Prediction errors of IMD

Why in news?

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Recently IMD has made an error in predicting the monsoon.

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What are the functions of IMD?

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- The India Meteorological Department (IMD), is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology.
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- It is headquartered in Pune with regional offices at Mumbai, Kolkata, Nagpur and Delhi.
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- In April, the IMD had predicted “near normal” or 96% rains and then upgraded the figure to 98% a couple of months later.
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- These percentages refer to the proportion of rains to 89 cm, a 50-year average of monsoon rains.
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What is the recent prediction error made by IMD?

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- The recent predictions made by IMD went wrong, at the end of this monsoon there were “below normal” rains (that is, less than 96% of the 50-year long period average).
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- A single number 96 or 95, has the power to brand rainfall as “near” or “below” normal.
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- A 98% forecast implies a range from 94% to 102% and so could span “below normal” to “above normal”.
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- The IMD continues to persevere with the meaningless practice of assigning an overall number to the quantum of rain expected during the monsoon.
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- This exercise of Monsoon prediction was initially conceived as a measure to warn the government about a draught or weak rains.
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- But now this has become just an exercise of numbers secured with statistical error margins to rationalise a wrong forecast.
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What are the impacts of faulty prediction?

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- Faulty predictions of intra-seasonal variation or forecasting a change in global weather can affect agricultural outputs and normal lives of the people.
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- The outcome of focussing on quantitative numbershas ripple effects from policymakers to stock markets.
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- This leads to dilemma for policy makers for addressing the farmers who seek localised, actionable inputs on sowing or harvesting decisions.
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- Performance assessment of monsoon on agriculture and economy will be delayed due to the faulty prediction.
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Way forward

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- India Meteorological Department is one of the six Regional Specialised Meteorological Centres of the World Meteorological Organization, faulty predictions will make its reliability dubious.
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- The rain estimates needs to warn threatening weather and must be

operationally useful rather than reduce rain to numerical jugglery.
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- Thus IMD needs to take efforts to upgrade its supercomputers and sophisticated models to warn of weather changes at the district level.
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Source: The Hindu

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