Impact of Cyclone Gaja

What is the issue?

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- Recently, Cyclone Gaja made its landfall between Nagapattinam and Vedaranyam in Tamil Nadu. Click here to know more.
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- The extent of damage caused by Cyclone Gaja is much worse than what was believed earlier and thus calls for an integrated relief effort.
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How severe is the disaster?

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- The impact was not considered to have been this severe in the initial days after the cyclone stuck as the death toll was relatively low.
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- But Cyclone Gaja is a major disaster, and its economic impact in Tamil Nadu is comparable to that of the tsunami of 2004.
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- **People** - The suffering, the loss, and the displacement are of an enormous magnitude.
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- People are distraught as houses have collapsed, farms lie ruined, water sources are contaminated and electricity supply remains disrupted.
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- The Tamil Nadu government has estimated the number of people rendered homeless at 3.7 lakh, and houses destroyed at 3.4 lakh.
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- **Livelihoods** - The cyclone has crippled agriculture and livelihoods, felling thousands of productive trees and killing livestock.
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- The districts of Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur and Pudukottai are the severely affected.
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- These are the fertile Cauvery delta districts which are considered the

granary of the state of Tamil Nadu.
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- The cyclone swept in wind and water, destroying lakhs of trees.
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- These include commercial coconut, banana, cashew, mango, jackfruit, casuarina, betelvine, eucalyptus, teak and sugarcane on thousands of hectares.
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- Between 60% and 80% of the coconut trees in the region have fallen.
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- Notably, these contribute a quarter of India’s coconuts with the highest unit yield.
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- Unlike paddy or many other crops, bringing coconut plantations back to life will take years.
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- The paddy crop of the samba/thaladi seasons was also damaged in some places.
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- Boats and huts of fishermen were destroyed. Nearly a lakh tonne of stocks in salt pans in Vedaranyam in Nagapattinam district were washed away.
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- **Ecosystem** - The Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, a Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance for conservation), was ravaged.
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- Carcasses of blackbuck, spotted deer, feral horses and birds were washed on the shores of Karaikal in Puducherry.
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What lies ahead?

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- **Infrastructure** - Tamil Nadu government's top priority should be to restore administrative systems and service delivery in the affected areas.
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- Many areas still remain inaccessible because fallen trees have blocked roads.
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- Physical access, electricity connections and public health facilities are essential for effective relief work to be undertaken.
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- **Compensation** - The farm insurance under Centre’s *Fasal Bima Yojana* covers only food crops, oilseeds and annual horticultural crops.
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- But many of the farmers have invested in various trees and livestock, expecting long-term returns.
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- The large number of stricken farmers should thus be assured of a moratorium on any agricultural loans that they have taken.
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- A fair and special compensation scheme should be prepared.
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- The state government has given the Centre a memorandum seeking nearly Rs. 15,000 crore for restoration, rehabilitation and mitigation, besides Rs. 1,431 crore for immediate relief work.
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- The State’s requirements should be met in full.
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Source: The Hindu

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Quick Fact

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Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana

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- The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme) was launched in 2016.
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- It envisages a uniform premium of only 2% to be paid by farmers for Kharif crops and 1.5% for Rabi crops.
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- The premium for annual commercial and horticultural crops will be 5%.
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