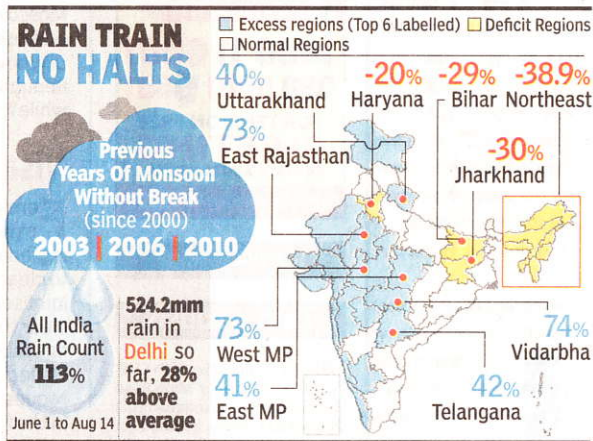


Monsoon marches on sans a break

Amit Bhattacharya | TNN

New Delhi: Two months after it covered the entire country much ahead of schedule, this year's monsoon continues to surprise, albeit pleasantly. The monsoon has been active without a 'break' since June 16 and rains have so far been 113% of the long-term average. One or two periods of a break in monsoon — defined as three straight days of very low rain activity across central India — are common during the rainy season.

Since 2000, there have only been three years when there was no monsoon break. And all three years coincided with plentiful rains. "Two months of monsoon activity without a break is rather rare. It's an indication of a good monsoon," said M Rajeevan, senior



weather scientist at the earth sciences ministry.

After posting a 19-year high June-July rain record of 117%, the monsoon has weakened a bit in August. Rains during the month (till August

13) have been 96% of the average. Yet, there hasn't been a break. "Conditions close to a break developed on August 3-4, but the monsoon quickly recovered," said D Sivananda Pai, IMD's monsoon forecaster.

At least four factors have worked in favour of the monsoon this year. The first good sign was an absence of El Niño — an anomalous rise in ocean surface temperatures in the east Pacific that is linked to monsoon failure in India. Currently, weak La Niña conditions exist in the Pacific, which is the opposite of El Niño and is known to help the monsoon here.

"Then, typhoons breaking out over the south Pacific have also helped because these have generally moved in a direction that reinforces the Indian monsoon," said Rajeevan. Importantly, what has helped sustain the rains — and distribute it more or less evenly — has been a series of low pressure formations over the Bay of Bengal that have travelled westwards.