

Highest rainfall in 25 years to boost winter crops, aid farmers

Extra June-September monsoon rainfall will help farmers expand areas under winter-sown crops, improving their earning potential and helping revive tepid rural demand that has stung Indian economic growth.

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Monsoon rains in India were 10 per cent above average in 2019 and the highest in 25 years as seasonal rainfall continued longer than expected, the weather department said on Monday.

Extra June-September monsoon rainfall will help farmers expand areas under winter-sown crops such as wheat, rice rapeseed and chickpeas, improving their earning potential and helping revive tepid rural demand that has stung Indian economic growth.

The longer monsoon could also restock reservoirs and help replenish groundwater, helping assuage water shortages in pockets of the country of 1.3 billion people.

But heavy rainfall in some areas has damaged summer-sown crops like cotton, soybean and pulses that are close to harvest.

The monsoon delivers about 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall and determines the yield of rice, wheat, sugarcane and oilseeds, such as soybeans.

Farming accounts for about 15 per cent of India's \$2.5 trillion economy but employs more than half of its people.

Even in the first half of October, above-average rainfall is expected due to a delay in the withdrawal of the monsoon, said an official with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), declining to be named as he was not authorized to speak with media.

The monsoon generally begins in June and starts to retreat by Sept. 1, but rains have lasted longer this year, triggering fatal floods and killing hundreds of people.

Rains are unlikely to start receding before early October, more than a month later than usual, the head of the weather office said on Friday.

Excessive rainfall wasn't of much benefit to summer crops due to erratic weather patterns, but it will help winter crops. Reservoirs are holding more water than normal, said Harish Galipelli, head of commodities and currencies at Inditrade Derivatives & Commodities in Mumbai.

The 2019 monsoon season got off to a bleak start with the driest June in five years and below-average precipitation in July, suggesting an initial prediction for lower than normal rainfall from the country's only private forecaster, Skymet, could come to pass.

The weather department had also said in May that rains this year would amount to 96 per cent of the long-term average.

But August saw heavy rains and flooding in some states and the strong monsoon has stretched into this month.

Water levels in India's main reservoirs were at 89 per cent of their storage capacity as on Sept. 27 against 74 per cent a year earlier, government data show. The average for the past 10 years is 72 per cent.

Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/highest-rainfall-in-25-years-to-boost-winter-crops-aid-farmers-1605004-2019-10-01>