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Drought like situation in N India: Govt

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Zeenews Bureau

New Delhi, July 10: Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar warned on Friday that North India was facing drought-like situation. The minister said deficient rains across the region have created serious problems for states like Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, including national capital New Delhi.

He however added that his ministry has prepared two contingency plans for the region to counter rain deficiency.

"As of now seeds and fertilisers have been provided to state governments. However, in case sowing fails in areas where it had been completed, then we will provide additional seeds," Pawar informed Rajya Sabha.

Replying to supplementaries during the Question Hour, he said problems prevailed in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and western Uttar Pradesh, where monsoon has been inadequate, "but I feel that the situation will improve".

The minister had said yesterday also that rainfall will be subdued over Punjab, Haryana, and parts of western UP and Bihar.

According to him, active monsoon condition was likely to continue over Central India till Saturday, and monsoon was expected to intensify over Maharashtra and Gujarat during the same period.

Rainfall is likely to increase in eastern and north-eastern India, he added.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) too had predicted earlier this week that Delhi and surrounding areas would experience a weak monsoon this year.

According to IMD, northwest India comprising Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh were likely to receive very little rainfall.

"Monsoon will remain weak in the national capital and neighbouring states. Delhi will not receive heavy rainfall this monsoon season," IMD director BP Yadav said.

IMD had predicted below normal rainfall for the country with the northwest region receiving the lowest rainfall compared to other areas. The region is likely to get 81 percent of the average rainfall, which is far below the national average of 93 percent.

Rainfall for the country in June was 48.8 mm against a normal of 101.7 mm with a deficiency of 52 percent. In northwest India, it was 21 mm, almost 48 percent deficient.

Worries over farm production

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

According to the latest estimates of the 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.

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.

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.

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.

Water low in reservoirs

Water levels in India's 81 main reservoirs more than halved to 16.003 billion cubic metres (bcm) from 37.301 bcm a year ago, according to government data for the week ending July 8.

The water level was 51.5 percent lower than the average in the past decade and a senior government scientist said that if rains in the months ahead are not enough to fill up reservoirs, irrigated winter crops such as wheat and rapeseed will be hit.

"If the reservoir level does not improve by end-August, then winter-sown crops would be affected, but it is too early to say anything," said AK Singh, deputy director general at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Lower water level in reservoirs would also hit hydro power which accounts for a quarter of India's total power generation of 149,400 megawatts.

El Nino

Weather officials say India faces a risk from El Nino, a weather condition marked by warming of the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean waters that can impede the progressing monsoon.

The US Climate Prediction Center said on Thursday that El Nino had developed and it was of weak-to-moderate strength.

On July 3, the monsoon covered the whole country, 12 days ahead of the usual date, but it was 48 percent below normal last month despite arriving a week ahead of schedule, making it the driest June since 1926.

Weather officials have taken some comfort in the fact that in 1926 and in some subsequent years, when June rainfall was weak, the monsoon was strong in the following two months.

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