Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the findings of the report; challenges and steps taken

News: The latest telemetry report by the Bihar Minor Water Resources Department was released recently.

Key findings of the report

- The Water table has **dipped alarmingly across Bihar** between August 2019 and February 2020.

- The dips in water table **range from 13 feet to 25 feet**. The situation is **particularly alarming in the Seemanchal and the southern part of the state**.

- About **10 districts**, including Katihar and Begusarai, reported a dip of 17 feet to 25 feet in its water table and Patna too reported a 17-feet dip. The report also says the **water table in the state has gone down from 10 to 200 feet in the last 10 years**.

- According to the report, the groundwater level in Bihar earlier ranged from 40 feet to 200 feet, but the recent dips have brought down the range to between 60 and 250 feet. While this could lead to water crisis during summers, a drought could aggravate the problem.

**Why water table is dipping in Bihar?**

Uneven distribution of rains, lack of water-harvesting measures and encroachment upon water bodies are being cited as the major reasons for the alarming dip in water table across Bihar. A recent survey by the state government showed that 34,559 water bodies had been encroached upon. So far, temporary
encroachment has been cleared from 20,432 water bodies and permanent encroachment from 2,123 water bodies.

**Challenges and their remedies**

- The depleting groundwater level is a crisis that is emerging worldwide, but in Bihar it is **getting acute due to**

  1. **loss of forest and vegetation**,
  2. dependency on groundwater and depletion in surface water resources,
  3. overexploitation of groundwater with the coming of powerful pumps, and
  4. cultivation of high water-consuming crops.

- There is an urgent need to check soil erosion, revive traditional water management practices and more efficient use of water in agriculture. Also, **roof rainwater harvesting system** should be used to take care of urban needs.

- The State govt. have initiated several measures under the *Jal, Jeevan, Hariyali mission* to improve the water table. An exercise to remove encroachment from water bodies and clear them of silt is being conducted on a mass scale and the results could start showing from next year. Under the mission, about 3,000 ponds are being cleaned and over 2,000 checkdams have been planned in small rivers. All these measures are part of the project due for completion by 2022.