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# WEATHERING THE STORM

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

An India Meteorological Department (IMD) report, released on Monday, confirms what climate scientists have been claiming for more than half a decade — extreme weather events have become par for the course in the country. The Statement on Climate of India in 2019 notes that excessive heat, cold and rainfall killed 1,562 people during the year. The mean temperature last year was 0.36 above normal while the country also recorded excess rainfall during both the southwest and northeast monsoons. Intense dry spells, even droughts, were interspersed with floods in several parts of the country — a phenomenon that policymakers will increasingly be called to factor while drawing up projects in areas as diverse as agriculture, urban planning, water resources and disaster management.

The IMD report should be seen in conjunction with long-term meteorological trends. The World Meteorological Organisation, for example, reckons that the decade starting 2011 remains on track to be the warmest on record. At the same time, data from the European Center for Medium Range Forecast shows that the relative humidity in the mid-troposphere in the Subcontinent has increased by about 2 per cent in the past four decades. Such warming has increased the capacity of oceans to form intense cyclonic disturbances.

Last year, as the IMD report notes, the Indian Ocean witnessed eight cyclones. Ipso facto, cyclones don’t kill but buildings can turn hazardous during such extreme weather events. Last year, in Odisha for instance, winds blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour ripped off roofs and window frames in modern houses and also exposed the vulnerability of the mud and bamboo houses of the poor. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs does have guidelines for climate-friendly construction. But planners in coastal cities and towns rarely pay heed to its provisions.

This year, Kerala, southern Karnataka and Gujarat were heavily deficient till July. But within a few days in the last week of July, these states recorded surplus rainfall. For farmers, such vagaries mean disruptions in the entire cropping cycle. Increasing their resilience calls for efficient rainwater storage and use. The changing dynamics of weather also demand cooperation between states that share a river basin. This year, Maharashtra and Karnataka bickered over opening the gates of the Almatti dam on the Krishna. By the time the two states agreed over the amount of water to be discharged from the dam, the damage was already done. It’s clear that dealing with exceptional weather will require interventions at the national, state and local-levels. The Statement on Climate of India 2019 drives home the urgency of such interventions.

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