

Cotton output seen at 14-year low due to extreme weather

Zia Haq

letters@hindustantimes.com

India's cotton output is likely to hit a 14-year low of 29.3 million bales (170 kg each) in 2022-23 due to extreme weather and uneven rain said to be linked to climate change, estimates by a top industry body said on Wednesday.

Lower production will crimp exports from the world's largest producer of the fibre, potentially pushing up domestic prices and squeezing margins of textile companies.

This will also likely lift consumer prices of clothing and garments, analysts said.

The textile industry is a large employer and highly labour intensive, supporting livelihoods of nearly 60 million people, according to official estimates. In April, the United States Department of Agriculture forecast the country's cotton exports would fall sharply amid rising imports for the first time in two decades as domestic stocks run low.

On Wednesday, the Cotton Association of India revised its

output estimates further down to 29.3 million bales from 30.6 bales earlier, while pegging domestic consumption at 31.1 million bales of 170 kg. The 2022-23 cotton crop year will run till September 30, 2024.

"The estimates have been arrived at by the crop committee consisting of total 25 members of the association based on pressing numbers received from its 11 cotton growing state association members," said Atul S. Ganatra, president of the association.

The June-September monsoon rains in 2022 were first patchy in cotton growing states such as Maharashtra, Telangana, Punjab and Karnataka, and then turned heavy, affecting crop size, according to Bikash Singh of Silktex Fibres Ltd, a ginning mill in Maharashtra's Yavatmal.

Swinging weather patterns and intense heatwaves have impacted an array of crops, such as cereals and cotton. In 2022, an early hot spell trimmed wheat output by 2%, while a drought in some states cut rice acreage by 3%.