

Bountiful rains: Parched Maha crops get relief, throats stay dry

Parts Of State Seek Dry Spell, Others Worried

Nauzer K Bharucha | TNN

Mumbai: The bountiful monsoon this year has brought major relief to farmers in some of Maharashtra's worst drought-affected areas. Yet, it has not been able to alleviate the drinking water crisis in parts of the state. Several dams here still have extremely low drinking water levels and some, such as Jayakwadi in Aurangabad district, remain completely dry.

After reeling from one of its severest droughts, Maharashtra has on an average received over 100% rainfall so far. The agriculture department, which has been tracking the kharif sowing pattern since the monsoon began in June, says the state may even be on its way to a bumper harvest.

Aurangabad, Dhule, Osmanabad, Latur and Kolhapur districts, which suffered the drought's full blow, have covered a lot of ground in the past six weeks.

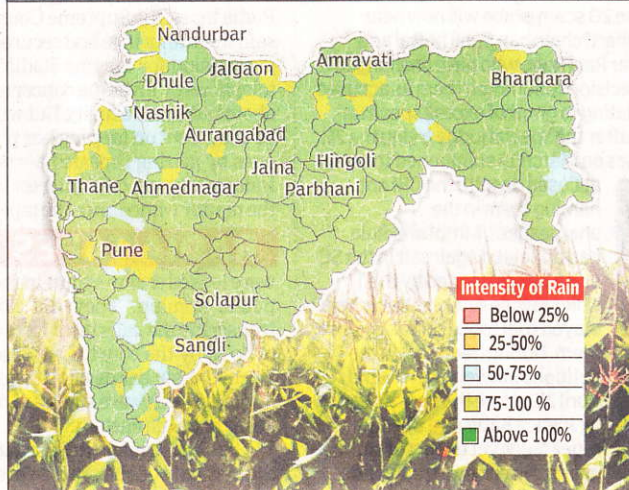
In Aurangabad district, the agriculture department says, kharif crops have been sown on 7,174 hectares as against the yearly seasonal normal (YSN) of 6,292 hectares. In Osmanabad district, where the YSN is 3,905 hectares, sowing has covered 4,305 hectares. And in Dhule and Akola districts, the YSN of 3,968 hectares is nearly reached.

"We now want a dry spell to protect the crops," said a department official. Kharif crops include paddy, jowar, bajra, maize, wheat, cereals and groundnut.

However, while delivering good news for crops, the heavy rain has done little to ease the severe drinking water problem in drought-prone regions.

FAR FROM FULL

Maharashtra has received generous rainfall this year. But that has not filled up many major dams in the state



Water In Major Dams

Region	Full Capacity	Till Last Week
Konkan	733	544
Marathwada	5,142	632
Nagpur	2,858	1,941
Amravati	1,540	926
Nashik	3,143	781
Pune	8,242	3,729

Figures in million cubic metres

"Rains were deficient the last two years in parts of the state, such as western Maharashtra and Marathwada. A good monsoon this time has not been sufficient to recharge ground water," said state relief and rehabilitation secretary Milind Mhaikar.

Data procured from official sources show that the water storage position in major dams of Marathwada region is still far from encouraging. While the total capacity of the 11 dams in the region is 5,142 Mcum (million cubic metres), water storage till last week was barely 632 Mcum.

Jayakwadi in Aurangabad district, Purna Yeldari and Purna Siddheshwar in Parbhani, Majalgaon and Manjra in

Beed, Lower Terna and Sina Kolegaon in Osmanabad were empty. These are all crucial irrigation projects in the Marathwada region.

Officials said water from dams in Pune and Nashik regions will be released to the empty dams once the former are 75% full. "This generally happens by end August every year," an official said.

The severe drought in Maharashtra and its impact on some regions have taken on a graver meaning in the light of this newspaper's expose of a multi-crore scam in the NCP-controlled state water resources department.

In the past decade, the government has spent Rs 70,000 crore on irrigation projects but

Wettest June-July in 19 yrs at 117% of long-term avg

Amit Bhattacharya | TNN

New Delhi: This year's June-July rainfall, at 117% of the long period average, is the highest India has seen in 19 years. The last time there was more rain during this two-month period was in 1994, when the monsoon was 123% of the average.

The 528.1mm rain bounty that the country got in the first half of the monsoon season is the third highest in 50 years. The wettest June-July spell during this period was in 1994 (564.7mm) while the second wettest was 1964 (538.1mm).

Another interesting feature of this year's rains has been the absence of a break in the monsoon ever since it covered the entire country in June 16.

The rainfall in July was 108% of LPA, just falling within the 9% error margin of IMD's forecast for the month. However, it is more than likely that the overall rains this year will overshoot IMD's predicted 98%.

has had little to show for it. An irrigation department whistle-blower, Vijay Pandhare, alleged last year that half the sum was wasted on dud projects or siphoned off.

Officials point out that the generous monsoon has helped the situation in the state. During the drought's most severe phase earlier this year, Mhaikar's department was dispatching 5,600 water tankers every day to 10,000 villages and hamlets. Most of these were sent to half-a-dozen talukas in Solapur, Sangli and Satara.

However, heavy rain has reduced the daily number of tankers to about 2,000. The 10 lakh cattle camps set up by the government are now down to three lakh.