Preparing for a Heat Stress

What is the issue?

- A forecast of a below average monsoon in 2019 is a cause for worry.
- It is crucial now that administrations at all levels draw up plans to address heat stress and possible water scarcity.

What is the weather scenario?

- Last year (2018) was marked by erratic rainfall that flooded Kerala and crippled agriculture in eastern and western States.
- Recent forecasts suggest the possibility of an El Nino, often associated with drought conditions.
- Nevertheless, this must be considered along with other factors that seem to weaken the El Nino link.
- These include a dipole weather phenomenon in the Indian Ocean.
- Given these, things may become much clearer when the India Meteorological Department issues its forecast.
- However, error margins and the erratic nature of rainfall in different regions make any predictions uncertain.
- E.g. last year, the realisation of rainfall was 91% of the long-term average, while the prediction was for 97%
- If the summer monsoon turns out to be deficient, it will add to the heat stress concerns, and pressures on rural employment and the economy as a whole.

What are the precautionary measures?

- The key elements of protection in a heat wave are avoiding exposure during the hottest part of the day around noon.
- Vulnerable sections of the population, especially the senior citizens, need special focus.
- Staying adequately hydrated, wearing suitable clothing including headgear, and creating shade in public places are some precautions.
- These kinds of messages and weather alerts should be disseminated through television, mobile phones and social media platforms.

What lies ahead?

- Given the elections time, it is crucial that administrators do not ignore the

public health risk of heat waves.

- The State administrations should be prepared for the likelihood of a heat spike, particularly during April and May.
- Official agencies and NGOs should start the groundwork as per the National Disaster Management Authority's guidelines.
- Urban local bodies in particular have a responsibility to care for the large number of vulnerable city dwellers.
- Yet, only few cities have drawn up proper heat action plans to respond to extreme weather or made them public.
- India is looking at another uncertain monsoon, increasingly when the neglected potential of decentralised water-harvesting is realised.
- It is more than a decade since the National Commission on Farmers suggested the wider adoption of both rainwater harvesting and aquifer recharge.
- It is time to take such measures that will help communities achieve resilience.
- These are essential to prevent loss of life and extreme distress to communities.

Source: The Hindu

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