

The Hindu - 16 April-2024

# India to get above-normal monsoon rainfall: IMD

**Jacob Koshy**

NEW DELHI

While several States reel under heatwaves, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a bountiful monsoon for the year. In a press briefing on Monday, the agency forecast that the rainfall in June-September will be 6% more than the annual average of 87 cm during these months.

Last year, El Nino – a warming of the Central Pacific and usually linked to diminished rainfall in India – dented India's monsoon by 6%. This year, the El Nino has not yet fully faded but is expected to do so by June and progress to La Nina, a converse cooling effect that is usually linked to surplus rainfall by the second half of the monsoon (August and September), said IMD Director-General Mrutunjay Mahapatra.

The IMD uses multiple

## Rain check

The long period average (LPA) of the southwest monsoon rainfall (June to September) from 1971 to 2020 is 87 cm

- This year, the IMD has predicted that the rainfall will be 106% of the LPA
- Rainfall over the country as a whole during June-September 2023 was 82 cm (94% of LPA)
- During June-September 2022, the rainfall was 93 cm (106% of LPA)

SOURCE: IMD



approaches to forecast the monsoon. One is to use statistical associations and draw upon its vast historical database of over 150 years to correlate certain global meteorological parameters such as ocean temperatures and snow cover in Europe, to the performance of the monsoon. The other way is to use the dynamical approach, or simulating the weather across the globe on a particular day, and having powerful computers crunch the numbers to extrapolate

this weather into any future day or time period desired. Both these models indicated a similar outlook for the monsoon this year, said M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences.

The IMD is expected to update its monsoon forecast in May, just ahead of the monsoon onset in June, and give more information on spatial distribution.

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# DDA flouts NGT guidelines, continues construction on crowded Yamuna floodplain

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NEW DELHI

Despite last year marking the worst floods in Delhi's history, *The Hindu* has found that the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is persisting with its plans of constructing permanent structures on the banks of the Yamuna. The project, dubbed as "restoration" of the river's floodplain, violates the guidelines issued in 2015 by a Principal Committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which the States were ordered to "strictly" follow.

Last year, experts had deduced that one of the causes that aggravated the floods, besides the heavy rainfall upstream of Delhi, was the permanent constructions encroaching on the river's floodplain. The constructions not only reduce the floodplain's water holding capacity, but also constrict the flow of the river, experts had said in

the aftermath of the flood, which saw the Yamuna rise to unprecedented levels.

However, under the DDA's 'Restoration and Rejuvenation of River Yamuna Floodplains Project', several permanent structures, including concrete ghats, large sitting areas made of concrete and sandstone, and a cafe, have been built. An approximately 40-metre-long pool and several concrete offices have also been constructed, while a convention centre, tent city, and more ghats are among other buildings that the DDA is planning.

The Principal Committee, formed after a landmark judgment with the specific purpose of monitoring activity on the Yamuna's floodplain, outlined strict norms governing construction. However, sources told *The Hindu* that the committee has not met in over 21 months.

The NGT has prohibited



**Death of a river:** Construction at Qudsia Ghat (Vasudev Ghat) in New Delhi in this photo taken in March; (right) the cafe at Baansera near Sarai Kale Khan. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA, NIKHIL M. BABU

any construction on the floodplain, barring in exceptional cases, for which plans are to be approved by the Principal Committee in advance. The committee, comprising several independent experts, has in the past been critical of constructions on the floodplain and turned down proposals for ghats, roads, and other buildings. It conducted inspections and pulled up the concerned government departments for flouting norms.

## Norms flouted

An internal communication accessed by *The*

*Hindu* showed that months before the July 2023 floods, the DDA went ahead with building permanent constructions on at least one site on the floodplain despite being turned down by the committee.

At Baansera – a bamboo theme park being developed by the DDA near Sarai Kale Khan – the civic body wanted to build a convention centre, a cafe, and an interpretation centre. This was shot down by the members of the committee, who in a letter dated January 31, 2023, held that it "could not be permitted".

tee (HLC) – comprising government officers with no independent subject experts – approved its request. Delhi's Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena, also the chairman of the DDA, presided over the HLC meeting which passed this proposal.

## Ground reality

The L-G's website mentions that the cafe at Baansera is "of bamboo". However, when *The Hindu* visited the cafe, which is yet to be opened to public, the construction featured a concrete and red brick base, part of which was covered with wooden and bamboo panelling.

Similarly, Asita East – a project designed to "rejuvenate the ecology of the Yamuna floodplain", as per the L-G's website – also features concrete pathways over 10 feet wide, affixed to the ground with cement at many places.

Workers at Asita East said the concrete blocks were laid after filling up the floodplain with red soil

and rocks with the help of massive rollers. Sur Ghat and Qudsia Ghat also featured several permanent constructions.

The guidelines, which the NGT had in 2015 ordered States to "strictly" follow, stipulates that "access to the river channel should be allowed in a manner that it avoids construction of paved (pucca) paths". But despite the presence of concrete structures on the project sites, senior DDA officials in the past told the Principal Committee that no permanent construction was being done in the floodplain. This is recorded in the minutes of the meeting of the panel.

## Crowded floodplain

Experts believe that the DDA's project has led to concretisation of the Yamuna's banks. "This will lead to a reduction of the water carrying capacity of the floodplain," said Bhim Singh Rawat, associate coordinator at the South Asia Networks on Dams, Rivers and People.

Shashi Shekhar, former Secretary at the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, opined that Indian rivers need more floodplains compared to Western rivers as they swell in size during monsoons. The 'Sabarmati model' – the urbanisation of Ahmedabad's Sabarmati riverfront with concrete embankment walls – was not a feasible solution for other rivers in India, he added. "We must focus on restoring the Yamuna to its natural form," he said.

DDA officials, however, deemed the project a success, pointing out that large swathes of the Yamuna's floodplain, lost in the past to encroachments, have now been "freed up". They further claimed that at the "restoration" project sites, grass and trees, suitable for the floodplain, have also been planted.

Despite making multiple calls and sending detailed questionnaires, the DDA and the L-G's office did not respond to queries.