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EDITORIAL 01

Human failure: On IAS aspirants and the accident in Delhi

The deaths of IAS aspirants in basement flooding were preventable

The tragic accident at an IAS coaching centre in New Delhi, where flooding led to three IAS aspirants dying, was a largely man-made, hence avoidable, disaster. Such incidents are an increasing feature of localised urban flooding in which human failures play a major role. Basements in buildings have limited access and often limited **ventilation**. Getting in and out can be a challenge and being trapped is a real possibility as the water will find its way there first. Special pumping arrangements would be required to **mitigate** flooding. In general, rules do not permit basements in buildings across the country to have **habitation**, while allowing storage, parking and utilities such as electric equipment and generators. Habitation would include offices and residents. Shops are **sanctioned** especially in malls or mixed-use buildings as they are seen as temporary habitation. A classroom or a study centre may well be considered habitation in such an interpretation of rules, which could mean



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classes or long hours of study should not be allowed in the basement. Building **byelaws** for Delhi (2016) consider the basement as a storage area but recognise mixed-use buildings that may use basements for other purposes. As India urbanises and land value and building value become increasingly expensive, it would be **inevitable** for buildings to be used for purposes other than mandated. In such mixed-use buildings, basements are also seen as income generators.

The Delhi Master Plan 2021 explicitly says that the use of a basement in coaching centres shall be subject to clearance from fire authorities and other statutory bodies as per the relevant laws. It is not known if the IAS coaching centre had the relevant permissions and if any changes made on basement use were notified to the authorities. In India, questions need to be asked whether a renewal of permits was done after inspections; users prefer not to notify the authorities since it causes **hurdles** and invites bribe demands. In what appears to be a case of poor civic infrastructure, a stormwater drain burst with the water entering the basement of the coaching centre. Big cities getting flooded has become routine and the flooding is as much due to natural **topography** as changes in land use and **haphazard** constructions. In 2015, for instance, in Chennai, flooding of basements damaged electric equipment in many buildings and

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disrupted businesses. It caused deaths in a hospital since the water damaged emergency power generators and lifesaving ICU equipment stopped functioning. Buildings can be made flood-resilient by ensuring that no water enters inside up to the one metre to 1.5 m level on the road. Concrete, non-porous compound walls, flood-barrier gates and non-return valves on plumbing lines can help achieve this resilience.

SUMMARY

The tragic accident at an IAS coaching centre in New Delhi resulted in three IAS aspirants dying due to basement flooding. This was largely man-made and avoidable, as basements in buildings have limited access and ventilation, making it difficult to get in and out. Special pumping arrangements would be required to mitigate flooding. Rules generally do not permit basements in buildings to have habitation, but allow storage, parking, and utilities like electric equipment and generators. Building byelaws for Delhi (2016) consider basements as storage areas but recognize mixed-use buildings that may use them for other purposes. The Delhi Master Plan 2021 explicitly states that basement use in coaching centers must be subject to clearance from fire authorities and other statutory bodies. Buildings can be made flood-resilient by ensuring no water enters inside up to one metre to 1.5 m level on the road.

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Vocabulary

1. Ventilation

Synonyms: Airing, circulation, aeration

Antonyms: Suffocation, stagnation, closure

2. Mitigate

Synonyms: Alleviate, reduce, lessen

Antonyms: Aggravate, worsen, intensify

3. Habitation

Synonyms: Dwelling, residence, abode

Antonyms: Vacancy, desertion, absence

4. Sanctioned

Synonyms: Approved, authorized, permitted

Antonyms: Prohibited, forbidden, disapproved



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5. Byelaws

Synonyms: Regulations, rules, statutes

Antonyms: Chaos, disorder, anarchy

6. Inevitable

Synonyms: Unavoidable, certain, inescapable

Antonyms: Avoidable, uncertain, preventable

8. Hurdles

Synonyms: Obstacles, barriers, impediments

Antonyms: Aids, assists, facilitators

9. Haphazard

Synonyms: Random, unplanned, chaotic

Antonyms: Organized, deliberate, systematic

10. Topography

Meaning: Topography refers to the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. This includes the shape,



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elevation, and features of the land surface, such as mountains, valleys, rivers, and roads.

11. Resilient

Synonyms: Adaptable, tough, flexible

Antonyms: Fragile, vulnerable, inflexible

12. Non-porous

Synonyms: Impermeable, solid, sealed

Antonyms: Porous, absorbent, permeable

EDITORIAL 02

Widening conflict: On an elusive peace in West Asia

As long as the Gaza war drags on, peace will be elusive in West Asia

A rocket attack on a football ground in Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights, in which 12 young people were killed, has taken West Asia to the **brink** of a wider war. Israel and the U.S. have blamed Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful Shia militia that is backed by Iran, for the attack. Hezbollah, which initially claimed rocket strikes on

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an Israeli military **outpost** in the nearby Mount Hermon, later denied any role in this incident. But Israel has not bought Hezbollah's claims and is preparing its response. From October 7, 2023, the day Hamas carried out a cross-border attack in Israel, killing an estimated 1,200 people, a slow-burning war has been **raging** on Israel's northern border with Hezbollah. When Israel launched the Gaza war following the Hamas attack, Hezbollah began rocket attacks from southern Lebanon, its stronghold, mostly targeting Israel's military outposts in the occupied Shebaa Farms or the Upper Galilee region of northern Israel. Hezbollah's attacks forced some 60,000 Israelis to flee from Upper Galilee, with Israeli forces carrying out air strikes inside Lebanon in **retaliation**. Hezbollah claimed that it was fighting Israel "in **solidarity**" with the Palestinians, while Israel's leadership said none of Hezbollah's attacks would go unpunished. However, both sides were, until recently, cautious not to let the conflict **spiral** into an all-out war. But the Majdal Shams attack seems to have broken those unwritten rules of the war.

Hezbollah's claim that it was not involved in the attack cannot be taken for granted. It is possible that the group targeted IDF outposts in the Golan Heights, under Israel's illegal occupation

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since 1967, and the rocket fell on the football field, but still the responsibility lies with the militia. Israel's hands are not clean either. The IDF, whose Gaza campaign has killed thousands of Palestinian civilians, has also carried out strikes in Lebanon's civilian neighbourhoods. Hezbollah and Israel last fought an all-out war in 2006, and it did not end well for the Jewish state. Hezbollah also takes credit in forcing Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon after 18 years of occupation. And since 2006, Hezbollah has built a stronger army and a huge stockpile of weapons. A war could spiral out of control with a high risk of Iran's involvement. Hezbollah's rocket attacks in recent months have only **provoked** Israel; and Israeli strikes on Lebanon have done little in **detering** the group. This cycle of violence is self-defeatist and there will be peace only if both parties reset the current **hostility** and calm the borders. The obvious first step is to end the war which **triggered** this regional crisis — the war on Gaza.

SUMMARY

The ongoing Gaza war in West Asia is escalating into a wider conflict, with Israel and the U.S. accusing Hezbollah, Lebanon's Shia militia backed by Iran, for the attack. Hezbollah initially claimed

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rocket strikes on an Israeli military outpost in Mount Hermon but later denied any role. Israel has not bought Hezbollah's claims and is preparing its response. Since October 7, 2023, a slow-burning war has been raging on Israel's northern border with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah claims it was fighting Israel "in solidarity" with the Palestinians, while Israel's leadership has said none of Hezbollah's attacks would go unpunished. The conflict could spiral out of control with a high risk of Iran's involvement. The first step to peace is to end the war on Gaza, which triggered the regional crisis.

Vocabulary

1. Brink

Synonyms: Edge, verge, threshold

Antonyms: Center, middle, far

2. Outpost

Synonyms: Fort, station, base

Antonyms: Center, headquarters, main base

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3. Raging

Synonyms: Furious, intense, wild

Antonyms: Calm, peaceful, controlled

4. Retaliation

Synonyms: Revenge, reprisal, vengeance

Antonyms: Forgiveness, pardon, reconciliation

5. Solidarity

Synonyms: Unity, cohesion, support

Antonyms: Division, disunity, discord

6. Spiral

Synonyms: Coil, swirl, helical

Antonyms: Straight, linear, flat

7. Provoked

Synonyms: Incite, stimulate, arouse

Antonyms: Calm, soothe, placate



8. Deterring

Synonyms: Discouraging, preventing, hindering

Antonyms: Encouraging, facilitating, promoting

9. Hostility

Synonyms: Animosity, antagonism, enmity

Antonyms: Friendliness, goodwill, benevolence

10. Triggered

Synonyms: Activated, initiated, prompted

Antonyms: Halted, deactivated, stopped

