

## Erratic monsoon likely to affect farm production

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The monsoon that has been erratic so far this year is likely to take a toll on agriculture production in the country, which in turn is likely to effect overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a basic measure of country's economic performance.

According to the latest estimates of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), cumulative seasonal rainfall during this year's monsoon has so far been 43 percent below the long-term average.

Out of 36 meteorological sub-divisions, rainfall was excess or normal in seven and deficient or scanty in 29 meteorological sub-divisions.

The IMD has announced the monsoon in the country to be 'below normal' this year.

'A low pressure area is likely to form over west-central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal around in next 48 hours that is likely to bring heavy to very heavy rain showers in central, west and east parts of the country. However monsoon will be weak over northern India,' IMD director B.P. Yadav told IANS.

According to Yadav, monsoon is progressing. But he ruled out heavy showers in the food basket states of the country, Punjab and Haryana.

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India receives 75 percent of its annual rainfall during the southwest monsoon, between June and September. Thus, this period is crucial for India's food production, as 60 percent of the country's farms depend on rain.

Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said recently that there was no drought-like situation in the country and that there was no cause for alarm.

'There is concern, but no worry as yet. There is still time,' said Agriculture Secretary T. Nanda Kumar.

The agriculture ministry has assured the state that there is enough seed availability to meet the demand in case short-duration seeds are required.

But as per the government's third advance estimates, rice production during this year's rabi season, or the spring harvest, was likely to see a drop of 0.9 percent over the previous year. Last year, rice production was up 2.8 percent at 99.37 million tonnes.

In the case of wheat, too, production during agriculture year 2008-09 (July to June) is expected to have been lower by 1.2 percent at 77.63 million tonnes, against 78.63 million tonnes.

The overall production for the fiscal is estimated at 229.85 million tonnes, which is a marginal improvement of 1.97 million tonnes over last year, but lower than the target of 233 million tonnes set for the year.

According to RMSI, a company specialised in analysing and quantifying climate- and weather-related risks worldwide, the delay in monsoon and long spell of dry breaks could cut India's rice output by up to 38 percent in major growing regions.

Farmers had planted seedlings in the second half of May with the arrival of pre-monsoon showers. But these could not survive under the drought-like conditions thereafter, affecting the transplantation to fields. This will lead to reduced sowing area and reduced production.

The bad monsoon so far has increased concerns in the industry for it will also affect the raw material supplies to agro-based industries.

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Assocham) has predicted the farm output this year to fall by 3.8 percent because of erratic monsoon rains.

'Low agriculture output could impact the incomes of the rural people where domestic private demand is largely dependent on rural people's income,' the chamber said in a study.

'The figure could go higher if the dry spell continues further or the current situation of patchy or erratic rainfall continues,' said Satya Priya, who led the study that covered states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa.

'The delay in monsoon will not only lead to reduction in rice yield but also impact the total area under rice plantation,' said Priya.

The impact, the chamber warned, will also be severely felt by industry with a drop in raw material supplies to agro-based industries. Reduced rural income and demand may also divert government resources to drought relief measures.

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