

A FLOOD OF DOUBTS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd.
All Rights Reserved

After being battered by unprecedented rains for over a week, nearly 4 lakh people have been rescued from flood-hit villages in the Pune, Sangli and Satara districts of Maharashtra and relocated to 300-odd camps. The state government, the armed forces and the NDRF completed commendable rescue missions, but around 30 lives were lost, including 10 who died tragically when a rescue boat capsized in Sangli. The Met department has predicted a slowing down of rains in the state over the next few days, and while lakhs of homes will need rebuilding, about 1.5 lakh hectares including some of Western India's most productive farmland, including sugar-producing regions, is now destroyed for this year's critical kharif season.

Running through the centre of this crisis is the river Krishna, which blesses agricultural land in south-western Maharashtra with bountiful harvests. The very heavy rains in the upstream areas of the Krishna began at the start of the month. By Monday, August 5, parts of Pune district experienced floods even as Kolhapur city faced a partial blackout as transformers and feeders went under. By Tuesday, very large parts of the region were flooded as the dangerously swollen Krishna breached its banks. On Tuesday, Chief Minister [Devendra Fadnavis](#) spoke to his Karnataka counterpart BS Yediyurappa, requesting that more water be discharged from the Almatti, the first dam across the Krishna in the neighbouring district, in order to provide some relief in the upstream regions in Maharashtra. But only on Friday did the discharge from Almatti cross five lakh cusecs, likely on account of the neighbouring state's bureaucracy, concerned about its own water stocks. By Saturday, parts of Sangli and Kolhapur had been flooded for six days and dozens of villages marooned as roads and major highways were inundated. Without a doubt, the rains were unprecedented — Pune has now received 140 per cent in excess of its average rain for this time of the year, while Satara and Sangli have recorded 81 per cent and 59 per cent in excess. But the upstream dams on the Krishna were discharging water from their reservoirs early last week, and the delay in coaxing more water to be released from Almatti was perhaps critical. Fadnavis has said the need of the hour is more accurate rain forecasts, more detailed warnings in place of the current categorisation as “heavy” or “very heavy”. But in reality, while weather forecasting models will continue to develop, there was fair warning of last week's deluge. So the state must now look into whether there was adequate coordination between various arms of the bureaucracy in managing dam waters in the Krishna river basin, whether a pre-planned and controlled release of waters over a few days could have prevented some of the widespread destruction caused by sudden discharges.

Similar questions over whether reservoir waters should have been released in a controlled manner over several days were raised after previous Maharashtra floods too. Flood management can no longer be seen as minimising economic and physical losses. As plans get afoot to build more big dams and river linking projects, the state will need intelligent and nimble — and transparent — water resource management.

Download the Indian Express apps for iPhone, iPad or Android

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd. All Rights Reserved

END

CrackIAS.com