



Stormy start

CruX: Accurate forecasts and resilience-building hold the key to handling severe cyclones.

Highlights:

1. Millions of people wearied by the onslaught of the coronavirus have had to contend with a furious tropical cyclone that has left a trail of death and destruction before making landfall in Gujarat.
2. Cyclone Tauktae swelled into an extremely severe cyclonic storm, dumping enormous volumes of water all along the west coast, and caused loss of life in Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat, before weakening overland.
3. To thousands who had to be evacuated to safe locations, this year's pre-monsoon season presented double jeopardy, caught as they were between a fast-spreading virus variant and an unrelenting storm.
4. Many coastal residents would have felt a sense of déjà vu, having gone through a similar experience last year, when the severe cyclonic storm, Nisarga, barrelled landwards from the Arabian Sea, pounding Alibaug in Maharashtra as it came ashore.
5. The cyclones in both years spared densely populated Mumbai. The twin crises have, however, strained the capacities of multiple States, especially the coastal ones, although the impact of the storm was considerably mitigated by disaster response forces.
6. Once again, the value of creating a trained cadre, supported by the defence forces in rescue and relief work, is seen. The heralding of the 2021 monsoon season by a cyclone comes as another reminder that the subcontinent is at the confluence of more frequent, extreme weather events originating in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea every year.

Level of preparedness:

1. How well India is prepared to handle cyclones depends on developing greater expertise in forecasting and disaster mitigation, and crafting policies to increase resilience among communities.



2. Last year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) launched an impact-based cyclone warning system from the October-December season designed to reduce economic losses by focusing on districts and specific locations and incorporating such factors as population, infrastructure, land use and settlements.
3. The IMD also claimed that its accuracy of forecasts, for instance, in plotting landfall location, is now better. Together with ground mapping of vulnerabilities, this is a promising approach to avoid loss of life and destruction of property.
4. The importance of precise early warnings cannot be overemphasised, considering that the Arabian Sea has emerged as a major source of severe cyclones, and their intensity is aggravated by the long-term rise in sea surface temperatures linked to pollution over South Asia and its neighbourhood.
5. Climate-proofing lives and dwellings is a high priority now, a task that warrants a multi-sectoral approach: to build sturdy homes of suitable design, create adequate storm shelters, provide accurate early warnings, and ensure financial protection against calamities through insurance for property and assets.

Engage with U.S. progressives

Crux: India should note that it was the progressives who pushed the U.S. to back the TRIPS waiver.

Progressives:

1. It is tempting to surmise the shift in the U.S.'s approach on providing COVID-19-related aid to India as well as on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver on COVID-19 vaccines, drugs, therapeutics, and related technologies as being driven by the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with New Delhi. But it is more than just that.
2. The development was a result of the determined push by some sections of the political and business class, civil society, and Indian Americans. Besides them, the progressives in the Democratic Party made a big difference.

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Urging Biden to act

1. Among the progressives who urged the President to act soon were Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and Congressman Rohit 'Ro' Khanna, the Democratic vice chair of the Congressional India Caucus.
2. Thus, the Biden administration's decision on the waiver and the vaccines, characterised as courageous by many, as a result of the push by the progressives.