

Drought Conditions in Maharashtra

Why in news?

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Maharashtra government has identified 201 talukas in 32 districts as facing water scarcity and drought-like conditions.

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What is the recent crisis?

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- Large parts of Maharashtra, North Gujarat, Saurashtra, Kutch and North Karnataka are reeling under drought.

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- Marathwada region of Maharashtra seems the worst affected.

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- The southwest monsoon rains were, in fact, quite good in most of these areas during June-July.

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- The monsoon's timely arrival led to the area sown under kharif crops being more or less normal.

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- But drought conditions have been induced by monsoon failure in the second half of the season.

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- Farmers were caught unaware by the extended dry spell from August.

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- By this time, their already planted crops were in the late vegetative growth stage.

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What is the impact?

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- Farmers with some irrigation facilities would well have saved their crop.

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- In the event, the yield losses from late-season moisture stress may have been minimal.
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 - But even these farmers are in no position to plant a rabi crop.
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 - It's because there's hardly any soil and subsoil moisture left to allow rabi cropping.
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 - Evidently, the Union Agriculture Ministry's latest sowing data for the current rabi season shows a 16% drop in crop area so far.
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 - While rabi plantings will continue for the next one month, the trend is unlikely to reverse in this period.
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 - This is particularly the case in the above said states/regions where the drought situation is most serious.
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 - But the problem is not simply that of farmers being unable to grow crops (wheat, mustard, chana, jeera, dhaniya, or saunf).
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 - What worries them more is providing water and fodder to their cattle and buffaloes.
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 - The distress migration by farmers along with animals has already begun in central Maharashtra.
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 - This could present a serious challenge when the next monsoon is just few months away.
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 - Marathwada is already in a water crisis. Availability of drinking water has become a challenge as dug wells have dried up and bore wells are fast running dry.
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What is to be done?

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- Rabi season drought may be somewhat a rare phenomenon.
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 - But its impact on crop production and supply of water and fodder is no less, extending to the following summer.

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- The state has started securing the existing water sources for rational use, to curtail water crisis.

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- For the governments at the Centre and in the concerned states, the most sensible option is to act fast.

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- The Central teams should immediately be sent to ascertain the ground situation and officially declare drought.

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- Preparation for starting fodder camps, taking up MGNREGA works or making direct benefit transfers to the most vulnerable families should start soon.

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Source: Indian Express, Down to Earth

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