Extinction of rivers

Why in news?

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Prime Minister said that many of the country's rivers existed only on the map as they had no water in them.

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What is the present condition?

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- Numerous small rivers and rivulets like Bharathapuzha and Ghaggar, which once flowed the year-round, have already dried up or have become seasonal streams.
- Most states have no action plans in place aimed specifically at safeguarding the rivers from threatened disappearance.
- Existing river management strategies are focused primarily on mitigating the pollution of their waters.
- Main reason is rooted largely in the poor upkeep of their catchments which feed water into them.
- Most of India's major, minor and small rivers are either rainfed (read monsoon-fed) or snow-fed or both rain- and snow-fed.
- The green cover of their catchments needs to be preserved to ensure sustained water inflows into them.
- Even the riverbeds need to be kept free of encroachment.
- But this is not the case.
- The rivers originating from the Himalayas, too, are at risk because of rapid melting of glaciers and erosion of vegetation due to indiscriminate mining, tourism, construction and other human activities.

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What is Narmada Conservation Action Plan?

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- PM has commended the Madhya Pradesh government’s Narmada Conservation Action Plan as the role model for river protection.
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- Some of the components of this plan are worthy of emulating elsewhere.
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- These include extensive planting of tree saplings in the river catchment and all along its embankments.
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- It aims at conversion of all the towns around the river into mini smart cities with zero discharge of any untreated effluent into the river.
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What should be done?

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- Programmes to check the discharge of wastes into the rivers are part of practically all river rejuvenation projects, but none of them has worked.
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- e.g The Ganga action plan, which was originally launched way back in the 1980s failed to curb disposal of wastes into this river, this malpractice has continued unabated.
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- It cannot work without the participation and of the local people.
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- Programmes have to be need-based and planned with people’s involvement.
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- The government’s role should be confined largely to provision of funds, technological support and creation of necessary supportive infrastructure.
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Source: Business Standard

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