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THE TIMES OF INDIA

With over 9% deficit, monsoon may end in below-normal zone

TNN | Sep 30, 2018, 02.39 AM IST



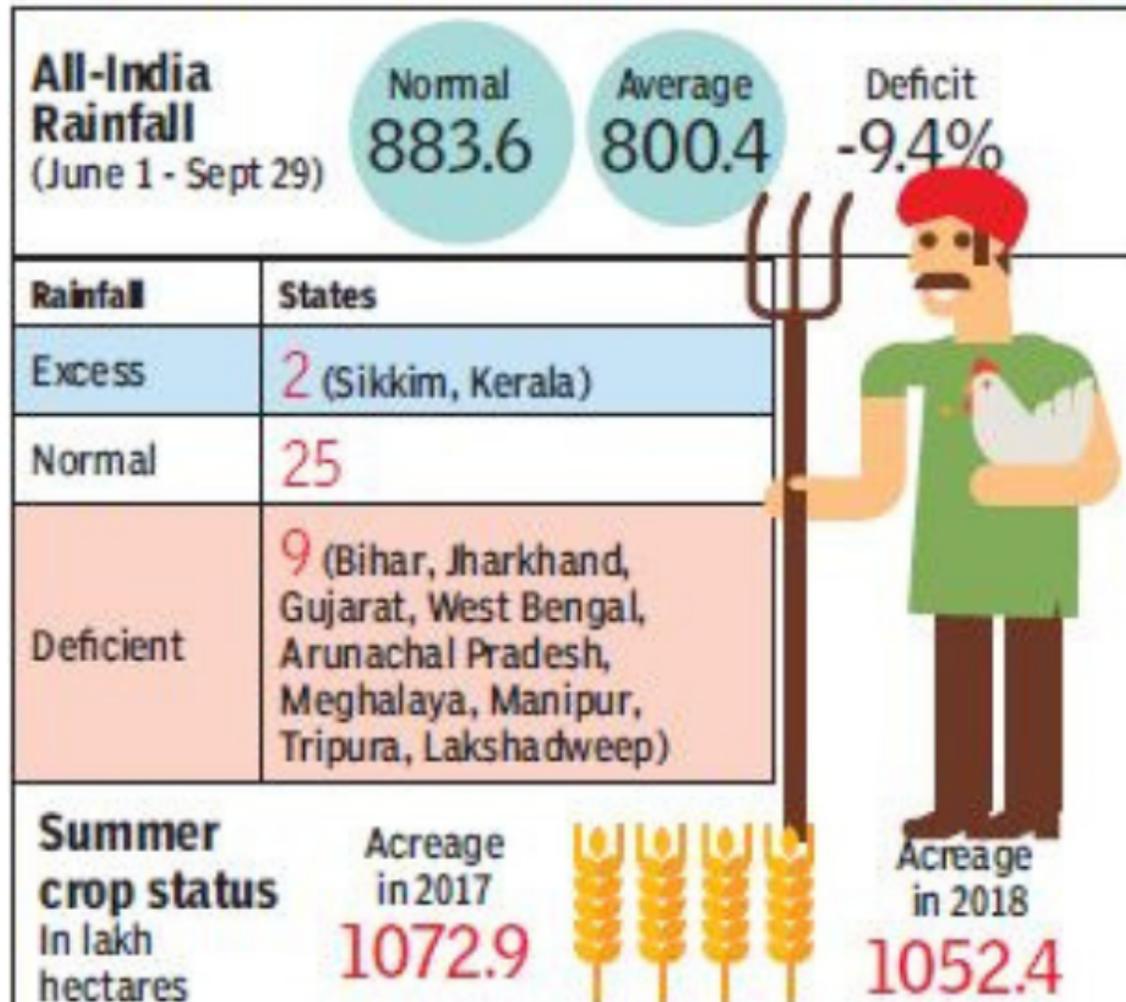
NEW DELHI: The southwest monsoon which brings most of the annual rainfall in the country during June-September period may end in 'below normal' situation with reporting overall deficit of 9%. But, the northeast monsoon which brings rains exclusively to south Peninsula during October-December period is predicted to be 'normal' making parts of the southern states get rains for almost seven months in 2018.

The 'below normal' rainfall has not affected the sowing operation much as good distribution of rains in most parts of the country brought the acreage almost to the normal area for whole Kharif (summer sown) season.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday released its operational forecast for the northeast monsoon, saying the northeast monsoon rainfall over south Peninsula is "most likely to be normal with a tendency to be in the positive side of the normal".

Tamil Nadu during the period will get more rains than other states in south Peninsula as the IMD predicted 'above normal' rains during northeast monsoon (October-December).

DEFICIT MARGINALLY HITS KHARIF CROPS



The northeast monsoon brings rains to Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, Kerala and south interior Karnataka. These south Peninsula receives about 30% of its annual rainfall during the northeast monsoon season.

“The south-west monsoon may be slightly below normal as we take all-India metrics to arrive at the figures, but you must see other side of it. Barring few parts of the country, distribution of rainfall has been very good this year. It resulted in good acreage which almost touched the last year’s level,” said the IMD chief K J Ramesh.

He told TOI on Saturday that the IMD has in association with IIT Gandhinagar come out with a map, showing moisture content in the soil across the country as a result of this year's rains. "The map shows that the soil moisture content in most part of the country is extremely good. It's a very good sign for Rabi (winter sown) crops and the overall farm sector," said Ramesh.

He said three parameters - good distribution of rainfall, soil moisture content and better reservoir status - have been quite positive.

Though the better reservoir status and moisture content in soil in most of the states may be a good sign for winter crops, the 9% deficit in southwest monsoon rainfall (June-September) marginally affected the sowing of summer crops.

Area under Kharif (summer sown) crops this year ended with a decline of 1.9% as compared to last year. Acreage figures, released by the agriculture ministry on Friday, show that the sown area under Kharif crops stand at 1052.38 lakh hectares on Friday as compared to 1072.79 lakh hectares at this time in 2017.

Figures show that acreage of rice, pulses, cotton and coarse cereals declined this year while acreage of oilseeds, sugarcane and jute & mesta increased over previous year.

The IMD on Saturday also released withdrawal map of the current monsoon season, showing its withdrawal from some parts of Rajasthan, Kutch and north Arabian Sea on Saturday.

"Conditions are becoming favourable for further withdrawal of south-west monsoon from remaining parts of Rajasthan, some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and some more parts of Gujarat and north Arabian sea during next 2-3 days", said IMD.