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Met notifies depression alert, no respite seen for flood-hit areas in Central India

The rain-driving low-pressure area over Central India has intensified into being 'well-marked' and is well on its way to become a monsoon depression, loaded with ramifications for the flood-hit areas in the region.

The 'well-marked low' was located over South-West Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday evening, and could be heading towards South Gujarat and Mumbai-Konkan over the next couple of days.

Beats forecasts

The intensification of the 'low' had beat all forecasts, not to speak about the prospects of its acquiring the strength of full-scale depression, including those by international models.

The only relief, if it can be called one, is the likely advancement of formation of a follow-up weather system in the Bay of Bengal, earlier forecast to take place by Friday.

The hyperactive monsoon being sustained by the depression-in-making would have the effect of slowing down the successor system by at least five days, as per early indications.

East India and Central India would have to brace for another round of wet spell from September 5, which would also mean that the withdrawal process of the monsoon could get delayed in the process.

Texas-like scenario

Meanwhile, the flood-hit Mumbai and neighbourhood, and prospectively Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch, would bear the brunt of the ongoing roaring phase of the monsoon.

The emerging scenario could be even worse than what is obtaining far west to Texas in South-West of the US, still reeling under floods set off by erstwhile category-4 hurricane 'Harvey.'

This is because a low-pressure area or a depression, though lesser in strength and intensity, has a longer shelf life and sustain heavy to very rainfall with assured back-up in moisture feed from the neighbouring seas - Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal in the local context.

In a special bulletin, India Met Department has warned of fairly widespread to widespread rainfall over Gujarat, Konkan, North Madhya Maharashtra, South-West Madhya Pradesh and South-East Rajasthan during the next two to three days.

Limited respite

The rains may relent over South-West Madhya Pradesh, South-East Rajasthan and North Madhya Maharashtra. But Konkan-Mumbai, Gujarat and Saurashtra would continue to be vulnerable. Satellite maps on Tuesday evening showed the entire landscape extending from Konkan-Mumbai and West Madhya Pradesh into entire Gujarat and South-West Rajasthan already invaded by humongous mass of clouds.

It hung precariously over Mumbai, Nashik, Dhule, Surat, Vadodara, Anand, Ahmedabad, Junagadh, Jamnagar, Gandhidham, Bhuj, Nalia, Mahesana, Palanpur, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Jalore, Barmer and Jodhpur.

This covered the Met subdivisions of Konkan, West Madhya Pradesh, East Gujarat, Saurashtra & Kutch, East Rajasthan and West Rajasthan.

(This article was published on August 29, 2017)

Onion prices: Centre asks States, UTs to rein in speculators and hoarders

Following a fresh surge in onion prices – termed as “abnormal” by the Centre – States and Union Territories have been asked to take adequate measures to ensure its availability and to keep prices of essential commodities under control.

In a notification issued on August 25, the Centre has allowed States to impose stock limits on onions and undertake various measures, such as de-hoarding of onions, as well as crackdown on speculation and profiteering.

“This has been necessitated due to the abnormal rise in prices of onion in recent weeks, particularly from July-end of this year onwards, though the production and supply of onions in the market is better than last year during the same period,” the Food Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

As per the all-India average retail price, onions are being sold at ₹15/kg to ₹28.94/kg. The rise has been steeper in metros, with the kitchen staple being sold at ₹31/kg in Chennai, ₹38/kg in Delhi, ₹40/kg in Kolkata and ₹33/kg in Mumbai.

“As part of its efforts to ensure that the prices of essential commodities are kept under control, the Government has taken a decision to enable the States and Union Territories to impose control measures on traders and dealers of onion to ensure adequate availability of essential commodity at reasonable prices,” the Food Ministry said.

(This article was published on August 29, 2017)

Onion price surge: Centre asks states to impose stock limits

Following a fresh surge in onion prices, the Centre has asked states to ensure that prices of essential commodities are kept under control and to especially take adequate measures to check traders/ dealers of onions to ensure adequate availability.

As a result, states can now impose stock limits on onions and undertake various measures, such as de-hoarding operations, action against speculators and profiteers.

“This has been necessitated due to the abnormal rise in prices of onions in recent weeks, particularly from July-end of this year, though the production and supply of onions in the market has been better than last year during the same period,” the Food Ministry said in a statement.

As per the all-India average retail price, onions are sold at Rs 15/kg to Rs 28.94/kg. In the metros, the rise has been steeper, Rs 31/kg in Chennai, Rs 38/kg in Delhi, Rs 40/kg in Kolkata and Rs 3/ kg in Mumbai.

“As part of its efforts to ensure that the prices of essential commodities are kept under control, the government has taken a decision to enable the states and Union Territories to impose control measures on traders and dealers of onion to ensure adequate availability of the essential commodity at reasonable prices,” the Food Ministry said, adding that the government notified this decision vide order SO No. 2785 (E) on August 25, 2017.

The Food Ministry said after “examination of all the circumstances, the Government has inferred that there are some other reasons, other than shortage of onions, contributing to the abnormal price rise like hoarding, speculation, etc”, and expects that measures taken by the states will help bring prices down to a reasonable level.

(This article was published on August 29, 2017)

Coming, an interactive Tamil app for farmers

What if farmers could have an application like Apple’s Siri that answers queries on preventing plant diseases or the right pesticides to use?

It will soon be possible, say officials from the Tamil Virtual Academy (TVA) in Chennai.

The academy is developing an interactive system that can answer questions about paddy, sugarcane and ragi. The product is being developed in collaboration with academic institutions, which they did not want to name.

The application is a result of increasing internet and mobile penetration in rural areas, said the director in charge of development at TVA.

The app can clarify farmers' doubts on crop diseases, fertilisers and soil fertility based on the information available in the database. The information is sourced from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

Will such technology be relevant? Very much so, said the TVA official.

According to a recent study, about one-third of the 351 million internet users in the country are from rural areas. Low-cost and easy-to-use mobile devices to access the internet are pushing the growth in rural areas as well.

All these factors play a major role in making technology more relevant among rural communities, the TVA director said.

Language advantage

There are applications such as Kisan Suvidha, IFFCO Kisan Agriculture, Agri App and Agri Market that currently help farmers with clarifications regarding crop insurance, prices and other issues. But having a platform that lets the user speak in the vernacular is expected to be more effective.

It is for this reason that TVA has focussed on crops that are widely produced in the State.

Additionally, the amount of data that needs to be collected would be humongous if more crops were added. "We might not be able to do justice," the official added.

The app is in final stages of development and will be launched once the State government clears it.

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