Mumbai Floods – An Analysis of the institutional responses

Why in news?

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Mumbai recently received the highest ever 24 hour rainfall for the August month since 1997.

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How did the government & community respond?

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- With excessive rains devastating Mumbai, the pressure on the Municipal Corporation to deliver was immense.
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- All the BMC services were running and uninterrupted power & water supply was maintained.
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- While, the tireless work of the municipal employees deserves applause, the police force too adapted admirably to working under challenging conditions.
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- The public also contributed in numerous ways to ease the distress of the calamity by providing for food & shelter to the needy.
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What have been the major sticky points?

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- **Ignored Warning -** India Meteorological Department (IMD) had apparently warned of a deluge-like situation a day earlier.
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- This wasn’t heeded by the government and hence schools & colleges remained functional till the deluge intensified.
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- While the government’s high-headed attitude deserves severe condemnation, it is partly due to the poor track record of the IMD that had led to its warning being ignored.
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- **Meteorological Deficiencies -** The IMD’s excuse for its failure is that it does not have the computing power to process all the data from satellites.
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- Also, Doppler radar, one of the important instruments for accurate weather forecasting, is deficient in India.
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- While India requires 55 of them, currently only 10 is available & the procurement of the rest is repeatedly getting delayed.
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How did the TV Channels respond?

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- While telephone lines get jammed soon during a calamity, television and radio usually continue to reach a maximum number of people.
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- **TRP Madness -** The important thing during the deluge was to keep citizens informed about the precise situation, hour by hour, area by area.
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- But rather, all news channels were more focused on castigated the BMC and other authorities over their failures for TRPs.
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- **Tidal woes -** If people had been informed of the timing of tides that affect flooding patterns by the TV channels, the stress could’ve been reduced.
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- **Logistics -** If people had been told trains had stopped running, they wouldn’t have waited for hours at railway platforms.
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- While, TV channels need to be sensitised on their moral responsibilities, the government could also alternately consider developing an emergency app which gives accurate and vital information during calamities.
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What is the larger picture regarding floods?

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- Data correlates increasing erraticity & massive downpours to the largely to the current decade.
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- Experts interpret that these as the effects of Global warming and climate change.
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- While it will be too expensive to have robust systems to withstand the emerging extreme eventualities, it needs to be recognized that a lot has to be done to even meet the average highs of annual downpour.
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- Convservation of wetlands & mangroves holds the key to a sustained solution for dealing with floods.
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- Offiicial apathy in recognizing the importance of open spaces, designing sufficient dirnage systems & checking encroachemts contributes a great deal in aggrevating floods.
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Source: Indian Express

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