monsoons are (nearly) unpredictable natural disasters.
- The impact left by the monsoon is widespread, spread out over days, weeks or even months.
- 2019 has seen a new high in the variations in the spatial and temporal distribution of the monsoons, but it is now part of a pattern which has been seen for several years now.
- Thus Government need to change crop cycles, credit cycles, create storage infrastructure to deal with flooding.
- Change in the type and variety of crops and change in the kind of inputs used by farmers to deal with the altered reality is needed of the hour.

Source: Business Line

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