

MERCURY SOARS, PRE-MONSOON RAIN RARE

Roasted: Sikkim and north Bengal

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Siliguri: The hills and plains of north Bengal and neighbouring Sikkim are reeling under unusual and intense pre-monsoon heat with extremely sparse showers over the past several days.

Weather experts have warned that the prevailing hot and dry conditions are likely to persist for at least another 48 hours while isolated thunderstorms or light rainfall are likely in a few areas.

With little to no pre-monsoon rainfall, temperatures have risen sharply in most parts of north Bengal and Sikkim.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, many locations

in Sikkim recorded unusually high temperatures over the past 24 hours.

Mazitar near Rangpo, the principal entry point to the Himalayan state, clocked 35 degrees Celsius. Tadong near Gangtok recorded 30 degrees while Soreng and Pakyong recorded 27 degrees each. Gangtok, the state capital, recorded 25 degrees Celsius.

In Bengal, the maximum temperatures in Darjeeling and Kalimpong were 24 and 27 degrees Celsius, respectively.

North Bengal plains saw scorching temperatures. Jalpaiguri, Malda and Raiganj clocked around 37 degrees Celsius. Cooch Behar and Balurghat touched nearly 36 degrees.

The rising mercury



A vendor ferries tender coconuts in Siliguri on a hot Wednesday.

Picture by Passang Yolmo

prompted education authorities in many districts to alter school schedules. Classes were shifted to morning hours to protect students from the heat.

The prolonged dry spell has also rung alarm bells in the tea sector. Tea growers have noted that soil moisture levels were declining rapidly, increasing the risk of stress on tea bushes during a critical growing period. "If dry conditions and severe heat continue, tea leaves may dry up. We are concerned that the prevailing weather pattern could negatively impact production unless sufficient rainfall arrives soon to improve the situation," said Chinmoy Dhar, the senior manager of the Majherdabri tea estate in Alipurduar.

IMD officials said a cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal was preventing moisture-laden winds from reaching north Bengal and Sikkim.