

LETTER

CHANGING RAINFALL PATTERN

This year's rainfall pattern in India up to the month of August has departed significantly from the situation commonly seen every year. A newspaper headline proclaimed : Floods in Barmer, drought in Cherapunjee. This reflected the prevailing reality that some of the most flood-prone areas (such as large parts of Assam and Bihar) experienced drought like conditions while some of the drought-prone areas (such as the Rajasthan desert, Marathwada region of Maharashtra and parts of Gujarat) experienced heavy floods.

This freak phenomenon is actually entirely in keeping with the climate change being seen all over the world.

What is the lesson in this for India's water management and planning? The most extensive and long-term water project that India has is the national river-link project. In its essence this project is based on taking water from surplus basins to water deficit basins.

The efforts to do this on a gigantic scale at a national level have been widely criticised for their adverse environmental impacts even earlier but this year's curious rainfall pattern has knocked out whatever little rationale that may have existed for this expensive project. With the changing rainfall pattern it is ridiculous to think of a project to transfer water from water-surplus eastern parts of the country to water scarce western parts of the country.

So it is futile to go on investing billions of Rs in this project and instead the government agencies should concentrate their time and resources on carefully monitoring the changing situation and bringing water management efforts in tune with it.

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