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Climate to veer off course in 50 years: UN

Sanchita Sharma
 New Delhi, November 12

INDIA'S CLIMATE is headed for a change over the next 50 years, warns the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2006. Global warming will change monsoon patterns by as much as 25 to 100 per cent and affect India's climate in peculiar ways.

The good news is that the country is expected to get more rain as a whole, with some parts getting as many as 10 extra days of rain each year. But the bad news is: it is the wet areas of the country such as the Northeast and the Terai region that will get the extra rain. The rest of

the country will have fewer rainy days and get dryer.

"Fluctuations of just 10 per cent are known to cause severe flooding or draught. Heavy rains have devastating consequences, as the flooding in Mumbai in 2005 demonstrated: 500 people perished," states the report.

More rain, however, does not necessarily translate into agricultural productivity. Areas may get more water through rain but lose even more through evaporation as temperatures rise. Even if the annual rainfall rises, reduced moisture retention in the soil due to global warming would lower soil fertility and

UNDP REPORT

raise the risk of crop failure.

"Projections for India highlight the complexity of climate change patterns. Most modeling points to an increase in rainfall for the country as a whole. However, an increased proportion of rain will fall during intensive monsoon episodes in parts of the country that are already well endowed with rainfall. Meanwhile, two thirds of the country — including semi-arid areas in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan — will have fewer rainy days. This will translate into a net loss for water security, placing a pre-

mium on water harvesting and storage," says the report.

The other major concern for the subcontinent is the glacial melt. "Glaciers of the Himalayas and Tibet alone feed seven of the world's greatest rivers — the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Irrawady, Mekong, Salween and the Yangtze — that provide water supplies for more than 2 billion people. With global warming, glaciers are melting more rapidly, increasing the risk of flooding in spring, followed by water shortages in summer. Over the next 50 years, glacial melt could emerge as one of the biggest threats," says the UNDP report.

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