

MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS

# Monsoon in 2014 likely to be below normal: Skymet

Impact on farm output to depend on distribution of rains

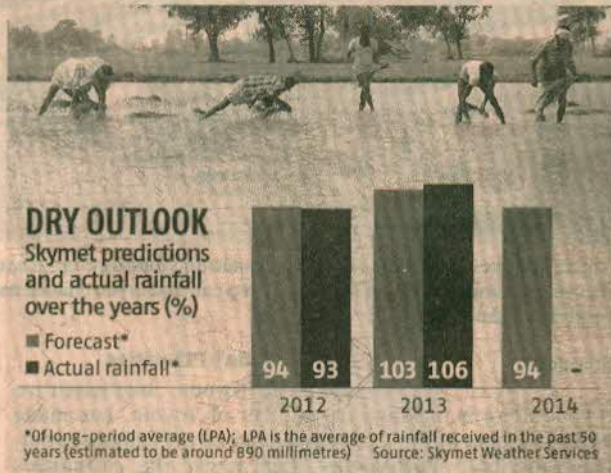
BS REPORTER  
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The southwest monsoon is likely to be below normal in 2014 because of the evolving El Niño, a warming of the Pacific Ocean that upsets weather patterns across the globe, according to a forecast issued on Tuesday by a leading private meteorological agency, Skymet.

The official monsoon forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is due on April 25.

Rain during the four months of monsoon in India beginning June is expected to be 94 per cent of the average of the past 50 years, called long-period average. Monsoon rain in the range of 96-100 per cent of the long-period average is considered normal. Overall, there is a 40 per cent chance of rain being below normal in 2014, a 34 per cent chance of a normal monsoon, a 25-per cent chance of a drought and a one-per cent chance of rain being above normal.

A less than normal mon-



soon could hurt farm production in 2014-15, exerting pressure on prices of grain, vegetables and pulses. "This below normal rain is not bad, provided it is well distributed. Too much moisture is bad for crops," said D R Sikka, former director of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

Ramesh Chand, director of the National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, agreed: "If the southwest monsoon is 94 per cent of the long-period average, it might not have a very severe impact on agriculture production, provided the distribution is

even, without long dry spells."

Skymet, however, predicted a weak monsoon in northwest India — Gujarat, Saurashtra, Kutch, Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana — and west-central India — east Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha, Marathwada, Madhya Maharashtra, Konkan and Goa, north interior Karnataka and Telangana. East India might get normal monsoon rain.

The monsoon usually hits the Kerala coast on June 1 and progresses across the country over the next 45 days. "The onset could be staggered, particularly over Karnataka and the Konkan

region, and could show uneven progress thereafter," said Jatin Singh, chief executive of Skymet.

"There is a 30 per cent chance of the El Niño phenomenon getting stronger. If El Niño were to amplify there would be a stronger chance of a drought, like in 2009. This does not seem to be the case at this point in time," Singh said. The El Niño weather phenomenon occurs when warm water off the western coast of South America increases the sea surface temperatures by 0.5 degrees above normal.

El Niño impacts the monsoon by lowering the total rainfall and making the spread uneven, according to Chand. "If the latter is pronounced, it can have an adverse impact on grain output. But the effect on prices might not be big because of adequate stocks," he added.

In the past decade, 2002, 2004 and 2009 were drought years. Monsoon rain was 22 per cent below normal in 2002 and 17 per cent below normal in 2004. In 2009, one of the worst droughts in recent years, monsoon rain was 27 per cent below normal. Skymet forecasts rainfall in June at 90 per cent of the long-period average, in July at 94 per cent, in August at 98 per cent, and in September at 90 per cent.