

Water crisis predicted after less snowfall in Himalayas: study

KATHMANDU

MILLIONS of people dependent on Himalayan snowmelt for water face a "very serious" risk of shortages this year after one of the lowest rates of snowfall, scientists warned on Monday.

Snowmelt is the source of about a quarter of the total water flow of 12 major river basins that originate high in the region, the report said.

"This is a wake-up call for re-

searchers, policymakers, and downstream communities," said report author Sher Muhammad, from the Nepal-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). "Lower accumulation of snow and fluctuating levels of snow pose a very serious increased risk of water shortages, particularly this year." Snow and ice on the Himalayas are a crucial water source for around 240 million

people in the mountainous regions, as well as for another 1.65 billion people in the river valleys below, according to ICIMOD.

While snow levels fluctuate each year, scientists say climate change is driving erratic rainfall and shifting weather patterns.

The report measured "snow persistence" – the time snow remains on the ground – with



levels dropping almost a fifth below normal this year across the wider Hindu Kush and Himalaya region.

"This year's snow persistence (18.5% below normal) is the second-lowest in the past 22 years, narrowly trailing the record low of 19% set in 2018," Muhammad said.

As well as Nepal, the inter-governmental ICIMOD organi-

sation includes member countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar and Pakistan.

The report warned that ICIMOD "observations and projections indicate significant changes in the timing and intensity of stream flows", with snow a key part.

"Snow plays a particularly important role in ensuring seasonal water availability," it added.

AFP

The New Indian Express dt: 18.06.2024