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DH file photo.

The state, which witnessed bounteous rainfall with almost all rivers flowing in spate until a few weeks ago, is suddenly staring at acute scarcity of potable water.

Paving way for yet another disaster, major rivers and rivulets along the Western Ghats and coastal areas have dried up unfolding a near summer-like situation in several districts.

The sudden drying up of rivers and water bodies in less than a month since the heavy rainfall has not only left the state's scientific community flummoxed but has also caused panic among people.

While the climate experts, geologists, hydrologists have termed it as a rare event, environmentalists have blamed it on the rampant destruction of vegetation over the years.

“The earth is like a living body. Forests, rivers and natural vegetation are suggestive of its health. But they have been destroyed over the years resulting in the sudden drying up of rivers and water bodies especially along the Ghats and coastal districts,” opined Dr Rajendra Hegde, Principal Scientist and Head at the Bengaluru Regional Centre of National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning.

Elaborating further, Dr Hegde said, “The Western Ghats act as natural filter facilitating the percolation of rainwater into the ground. Further, the humus on top of the soil helps in retaining the water. But over the years, shockingly water retention capacity in Kodagu and Malnad districts has been reduced from 5% to just 1%. This has a cascading effect on flow of water as well. Hence, all the water bodies have dried up.”

Alarming phenomenon

Expressing concern, yet another ecological scientist at Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Dr TV Ramachandra said, “This is indeed a warning for all of us. The ground water level has dropped alarmingly and we had anticipated it when we were doing research on the Western Ghats rivers. Even though it is common for water levels in rivers to recede during summer, the phenomenon unnatural as early as September.”

He also said that change in the land use pattern has resulted in the loss of unique bacteria and fungi in soil affecting water retention capacity.

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