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IIT prof forecasts drought in state

Met Dept will wait to say so, but Prof Vimal Mishra has predicted a severe drought this year on the basis of available data; cabinet panel to meet today

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Showers on Monday evening raised hopes of a revival of monsoon in city and state, but the climate variability data of June-July give a different picture. While the Meteorological Department does not term it as a 'drought like situation', a professor at Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar says that the state is currently under drought conditions which could strengthen even further in coming days. Taking a cue from the prevailing conditions, the cabinet sub-committee on truant monsoon will meet today to discuss the deficient rainfall and its consequences. All district collectors have been asked to prepare reports on the damage to crop. The state government will compile them and send the final report to the Central government to seek relief package.

Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar has already said that six major states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana have caused much anxiety.

He will discuss the conditions with Chief Minister Narendra Modi on August 3 as part of his consultation with the chief minister of the six states, beginning August 1.

'EXTREME CONDITIONS'

According to a forecast by Vimal Mishra, an assistant professor in civil engineering at Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, "Rainfall in June and July has been anomalously low in most of the country, mainly Gujarat. Considering that July is the most critical month for monsoon, weak monsoon rainfall this month indicate that it could turn out as a substantial drought event."

The ensemble forecast issued by European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecast (ECMWF) for 1 and 2 month lead time for SST, rainfall, and air temperature also suggest that the current ongoing drought may persist in the rest of the monsoon season, Mishra Adds.

Weather man won't call it 'drought-like situation', though. For the Met Department it is too early as drought is officially declared only after monsoon is over and the department has collected the relevant data.

Mishra, who is also Ministry of Earth Science's Varahamihir Research Fellow, says that India, mainly Gujarat, may witness extreme climate change conditions like drought similar to that in year 2002.

His research focuses on understanding impacts of climate variability and climate change on aspects related to humans and society, namely water resources, energy, infrastructure, and food security. The research says that 80 per cent of India is under drought.

'AUG RAIN OF LITTLE HELP'

"If this situation persists, then it is likely that we might face a situation like we had faced in the year 2002. Since nature is uncertain, even if it rains in August-September, it will not help change the scenario as the planting season will be over. There is 20 to 50 per cent rain deficit this year," says Mishra.

The sea surface temperature (SST) in the tropical Pacific affects Indian monsoon significantly. The sudden propping up of the El Niño has affected the monsoon rains which can cause a drought-like situation in the entire region. The temperature is about 1.5 degrees higher in the tropical Pacific. El Niño is defined by prolonged differences in the Pacific Ocean surface temperatures when compared with the average value.

Mishra's research is based on data from ECMWF which is an intergovernmental organisation supported by 34 states and various climate change models.

'SITUATION CAN BE HANDLED'

"The drought scenario might be severe in Gujarat. A drought is a creepy disaster as it is not sudden. Hence, the situation can be handled well if people are well informed in advance. Steps like water management, harvesting water, etc could be taken. If farmers are informed in advance, they can select and prepare their crops in a better manner," Mishra says.

In the past, droughts have periodically led to major Indian famines, including the Bengal famine of 1770 in which up to one third of the population in affected areas died; the 1876–1877 famine in which more than five million people died; and the 1899 famine in which over 4.5 million died.

—With inputs from Nishkarsh Pandey **80 PER CENT OF GROUNDNUT, COTTON CROPS DEAD**

The cabinet sub-committee under the chairmanship of Finance Minister Vaju Vala will meet today to discuss the failure of rain in the state. According to sources, all collectors have been instructed to submit a report on the damage to crops in their districts. The state government will prepare a report and send it to the Union government to seek a relief package. The cabinet will also take up the issue in its meeting on Wednesday. The government wants insurance money to be given to the farmers in time. Insurance companies have begun preparing data on the crop failed. Apart from Vala, Irrigation Minister Nitin Patel, Revenue Minister Anandi Patel, Agriculture Minister Dileep Sanghani and minister of State for energy Saurabh Patel are the members of the sub-committee. Sources in the agriculture department said that groundnut and cotton crops have been almost destroyed. Farmers had showed groundnut on 11,32,100 hectares this year, but 80 per cent of the crop is dry or dead. Ukabhai Patel of Saurashtra Oil Mills Association said, "Going by the crop condition you can say not a single oil mill will be able to function in Saurashtra this year. Almost 80 per cent of the crop has failed in Amreli, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Porbandar, Surendranagar and Junagadh districts." —DILIP PATEL **MODERATE RAIN IN MOST OF STATE LIKELY**

Weather Department has predicted light to moderate rain in the next 48 hours over most of Gujarat. Sources from the Met office said that moderate rains were expected over South, North and other parts of Gujarat in the next two days. Kutch region, however, is likely to receive minimal rainfall in this spell. The monsoons have been much weaker over Gujarat this year so far. However, sources in the Met department refused to term it 'a draught like situation'. The source said that usually draught is declared after the Monsoon season gets over. Then the officials analyse the total rainfall which has occurred and compare it with the rainfall over the last few years. —AM

