Dealing with Rains and Floods

What is the issue?

- India is witnessing widespread monsoon rains across the country, with threats of floods in some states.
- There has to be concerted measures by states to deal with the crippling cycles of drought and flood.

What is the current monsoon status?

- The pre-monsoon phase between March and May was worrying as rainfall was scarce.
- However, the current robust monsoon season in most parts of coastal, western and central India augurs well for the entire economy.
- The beneficial conditions in the Indian Ocean have aided the very heavy rainfall recorded so far.
- This is, especially, in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, the north-eastern States, Karnataka, the Konkan coast, hilly districts of Kerala and TN.
- This pattern may extend into Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bengal and other eastern regions as well.

What is the need for caution?

- The recent floods in Kerala and the Chennai catastrophe of 2015 remind of the negative side to rains.
- The long-term trends for flood impact in India have been one of declining loss of lives and cattle since the decadal high of 1971-80.
- However, there is rising absolute economic losses, though not as a share of GDP.
- There can be a terrible cost in terms of lives and property lost, and people displaced in events of flood.
- Distressing scenes of death and destruction are again being witnessed.
- Even in a rain-shadow region such as Coimbatore in TN, the collapse of a railway parcel office after a downpour has led to avoidable deaths.
- All these call for taking preparatory measures for the rainy season.

What are the concerns in this regard?

- The response of State governments to this imperative is delayed.

- States are hesitant to act against encroachment of lake catchments, river courses and floodplains.
- E.g., even the extreme distress in Chennai has not persuaded the State government against allowing structures being constructed on a lake bed, after reclassification of land
- Granting such permissions is a clear abdication of responsibility and violation of National Disaster Management Authority Guidelines to prevent urban flooding.

What are the measures needed?

- It is important to increase resilience through planning, especially in cities and towns which are expanding steadily.
- Orderly urban development is critical for sustainability, as the mega flood disasters in Mumbai and Chennai indicate.
- Water-harvesting measures, as advocated by the Centre's Jal Shakti Abhiyan, and a safety audit of structures should be taken up.
- In drafting their management plans, States must be aware of the scientific consensus - on future rain spells influenced by a changing climate.
- They need to invest in reliable infrastructure to mitigate the impact of flooding and avert disasters that could have global consequences in an integrated economy.
- Scientific hydrology, coupled with the traditional wisdom of saving water through large innovative structures, will mitigate floods and help communities prosper.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering