

## As various parts of India witness one of the worst droughts, an above par monsoon is an imperative

G Seetharaman, ET Bureau Apr 10, 2016, 07.00AM IST



When a law usually reserved for times of religious, caste or political violence is used at a time of water scarcity, you know how bad the problem is. In the past few weeks, Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure has been imposed in Latur and Parbhani, both in the drought-stricken Marathwada region of Maharashtra, to prevent the gathering of more than five people around water supply spots, thereby averting conflicts.

These developments come at a time when the initial forecasts for this year's monsoon may provide some hope to millions starved of water. In 2014-15, India had a 12% deficit in rainfall, followed by a 14% shortfall in 2015-16, thanks to the El Nino weather phenomenon, which has parts of the [Pacific Ocean](#) warming up, leading to lower-than-average rainfall in countries like India and Australia.

This led 10 states to declare drought. The Supreme Court earlier this week came down heavily on Gujarat for its delay in declaring drought till April 1. Weather [Risk Management](#) Services, a private firm, has said that rainfall in June-September will be above normal in most parts of the country, barring the Northeast. According to the forecast, rains are expected to be more than 104% in most regions, all four months of the monsoon season are likely to get above normal rains countrywide, and June could have the highest positive departure from normal.

This forecast was backed by another by Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. The Indian Meteorological Department will issue its forecast later this month. With the El Nino having peaked and expected to return to neutral conditions by [the middle](#) of 2016, economists and weather forecasters are cautiously hopeful. El Nino's decline leads to an increase in the probability of the La Nina effect, or a cooling of the waters, which typically leads to improved rainfall.

These optimistic forecasts aside, the current scenario in parts of the country are comparable to the drought of 2002, says Bharat Sharma, coordinator of the India programme at the International Water Management Institute. He adds that it is about time India improved the efficiency of water use. "We should decouple our economic growth from our water use." The ratio of water use to gross domestic product, measured in terms of cubic metres of water per dollar of [GDP](#), between 1975 and 2000 was less than 0.1 in developed countries, while in India it was well over 1. Equally responsible for the recurring drought-like conditions is the government's inefficient agricultural policy, as former Planning Commission secretary Naresh Chandra Saxena argues (See [Blame it on a Flawed Agri Policy, Too](#) ).

As water, or the lack thereof, makes headlines day in and day out, ET Magazine visits Beed in Marathwada, Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh and Kolar in Karnataka to understand how the people and local administration are battling the drought.