Cauvery Basin – Ecological concerns

What is the issue?

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Voices have been raised against the proposal of railway lines in Cauvery river basin in recent times.

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What is its importance?

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- The Cauvery basin drains an area of about 81,000 sq. km across three states and a union territory.
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- The river originates in Kodagu district while it irrigates agricultural fields, generates electricity, and provides drinking water to downstream communities across south India.
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- The Cauvery and its tributaries contribute the bulk of water to the Krishna Raja Sagara dam which is the primary water source for Bengaluru.
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- But the proposed Mega railway projects are not only economically unviable but also ecologically damaging.
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- It poses a clear threat to the long-term water security of the three States that depend on the Cauvery.
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What are the major implications?

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- **Ecological** - All the tracks will cut through large swaths of agricultural farms and fields as well as Protected and Reserve Forests.
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- These areas are spread across Kodagu and Mangaluru districts of Karnataka

and Wayanad and Kannur districts of Kerala.
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- In its feasibility report of the Mysuru-Thalassery line, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation stated that the project would not be beneficial to the State.
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- With the protests by the people against the project, the plan to build the line was scrapped.
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- However, plans to build the tracks will re-emerge in time sooner or later.
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- **Forest cover** - India State of Forests report 2017 noted that Kodagu lost 102 sq. km. of tree cover in just two years.
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- The recent proposal might result in forest-depletion in the Kodagu basin that will have reduced capacity to capture and store rainwater.
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- Raised railway tracks will also impede wildlife and could result in the deaths of endangered animals such as elephants.
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What should be done?

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- Studies by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology have found evidence for increasingly variable monsoon rainfall in the Kodagu basin.
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- A recent study has revealed that activities like construction, illegal mining and hill cutting are increasingly responsible for the uptick in fatal landslides, particularly in Asia.
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- This makes preserving forest cover more vital in order to mitigate the collateral effects of these extreme events.
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- A **UN report**, Water for a Sustainable World, pointed out that the gap between the availability of water and our need for water is only going to increase.
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- The journal **Nature** has reported that diminished access to water resources increases the risk of social unrest, political instability, intensified refugee flows and armed conflicts even within borders.
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- The variable nature of monsoons makes India one of the most vulnerable

regions to water-related disasters associated with climate change and extreme weather events.
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- Hence, preserving existing forests in the Cauvery watershed can reduce the effect of floods and droughts, while recharging groundwater.
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- Economists should estimate the monetary and human cost of cities and implement policies focused on achieving and maintaining sustainable water resources.
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- Good water governance of the nation’s watersheds will be key to its sustainable future.
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- Hence, protecting the Cauvery’s source is essential for the sustained well-being of the entire basin.
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Source: The Hindu

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