

To take weather reports to farmers, Meteorological Department turns to postmen

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The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has a new job for postmen. Looking to collect and deliver weather information to remote villages, the IMD's Agricultural Meteorology Division, or AgriMet, wants them to step in and help.

"The postman will be given a template form when he goes to a village. It will have basic questions, like cropping pattern of the village, land usage, etc. He has to fill the form and get phone numbers of some farmers," Nabansu Chattopadhyay, deputy director general at AgriMet, said. The postal department will feed this information to their servers, and IMD officials will then access it to churn out circle-level, custom-made weather and crop forecast. Chattopadhyay said the decision to rope in the Postal Department was taken during a brainstorming session last month on how to disseminate AgriMet advisories to farmers. "Timely and precise weather-based advisories are invaluable for farmers to plan their crop cycle. Through the Kisan portal and other services, we have managed to reach 19 million farmers. But we aim to reach all 90 million farmers in India with custom-made weather and crop advisories," he said. Chattopadhyay said that in places where even mobile network does not exist, a postman could make all the difference. The IMD also plans to mount LED screens at village post offices, where weather and crop information would be shown through the day. "All the screens will be connected to the remote server, and information collected by postmen will be used to churn out the advisories," Chattopadhyay said. At the moment, five villages — in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh — have been selected for the trial run of the project, and a budget is being worked out. According to Chattopadhyay, of the 1,54,239 post offices in India, 1,39,222 are in rural areas. Referring to an economic impact analysis study by the National Council of Applied Economic Research, Chattopadhyay said that at least 25 per cent of the farmers who relied on AgriMet reported an increase in their net income. "The service has the potential of generating net economic benefit of up to Rs 3.3 lakh crore when such advisories are fully utilised by all 90 million farmers," he said. Apart from the postal department, AgriMet plans to use services such as farmer's cooperatives and agricultural produce market committees to ensure their advisories reach all corners. First published by *The Indian Express*

First published by
The Indian Express