

Half of India facing a drought: IIT Scientists

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This ongoing drought will pose challenges in water availability this summer.
Representative image. - The Hindu

Nearly 50 per cent of the country is currently facing a drought with at least 16 per cent falling in the “exceptional” or “extreme” category, according to IIT Gandhinagar scientists managing the country’s real-time drought prediction system.

This ongoing drought will pose challenges in water availability this summer, Vimal Mishra, Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology here, told PTI.

The real-time monitoring system, run by his team, collects weather and precipitation data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which is then used to simulate soil moisture and other factors that contribute to drought.

The results of the simulations, prepared by the Water and Climate Lab at IIT Gandhinagar, are available on the website of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

“Arunachal Pradesh did not get good rains this year, and parts of Jharkhand, Southern Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and northern part of Tamil Nadu are under drought,” Mishra said.

If these areas experience a very hot summer before the onset of monsoon, it could lead to a crisis, he warned.

According to Mishra, continuing drought will further burden the already depleting ground-water resources of the country.

“We are not enhancing groundwater recharge. On the other hand, drought conditions are making us extract more water,” he said.

While famine-like conditions are not expected, the drought will have a massive impact on the economy. “It can create long-term stress, if not mortality for poor, marginalised farmers,” Mishra said.

The scientist said global warming and climate change are likely to exacerbate drought in the coming years.

“You can reduce groundwater use by selecting appropriate crops. If we already have depleted groundwater we should not grow water-intensive crops. For example, Punjab should not be growing rice,” Mishra said.

“The government needs to take some tough decisions as far as ground water, and water conservation is concerned,” Mishra said.

Conserving water in urban homes is just a drop in the bucket compared to steps that can be taken in the agriculture sector, he said.

Freshwater use

“Of course, conservation should be encouraged at every level, but the elephant in the room is agriculture. Eighty per cent of our total freshwater is used in agricultural sites, rather than residential sites,” he said.

He also stressed the need to better to tackle a drought situation.

“The government thinks drought is a reactive situation, that they will provide relief only once there is a crisis But with the data available they can take proactive measures to prevent a water crisis,” Mishra said.

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