



Flood management through cooperation

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(Mains GS 2 & 3 : India and its neighborhood- relations & Disaster and disaster management.)

Context:

Almost every year Floods have been a recurrent phenomenon in many parts of India specially in Bihar causing loss of lives and public property and bringing untold misery to the people.

Process driven coordination:

- Some of Nepal's biggest river systems originate in the Himalayan glaciers and pass through Bihar causing severe floods in Bihar especially during monsoon.
- Thus there must be process-driven coordination between the Centre and the Government of Bihar to handle the flooding in Nepal's Terai and North Bihar.

Work not in progress:

- As part of the long-term measures to address the problem of massive and recurrent floods in Bihar, the Joint Project Office (JPO), Biratnagar, was established in Nepal in August 2004.
- JPO has the responsibility to prepare a detailed project report to construct a high dam on the Nepal side (on the Kosi, Kamla and Bagmati rivers).
- Recently a special meeting of the joint team of experts (India side) was held at New Delhi to ascertain the status of the detailed project report.

- The meeting was convened by The Central Water Commission (CWC), Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS), Government of India.
- Despite many efforts, the progress of the detailed project report task remains unaccomplished.

Lack of prompt reciprocation:

- The India-Nepal flood management under the existing arrangements of India's federal system offers enough room for better coordination between the Centre and State governments.
- The long-standing water sharing issues with Nepal are crucial but Nepal's lack of prompt reciprocation is a matter of worry.
- It is essential that Nepal shows the required will to find a long-term solution with India in ending a perennial disaster.

Working on flood protection:

- The India-Nepal Agreement on water resources authorised the state government to execute flood protection works up to critical stretches inside Nepal territory along the India-Nepal border.
- However, such flood protection works have had to be carried out in the face of increasing local resistance.
- Despite the challenges, the State government of Bihar engaged with local Nepalese authorities and appealed to the Central government for carrying out flood protection work.

Coordination work:

- Sustained coordination between the Centre and the State (Bihar) led to expedited interventions by India with Nepal which resulted in the conditional permission for manpower and machinery operation in the Nepal area of the Kosi basin.
- Progress was also made to facilitate the smooth movement of manpower, machinery and flood control materials across the Gandak and Kamla rivers situated on the Nepal side to carry out flood protection work during the flood period of 2020.
- Since bilateral cooperation remains the fulcrum of water sharing and water management between the two countries, Nepal must play its part in ensuring a sustainable way forward.
- Recent episodes in flood management also show that Nepal's attitude towards mutual issues (water sharing, flood control, etc.) has been short of collaboration, unlike in the past.

Towards another option:

- Nepal and India should restart the water dialogue for increasing cooperation among both countries.
- Both countries also need to come up with policies to safeguard the interests of all those who have been affected on both sides of the border.
- This is the right time for the two friendly countries to come together and assess the factors that are causing unimaginable losses through flooding every year.
- Optimisation of the infrastructure and making it resilient will be decisive in finding an alternative paradigm of flood management.
- The sustainable management of Himalayan glaciers and the green cover is also the area where stakeholders should shift their focus primarily.

Conclusion:

- Cooperation of India-Nepal is essential which can turn the crisis into an opportunity especially in water management, development and environmental protection.
- Thus by controlling the flooding and utilising the water resources for common development like hydroelectricity, irrigation and waterways will strengthen India-Nepal relations even further.