



Keeping dry: On Kerala floods

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Kerala's floods show the need for governments to strengthen resilience planning.

- The catastrophic impact of monsoon rainfall on several districts of Kerala has come as a grim reminder that the vigil against unpredictable natural disasters must never be relaxed.
- More than three dozen people have died and an estimated Rs.8,316 crore worth of economic assets have been lost in the seasonal rain, particularly over the past week.
- The gates of reservoirs in the Idukki system, a giant hydroelectric project, and several other dams have been opened, inundating riverside habitations downstream.
- In the northern districts, damage to houses, roads and other structures has occurred owing to landslips caused by incessant showers.

According to an analysis of data on the monsoon between 1954 and 2003 by climate researchers at the University of Cambridge, overall this part of the country had become drier in summer, but with an emerging frequency of destructive flash floods in rare events. This trend is expected to become stronger.

What needs to be done?

- This points to the need for governments to strengthen their resilience planning.
- It should begin with a programme to relocate people away from hazard zones along the rivers. Finding suitable land is, of course, a challenge in a populous, forested State, but it is an absolute necessity to prepare for the future.
- It is reasonable to expect that with its efficient primary health care network, Kerala will take all measures necessary to avoid epidemics in the wake of the floods.
- The spectacular disaster this year also underscores the role of the government as the insurer of last resort for the average citizen.

All States naturally look to Kerala, with its record of social development, for evolving best practices to handle such natural disasters.

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