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# Met expects monsoon to be sub-normal this year

## With El Niño emerging, forecasts rainfall at 95% of long-period average

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India's southwest monsoon could be below normal in 2014, with the El Niño weather phenomenon emerging, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday in its first official forecast for the year.

The weather office predicted rainfall in the four-month monsoon period to be 95 per cent of the long-period average (LPA), a tad lower than the normal range of 96-104 per cent.

LPA is the average of rainfall in the years from 1951 to 2000 (that is, 89 cm) and the forecast is with a model error of plus/minus five per cent.

"The latest forecasts from a majority of the models indicate a warming trend in the sea-surface temperature over the equatorial Pacific, reaching to the El Niño level during the southwest monsoon season, with a probability of around 60 per cent," IMD said in its forecast.

The four-month southwest monsoon period starting June provides almost 70 per cent of the total moisture the country receives annually. In the past decade, the El Niño phenomenon, which does not allow rain-bearing clouds to form, has caused drought in India in



**DRY RUN AHEAD?**  
IMD's first forecast and actual monsoon in earlier years (% of long-period average\*)



\*Long-period average, or LPA, refers to the average of monsoon rains in years from 1951 to 2000

NOTE: Rainfall between 96% and 104% of LPA is taken as normal, below 90% as drought and above 110% as excessive. India had last seen a drought in 2009 and in 2004 before that. IMD issues first forecast in April and updates it, if necessary, in June.

Source: IMD

2002, 2004 and 2009.

The rain is not only crucial for growth of kharif crops, planted during the season, but provides necessary moisture to the soil for the following rabi season. Southwest monsoon is significant for farm production, as only 45 per cent of India's sown land is irrigated.

Despite a fall in agriculture's share in the country's overall gross domestic product (GDP), monsoon remains key

for the rural economy, as almost 60 per cent of India's population lives in villages.

IMD said the chance of monsoon being normal was 35 per cent, while the possibility of it being below normal was 33 per cent. There was a 23 per cent chance of a drought, the weather department said. So, the possibility of sub-normal rainfall — 56 per cent — is much higher than the chance of normal rainfall.

Below-normal rain could

add to the pressure on prices of food commodities, particularly oilseeds, pulses and vegetables, as cereals are mainly grown in the areas that have good irrigation facilities.

Even as the overall rate of price rise in March was only 5.70 per cent, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based food inflation rate stood at about 10 per cent. The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based food inflation rate, too, was above nine per cent, while the total rate of price rise in the month was 8.31 per cent.

"I would say distribution of rainfall is quite important in this case. If the deficit in rains is combined with poor distribution, it could have a negative impact on agricultural output," said Ramesh Chand, director of the National Centre for Agriculture Economics and Policy Research (NCAP). "If the rainfall is distributed evenly, this deficit will not matter much."

"If El Niño causes less rainfall and patchy distribution, it will be a matter for concern and we should be prepared for that," Chand added.

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