

Trouble on the farm, output to fall

UPA'S BIG WORRY Climate change roils India's agriculture, threatens livelihood of 670 million

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NEW DELHI: Over the last 48 hours, India's ruling combine had two reasons for euphoria: electoral triumphs in three states and the announcement that the economy will grow by 6.5 per cent this year.

But a footnote in the economic data has revealed how the euphoria must be put aside immediately, as climate change poses the next big political challenge for the Congress party.

A season of withering drought and damaging rainstorms is predicted to cut India's agricultural output by 2 per cent, despite a 400 per cent rise in

A SEASON OF DROUGHT AND RAINSTORMS IS PREDICTED TO CUT INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL GROWTH BY 2 PER CENT THIS YEAR

rural spending on jobs and infrastructure by the government since Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took office in 2004.

With climate-change models predicting harsher droughts, storms and floods across India as the earth warms, rescuing the livelihoods of 670 million Indians who survive on farming

is an immediate and long-term economic and political challenge, a range of experts told the *HT*.

"Despite fiscal and monetary stimulus packages, there are strong risks emanating from poor monsoons that could delay the recovery in the economy," said N.R. Bhanumurthy, professor at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, a Delhi think-tank.

Scientists predict a best-worst-case global temperature rise anywhere from 1.1 to 6.4 deg C. But even a half-degree rise in India — the world's second-largest wheat producer — will reduce wheat yield by a fourth.

"The situation will be substantially worse by 2050,

marked by higher temperatures that will certainly affect India's wheat yield," said Gerald C. Nelson, a senior scientist, who led a study completed last month by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington D.C.

Nelson said it was "crucial" for rural incomes to keep going up because people with better incomes were more resilient to climate change impacts.

This year, the UPA government has a Rs 40,000 crore budget for its flagship job scheme against rural poverty, but it will spend 1/40th of that on expanding irrigation facilities. The IFPRI study was based on two models evolved in the

GLOBAL WARMING



US and Australia and released in September. They differ on the intensity of rainfall but what they agree on is in line with earlier predictions on the monsoon: India will have stronger droughts and get more rain. But the rain will also come in damaging storms, as Andhra witnessed last month.

About half of India's farms depend on rains.

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countdowntocopenhagen

Climate change is no longer the threat of tomorrow. It's here, changing the way millions across India live as they feel the effects of a warming

planet. As monsoons get more erratic, summer temperatures soar and winters shorten, India faces big economic, environmental and political

challenges. In the run-up to crucial global negotiations at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark (December 7-18) and beyond, *HT* starts today a new national reporting project that will take you from policymaking corridors to farms and glaciers, to prepare you for what is coming. It is time.

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