

Drinking water top issue at world's wettest spots

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Guwahati: Clouds float into their homes like everyday guests and the rain, when it pours, can be unceasing. But voters in arguably the world's wettest belt, Cherrapunji-Mawsynram in poll-bound Meghalaya, are left demanding from their elected representatives the one thing you would expect them to be never short of: drinking water.

In peak monsoon, it can rain more than 1,000mm in a day in Mawsynram and Cherrapunji, as it did on June 17 last year to set a new 24-hour record of 1003.6mm. Ask Larisa Myrthong to explain the conundrum of unrelenting rain and unreasonable water shortage and she has a response as dry as the water tap she points to.

"Water supply lasts only for an hour or so each day. The truth is none of the political parties has yet treated our water woes with the seriousness the issue deserves," she said.

The scientific explana-



Growing population of the two hill stations and degradation of forest cover have resulted in low recharge of ground water, experts said

tion for the rain-abundant region running short of drinking water is "low recharge of groundwater" because of a growing population and shrinking forest cover.

Rainwater harvesting is still in its infancy, forcing residents to pay private players and community organisations to source water from streams managed by the elected traditional local bodies called dorbars.

"Our water often comes from areas that are under other dorbars, and hence it isn't free," said Shembhaling Kharwanlang, headman of Dorbar Khliehshnong in Sohra constituency.

Kharwanlang, who also heads the environmental studies department in Sohra College, said there was no solution in sight other than water preservation measures. Larisa, an employee of the local dorbar, said residents like her had been paying Rs 300 to Rs 400 for a tanker of water containing around 1,500 litres.

In Mawsynram, many families traverse the hilly tracts for more than an hour to reach the streams and fetch enough water to get by. "Those of us who run businesses suffer the most," said Bisharlang Kharنائior, who manages a guesthouse.