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“Even after the rain and flood, many stayed back in the hope that the work situation will return to normal,” said the villager, who is in his fifties. “But now they are also coming back.”

“This year, I had to come back from Kozhikode in Kerala early, as the work has shrunk considerably after the disaster,” said Mondal, referring to the unseasonal downpour and floods. “I have been going to Kerala for so many years, but have never seen such incessant rain and flooding. Though the government has brought back normalcy, the opportunity of work has nosedived. Not only has the rate dwindled to INR 450 to INR 500 (USD 5.5-6.8) per day (from about INR 800), now there is hardly work for 2-3 days in a week compared with six days earlier.”

These are the testimonies of a local villager and a mason named Bidhan Mondal, who used to work in the Sundarbans. Owing to extreme climatic changes in the Sundarbans, he had to migrate to Kerala to work as a mason in the southern Indian states. He said, “I, along with many of my friends in the village, started going to Kerala after Cyclone Aila turned our land saline and unproductive, and many people from our area prefer to go to Kerala every year to work as construction labourers, as they pay good money compared to other places.”

Climate change and its severe, diverse impacts continue to drive significant internal displacement across the world. India has been experiencing substantial implications nationwide due to its varied and more expansive geography, hence, extreme climate differences. There have been significant reasons for these internal forced migrations found responsible. For instance, push and pull factors, constantly rising sea levels and temperatures, unpredictable and irregular rainfalls, famine, earthquakes, and cyclones are considered significant reasons for internal migration. It forces natives to leave their homes and belongings in such sudden climatic havoc and relocate temporarily for safety and survival. Today, these climatical internal displacements are uncontrollable and worrisome challenges worldwide. These immediate relocations affect the impacted populace at multiple levels other than the social and economic levels, including mental and physical well-being, safety, relocation, inclusion and security. The

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that in 2020 alone, over 3.9 million people were displaced due to climate-related disasters. Floods, cyclones, and droughts have been the primary drivers of such displacements. This number saw a doubled impact by 2023, where about 7.7 million people worldwide were living in internal displacement facilities due to disasters, floods and similar climate-induced calamities.

India has been at the forefront of juggling these challenges owing to its extreme diversity and vast geographical positioning, which led to significant internal displacement and migration due to climatic difficulties across the nation. Floods and severe recurrent tropical cyclones were major contributors to these displacements. For instance, cyclone Amphan, which struck the eastern states of West Bengal and Odisha in May 2020, displaced more than 2.4 million people. Similarly, two major recent cyclones, namely cyclone Tauktae and cyclone Yaas in 2021, forced thousands of families from the western and eastern coasts to migrate immediately. It has been observed that rising sea surface temperatures, a direct consequence of global warming, have intensified the gravity and frequency of such cyclones across India. Cyclone Biporjoy in June 2023 was another climatic havoc the nation has observed. These recurring climatic events in the last decade resulted in the displacement of over half a million natives migrating across the country. These are highly worrisome numbers with the anticipated rise in the future.

Further, the northeastern state of Assam has had a severe impact, mainly affected by monsoon-induced floods. Rivers swelled beyond their banks, leading to 79 deaths and displacing thousands. The floods also caused significant wildlife loss in the Kaziranga National Park, highlighting the extensive ecological and human impact of such climatic disasters—severe floods in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in north India recently. In addition, floods occurred due to the glacial lake upsurge, leading to the collapse of a hydroelectric dam in Sikkim, which resulted in the death of about 100 people and severely affected more than 88000 people in October 2023. Yamuna River, in Delhi, had been identified as a “flood displacement hotspot” last year when the river overflowed after heavy rains on July 9, 2023, prompting the authorities to migrate the residents from their homes to a temporary safe place. The IDMC's 2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement emphasises the growing risk of displacement associated with climate-related disasters. Projections indicate that, in a best-case scenario, the risk of displacement due to floods could at least double to around 20 million people by 2099. In an interview with DW, Mr. Jayanta Basu, a Kolkata-based environment and climate expert, said, "There is no structured policy or action plan from the administration to provide social protection in countering climate change and related migration."

Therefore, the absence of a standard government policy may pose significant challenges and add extreme uncertainty in handling such a disastrous climatic risk. There are chances that these risks could increase five-fold in a worst-case scenario, underscoring the urgent need for a comprehensive climate adaptation system, nationwide awareness, mitigation strategies, and national policies.

In addition, the human cost of these internal climatic displacements is profound. Communities, particularly those in vulnerable regions like river islands in Assam, face the annual dread of monsoon floods. Residents are often forced to relocate to temporary relief camps during floods, only to return and rebuild their lives once the waters recede. This cyclical displacement disrupts livelihoods, continuity and access to education, access to healthcare, challenging living conditions, limited opportunity to sustainable living and upward mobility of underprivileged class, increases gender disparity, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability among disadvantaged strata of society. These forced internal migrations also impact centralised policymaking and probable beneficiaries for the targeted vulnerable social group. Despite the clear and present dangers of climate-induced displacement, India's policy response remains inadequate to date. The absence of a robust and transparent national policy on internal displacement leaves affected populations without a cohesive framework for protection, rehabilitation and social inclusion. Experts advocate for developing such a centralised and state-wise policy based on the requirement and climatic positioning to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate-induced displacements that have been increasing manifolds in the last decade, emphasising the need for coordinated efforts of the governmental and non-governmental agencies to mitigate risks, decrease the damage and support displaced internal migrants.

In conclusion, data implies that nationwide climate-induced internal displacements throughout the year are becoming a significant and escalating challenge for India. Over the decades, the increasing frequency, uncertainty and intensity of climate-related calamities have necessitated urgent policy interventions and adaptive strategies to protect and support the vulnerable, marginal populations, precisely in India. Addressing this challenge requires a combination of comprehensive, centralised and state-wide approaches that include disaster risk reduction, quick and hygienic relocation plans, access to health and education, work opportunities, sustainable development planning, and robust support systems for displaced individuals.

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