Water Crisis in J&K

What is the issue?

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- Jammu and Kashmir government has directed the state's farmers to not sow paddy as the region is expecting a water shortage in the coming months.
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- Farmers have been suggested to opt for lesser water demanding crops.
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What is the water situation in J&K?

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- J&K has received deficit rainfall for the last three years is stated to experiencing a prolonged dry spell which was last witnessed in early 2000.
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- **Presently -** The state has received less than normal snowfall and rain in the winter of 2017, and in the initial days of spring this year.
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- The past 8 months had been dry in the valley, which has caused water levels in Jhelum to dip to a mere 1.3 meters, while it should've ideally been 1.5 meters.
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- Even an abundant rainfall in the coming months is expected to only partially offset the current situation – thereby triggering a water emergency.
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- **Risks -** If the situation aggravates, it may also lead to a drinking water crisis in many villages, as streams may run dry in the course of time.
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- Additionally, the districts of "Baramulla, Kupwara, Budgam and Pulwama" have been marked as high priority.
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- **Causes -** There is a clear spike in average temperatures in the valley, and even perceptible change in snowfall patterns have been observed.
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- Some experts have linked these phenomenal trends to global warming.

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Why has the government asked farmers to shun paddy?

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- In Kashmir, farmers do not use groundwater for irrigation purposes, thereby making their paddy fields dependent on surface water.
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- During a normal year, the Irrigation and Flood Control Department provides water to 2.5 lakh hectares of land.
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- This has triggered fears of a possible crisis and the government has asked farmers to grow crops that require less water in summer.
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- The circular is likely to be made mandatory for farmers and the government might even be empowered to use coercive force to dissuade paddy sowing.
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- The government has stated that the intention is to prevent farmer losses, and nip off any possible unrest that might get triggered as a consequence.
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- Notably, similar advisory circulars were issued in 1957 and 2000, but farmers didn't pay heed and had faced huge crop losses.
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What are the major crops of Kashmir?

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- **Paddy -** Paddy (rice) is a staple food crop in the valley and is cultivated in around 1.41 lakh hectares of land.
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- Around 88 quintals of rice is produced per annum in Kashmir and the market worth is estimated to be about 450 crores.
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- Notably, ten varieties of rice are grown in the valley and they command a premium in the market as there is mimimum fertilizer use.
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- But there are reports that farmers are turning their paddy fields into orchards or housing colonies due to the challenges involved in paddy cultivation.
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- Notably, in the past 15 years, areas under paddy cultivation is said to have come dowm from 1.70 lakh hectares to 1.41 lakh hectares.
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- **Other Crops -** Farmers also grow maize, cereal, and other short-duration crops in between two paddy seasons.
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- As a second crop, farmers take to mustard as it requires lesser water – but this too will be hit if the dry spell is prolonged.
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Source: Indian Express

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