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A Wayanad story

#WayanadLandslide   #WayanadDisaster   #GadgilCommittee   #KasturiranganCommitee
#DisasterManagement #GS3

Every year since 2018, many Keralites have gotten into the habit of moving their valuables upstairs when the rains get heavier.

Neighbourhoods remain in a constant state of preparedness and anxiety every monsoon season.

Kerala is a state whose resilience has been tested time and time again. Monsoons are now welcomed with a great deal of caution and worry. Homes, livelihoods, and a feeling of peace and safety are lost every year. Since 2018, there have been five severe landslides — in Kozhikode, Palakkad, Wayanad and Malappuram districts — in which a total of 160 people have been reported dead. **According to the central government data, Kerala faced the highest number of landslides between 2015 and 2022. Out of the 3,782 landslides reported in the country, 2,239 were reported from Kerala.**

The enormity of the 2024 landslides in Wayanad can be conveyed with this fact **— two villages have been washed away entirely, Madikkai and Chooralmala.** These were villages, home to roughly 1,000 people each.

Kerala's annual landslide problem has again put the spotlight on the reports of the Madhav Gadgil Committee (2011) and the K Kasturirangan-led High Level Working Group (2013), as well as the resistance to their recommendations. The **areas of Wayanad that have been devastated by the landslide were among those that were recommended to be demarcated as Ecologically Sensitive Areas by the Gadgil Committee.** These areas were, in turn, graded into three categories based on their environmental fragility. **Several restrictions were proposed to be placed on construction and developmental activities, including a ban on mining, quarrying, polluting factories etc. According to the Gadgil Committee Report, in the Ecologically Sensitive Area-1, no forest land could be changed to non-forest land and agricultural land could not be changed to non-agricultural land.** The report also stated that Sulthan Bathery, Vayittiri, and Manantavadi in Kerala's Wayanad district were especially vulnerable and therefore needed to be placed in the highest category of ecological sensitivity. Similarly, Perinthalmanna and Tirur taluks in Malappuram were to be placed in the ESZ- II category. **The report also highlighted the importance of involving local communities in any conservation effort and ensuring that their livelihoods are not adversely affected by these policies. It also recommended that tourism in the region be regulated to ensure that it remains environmentally sustainable and does not disrupt the region's fragile ecological balance.**

The **recommendation to prohibit change of land-use subsequently led to a group of farmers protesting in the hilly regions.** Protests spearheaded by all sections of the political class erupted in 2013 in Kerala and other southern states against the perceived imposition of the report on the public,

without stakeholder consultation. Even though there were claims that the protests were organised at the behest of the mining mafia, the threat of being evicted rang too close to home for the settler-farmers in the high ranges. **Both the Gadgil and Kasturirangan Committee reports were also criticised by various sections as being too "environmentally forward" and not being people-centric enough. The public pressure forced the government at all levels from carrying out any of the measures they recommended.**

It is said that the only thing natural about a natural disaster is the event itself. In every phase, from the cause and the vulnerabilities to the preparedness and the response, many years of action and inaction determine the outcomes. In a way, some of the course of the disaster is predictable. In light of the heart-wrenching stories one is hearing from Wayanad today, it is perhaps time to not just rebuild, but build better. This includes not just rescuing people and communities from the present disaster, but also building safeguards against all such tragedies in the future.

At the same time, Wayanad's story tells us that **environmental conservation cannot be a top-down endeavour. Adoption of conservation measures requires the support and participation of the people. This means that the policies must also strive to overcome the binary of environment versus development. In the coming years, we are likely to witness more and more extreme weather events, intensifying vulnerabilities in disaster-prone states like Kerala. Our people deserve the infrastructure, political will, and environmental policies that take into account their needs and livelihoods.**

'Axis of resistance'

#AxisOfResistance #IranBackedGrouping #IsraelHamasWar #MiddleEast #InternationalRelations #GS2

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in an air strike in Tehran. Although Israel has not claimed responsibility for Haniyeh's killing, **Hamas and Iran have blamed Israel for the strike, and promised "major repercussions".**

Experts believe that **Iran could hike up attacks against Israel through its allies — a coalition of Iranian-backed groups known as the 'axis of resistance'. Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Houthis are some of the major groups in the alliance.**

How was the coalition formed?

The roots of the 'axis of resistance' go back to the **Iranian Revolution of 1979, which paved the way for radical Shia Muslim clerics to come to power. To expand its political and military influence in a region where most powers — such as US-ally Saudi Arabia — are Sunni-majority nations, Iran's new regime began to support non-state actors.** Another reason for this was to **deter threats from Israel and the US — Iran has seen Israel's creation in 1948 as a means for the US (and the West) to influence the region for its strategic interests.**

The **coalition's name is said to be inspired by former US President George W Bush's use of the term 'axis of evil' — referring to Iran, Iraq and North Korea — in his 2002 State of the Union address.**

What 'equivalence' among school boards means

#PARAKH #SchoolBoardsEquivalence #NEP2020 #Education #Economy #GS3

PARAKH, a standard-setting body under the NCERT, has recently submitted to the Ministry of Education an 'equivalence' report, which makes recommendations on how equivalence can be achieved across different school boards in the country, in keeping with a mention of it in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The NEP provides for the formation of a body like PARAKH, and states that PARAKH "will also become an instrument for the sharing of best practices among school boards, and for ensuring equivalence of academic standards among learners across all school boards."

What does equivalence across boards mean?

A government official pointed out that **school boards now are different from one another, in terms of factors including curriculum, examinations, and the structure and functioning of the board itself**, resulting in some boards being seen as "better" than others.

There are 69 school boards in the country, including the State boards – some are secondary boards only, some are for higher secondary, and some are common for both – and CBSE, ICSE, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and other open school boards, technical and vocational boards, Sanskrit boards, and madrasa boards.

The **'equivalence' report sets standards for the boards across five categories – administration, curriculum, assessment, inclusiveness, and infrastructure.** The official explained that the intention behind pursuing equivalence is not to establish "uniformity" across boards, but ensure that **"every learner who enrolls in a school affiliated in any board should get certain standardised, benchmarked facilities for performance."**

What recommendations has PARAKH made?

A key recommendation is in terms of assessment – a student's performance in Class 9, 10, and 11 will count towards the final assessment for Class 12. **The Class 12 report card is envisaged as a 'cumulative' one, and a weight of 15% for Class 9, 20% for Class 10, 25% for Class 11, and 40% for Class 12 will go into the final Class 12 results.**

Another recommendation is that **these assessments be in terms of credits in each grade, with the student earning a certain number of credits for each subject, for pursuing online courses, and for activities that are part of the holistic progress card – a progress card which will include the student's evaluation of themselves in aspects like 'time management' and 'plans after school', the teacher's assessment of the student in group project work, and peer feedback.**

PARAKH has suggested that **boards develop a cadre of 'professional paper setters' –teachers who will be trained to prepare question papers, to ensure standardisation in the assessments in classes 9, 10, 11 and 12.**

For standardisation of question papers, PARAKH recommends that for classes 9 and 11, boards develop a question bank for all subjects offered. A blueprint to develop a question paper is also to be prepared and teachers in affiliated schools can prepare the question paper based on the question bank and the blueprint. Question paper blueprints have also been suggested for Class 10 and 12.

In terms of administration, **PARAKH has suggested that the guidelines for school affiliation specified by the boards be finalised according to its recommendations.** Boards lay down specific conditions that a school needs to meet to be affiliated to it – the CBSE, for instance, has conditions that include one that says that the school must be located on a single, contiguous plot of land, and a proper playground should exist in addition to a suitable building.

PARAKH's recommendation says that the **boards should conduct periodic reviews of affiliated schools, and affiliations should be granted for a maximum period of three years only. Since there are some States where the Directorate of Education recognises and affiliates schools, PARAKH has also recommended that the boards be empowered to do this,** in addition to being given the authority to identify unrecognised institutions and take action against them.

The recommendations suggest that **boards develop a mechanism to prevent cheating in examinations, implement protocol for handling exam papers, and conduct digital assessments where applicable.**

In terms of curriculum, the **boards are to incorporate digital literacy in affiliated schools, including training in coding and cybersecurity, and adhere to the National Curriculum Framework for School Education.**

In terms of infrastructure of the schools affiliated with them, the **boards are to ensure availability of basic infrastructure – toilets for girls and boys, internet, library, strongroom for question papers, labs, ramps, or elevators.**

How were these recommendations arrived at?

A **total of 32 boards, excluding the Sanskrit boards, madrasas, and technical boards from the total number in the country, were assessed according to the five parameters to determine their present status.** An **analysis of two years' worth of question papers of the boards, and a questionnaire with questions on five parameters was used for this.**

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