

Drought conditions persist in many States

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Drought conditions persist in many States

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Karnataka, which estimated the loss from drought to be ₹16,500 crore, has already sought Central assistance of ₹2,434 crore - H_S_Manjunath

Bihar, Karnataka and Maharashtra already seeking drought relief from the Centre

New Delhi, November 8

As many as seven major States, apart from many smaller States in the North-East, are threatened by a drought-like situation that would severely hit food production and livelihood, apart from drinking water availability in coming months, an expert has warned.

"The soil moisture deficit is under extreme to exceptional category in many states. If the condition doesn't improve, many parts of the country may witness a water crisis similar to that experienced in 2015-16," said Vimal Mishra, an associate professor in the Civil Engineering Department of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar.

According to one report, as many as 33 crore people in 2.5 lakh villages of 266 districts in 11 States were affected by the severe drought in 2015-16.

"This year's drought is different from that in previous years as water scarcity is already affecting a large part of the country," Mishra told *BusinessLine*.

Among the States where the rainfall deficit has already translated into drought-like situations are Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and many North-Eastern States, he said.

Even though, the India Meteorological Department forecast 97 per cent of the long period rainfall average of 89 centimetres during the 2018 South-West monsoon season, the rainfall received was only 91 per cent of the quantum.

Seeking Central assistance

Some States have already declared a drought in their jurisdictional areas. While Karnataka declared 100 talukas across 24 districts as drought-affected last month, Bihar said a drought was imminent as 33 out of its 38 districts suffered a rain deficit during the monsoon season.

Karnataka, which estimated the loss from drought to be ₹16,500 crore, has already sought Central assistance of ₹2,434 crore for drought relief.

Maharashtra is the latest State to seek drought relief. On October 31, the State government declared as many as 141 talukas across 26 districts in the States drought-hit and sought financial assistance of ₹7,000 crore from the Centre. The State has a total of 355 talukas and 182 of them are said to be drought-prone.

While eight drought-affected districts each are in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions, five are in north Maharashtra and four in western Maharashtra. Water scarcity has also hit one district in the Konkan region of the State.

According to the IIT-Gandhinagar researchers led by Mishra, who runs the Water & Climate lab, which regularly forecasts soil moisture in different parts of the country, a drought is looming in other States too. "Excessive groundwater pumping may worsen the situation in coming months. The States may face both surface and groundwater crises in the near future," Mishra said.

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