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Adhik Maas 2026: The Intercalary Month That Keeps India's Lunisolar Calendar in Step with the Sun

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Adhik Maas 2026: The Intercalary Month That Keeps India's Lunisolar Calendar in Step with the Sun

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WHY IN NEWS:

Adhik Maas — also known as Purushottam Maas or Mal Maas — begins on **May 17, 2026** and runs through **June 15, 2026**. The year 2026 sees an extra Jyeshtha month (Adhik Jyeshtha), inserting a 30-day corrective leap into the Hindu lunisolar calendar. Far more than a ritual curiosity, Adhik Maas is the elegant astronomical solution that has kept India's traditional calendar aligned with the solar year for millennia. As India's National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the revival of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), understanding the mathematical architecture of the Hindu calendar — including this intercalation mechanism — has renewed UPSC and academic relevance.

THE HINDU LUNISOLAR CALENDAR: FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

India does not follow a single national calendar for all purposes. The **Saka Calendar** (adopted 1957) serves as the official civil calendar, but most religious and social observances continue to be governed by regional variants of the ancient **Hindu lunisolar calendar** — a system that simultaneously tracks the Moon's phases and the Sun's annual journey through the zodiac.

FEATURE	DETAIL
Type	Lunisolar — months defined by lunar cycles; year anchored to solar year
Month duration	~29.5 days (one synodic lunar cycle)
Lunar year	12 months × ~29.5 days = ~354 days
Solar year	~365.25 days
Annual shortfall	~11 days (lunar year falls short of solar year)
Accumulation period	~2.7 years for shortfall to equal one full lunar month (~30 days)
Correction mechanism	Insert one extra (intercalary) month every ~32.5 months
Name of extra month	Adhik Maas (adhik = extra/additional)
Months in the Hindu calendar	12 named months: Chaitra, Vaishakha, Jyeshtha, Ashadha, Shravana, Bhadrapada, Ashwina, Kartika, Margashirsha, Pausha, Magha, Phalguna

The lunisolar system is India’s ancient reconciliation between two celestial realities: the Moon governs tides, agriculture rhythms, and religious observances; the Sun governs seasons. A purely lunar calendar (like the Islamic Hijri calendar) drifts through all seasons over decades. A purely solar calendar (like the Gregorian) loses touch with lunar phases. The Hindu calendar holds both in tension — elegantly.

MECHANISM: WHAT MAKES A MONTH “ADHIK”?

The technical criterion for Adhik Maas is precise and astronomically grounded.

The Surya Sankranti Test

UPSC RELEVANCE

A lunar month that contains

NO SURYA SANKRANTI

is declared an Adhik (intercalary) month.

Because the lunar month (~29.5 days) is shorter than the average solar month (~30.44 days), roughly every 32.5 months a lunar month passes without witnessing a Surya Sankranti. That month is the Adhik Maas. It takes the name of the month that follows it — in 2026, the extra month precedes regular Jyeshtha, so it is called **Adhik Jyeshtha**.

The Numbers Behind the Mechanism

PARAMETER	VALUE
Solar year	365.2422 days
Lunar year (12 months)	354.367 days
Annual deficit	~10.875 days
Time to accumulate one full lunar month	$354.367 \div 10.875 \approx \mathbf{32.59 \text{ months}}$ (~2.72 years)
Long-term ratio (Metonic-adjacent)	7 intercalary months in 19 solar years
2026 Adhik Maas dates	May 17 – June 15, 2026
Previous Adhik Maas	July 18 – August 16, 2023 (Adhik Shravana)
Most sacred day in 2026 Adhik Maas	Purushottam Purnima – May 31, 2026

The interval between two consecutive Adhik Maas events is never a fixed three years — it varies between approximately 19 and 37 months depending on which zodiac transition the lunar month happens to straddle. The average, however, converges to ~32.5 months over long cycles.

NAMES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The same month carries three distinct names, each reflecting a different cultural lens:

NAME	MEANING	CONNOTATION
Adhik Maas	Adhik = extra; Maas = month	Neutral/astronomical — the standard Sanskrit term
Mal Maas	Mal = impure, defiled	Social/ritual — reflects the suspension of auspicious ceremonies
Purushottam Maas	Purushottama = the best among beings (a name of Vishnu)	Devotional — the month consecrated by Lord Vishnu himself

Why “Mal Maas”?

In traditional Hindu social practice, the Adhik month is considered inauspicious for **karmic social rituals**. The following ceremonies are prohibited or strongly discouraged during Mal Maas:

- **Vivah** (marriage ceremonies)

- **Griha Pravesh** (housewarming / entry into a new home)
- **Upanayana** (sacred thread ceremony / Yajnopavit Sanskar)
- **Mundan** (first haircut ceremony / Chudakarana Sanskar)
- **Namakarana** (naming ceremony in some regional traditions)

The rationale: these ceremonies are governed by the patron deity of the month. Because Adhik Maas originally had no patron deity (it was considered “ownerless”), it was deemed an inauspicious window for binding social-ritual acts.

Why “Purushottam Maas”?

Traditional texts, including the **Purushottam Maas Mahatmya** sections of the Padma Purana and Skanda Purana, narrate the mythological origin of this name. According to tradition, when the extra month approached all the major deities requesting a patron, none agreed to adopt what they considered an inferior month. The month then approached Lord Vishnu. Vishnu, moved by devotion, not only adopted the month but declared it to be equal to Kartika (one of the most sacred months in the Vaishnava tradition) in spiritual merit — and gave it his own name: **Purushottama**.

This narrative transforms Mal Maas from a period of ritual suspension into one of intense spiritual opportunity. The theological inversion is characteristic of Vaishnava bhakti traditions: what the world considers “low” becomes “high” through divine grace.

AUSPICIOUS OBSERVANCES DURING PURUSHOTTAM MAAS

While social ceremonies are suspended, the month is considered ideal for:

PRACTICE	SIGNIFICANCE
Annadan (food donation)	Considered the highest form of dana during this month
Jal Daan (water/pot donation)	Especially meritorious in the summer heat of Jyeshtha
Vishnu Purana recitation	Reciting or hearing the Vishnu Purana is prescribed
Bhagavata Purana recitation	The Bhagavata Saptah (7-day recitation) is organized across temples
Pilgrimage (Tirtha Yatra)	Visits to Prayagraj, Vrindavan, Mathura, Dwarka, and Pandharpur surge
Tulsi puja and Vishnu archana	Daily worship intensified; Ekadashi fasts observed with added rigour
Pradakshina and daan at rivers	Bathing in sacred rivers, especially on Purushottam Purnima (May 31)

The month thus functions as a devotional reorientation: society pauses its outward-facing rituals (weddings, initiations) and turns inward toward personal spiritual practice, charity, and scripture study.

COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK: INTERCALATION ACROSS CALENDAR SYSTEMS

The challenge of reconciling lunar and solar cycles is universal. Different civilisations developed distinct solutions:

CALENDAR SYSTEM	TYPE	INTERCALATION METHOD
Hindu Lunisolar	Lunisolar	Extra lunar month (Adhik Maas) added every ~32.5 months when no Surya Sankranti falls in a lunar month
Gregorian (Civil)	Solar	Extra day (February 29) added every 4 years (with century corrections); keeps pace with Earth's orbital year
Hebrew (Jewish)	Lunisolar	7 extra months in a 19-year Metonic cycle (years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, 19 of the cycle); called Adar II
Chinese Lunisolar	Lunisolar	Extra month inserted when no major solar term (Zhongqi) falls within a lunar month — structurally identical to the Hindu method
Islamic Hijri	Pure Lunar	No intercalation; calendar drifts ~11 days/year through all seasons
Ethiopian	Solar	13 months (12 of 30 days + 1 of 5–6 days); intercalation handles solar alignment

The structural similarity between the Hindu and Chinese intercalation rules is notable: both use the absence of a solar event within a lunar month as the trigger. This reflects independent convergent astronomical reasoning, not cross-cultural borrowing — both civilisations discovered the same mathematical solution.

THE SURYA SIDDHANTA: ANCIENT INDIAN ASTRONOMICAL FOUNDATION

The Hindu calendar's precision rests on foundational astronomical texts, most importantly the **Surya Siddhanta** — one of the earliest surviving Indian treatises on mathematical astronomy, traditionally dated (in its current form) to approximately the **4th–5th century CE**, though its underlying observations are older.

The Surya Siddhanta computed:

- The length of the solar year as **365 days, 6 hours, 12 minutes, 36 seconds** (modern value: 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45 seconds — an error of just ~24 minutes over the whole year)
- The synodic month (time between two new moons) with remarkable accuracy

- The precise rules for calculating Surya Sankrantis — the same rules that determine when a lunar month will lack a Sankranti and must become Adhik Maas

Other relevant texts: **Aryabhatiya** (Aryabhata, 499 CE), **Brahmasphutasiddhanta** (Brahmagupta, 628 CE), **Siddhanta Shiromani** (Bhaskaracharya, 1150 CE). These texts collectively constitute India's classical computational astronomy tradition — a subject now actively promoted under NEP 2020's Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) initiative.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 — Indian Heritage and Culture

Prelims:

- Adhik Maas occurs when a lunar month contains **no Surya Sankranti** (Sun's transit between zodiac signs)
- It occurs approximately every **32.5 months** (not a fixed 3-year cycle)
- 2026 Adhik Maas: **May 17 – June 15** (Adhik Jyeshtha)
- Also called **Purushottam Maas** (named after Lord Vishnu) and **Mal Maas** (social ceremonies avoided)
- The Surya Siddhanta is the foundational astronomical text for the Hindu calendar
- The Hindu calendar is **lunisolar** — months follow the Moon, year follows the Sun
- The Hebrew calendar uses a **Metonic cycle** (19-year) for intercalation — different from the Hindu trigger-based method

Mains (GS1 — Art and Culture / Indian Heritage):

- Analyse how the Hindu lunisolar calendar resolves the tension between lunar months and solar seasons. What is the astronomical basis of Adhik Maas?
- Compare the intercalation methods of the Hindu, Hebrew, and Chinese calendar systems. What does this reveal about ancient astronomical knowledge?
- Examine the cultural and social significance of Adhik Maas in Hindu tradition. How does the concept of Purushottam Maas illustrate the integration of astronomy and theology in Indian culture?

IKS / NEP 2020 Angle: NEP 2020 mandates the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems across all levels of education. Classical Indian astronomy (Jyotisha Shastra), of which the lunisolar calendar is a central output, is explicitly identified as an IKS domain. Understanding Adhik Maas is thus relevant to both cultural literacy and the policy context of reviving traditional knowledge systems.

FACTS CORNER

- 1 Lunisolar calendar defined:** A calendar that uses lunar months (based on Moon phases) to structure the year but periodically adjusts to stay in sync with the solar year (based on Earth's orbit around the Sun). The Hindu, Hebrew, and Chinese calendars are all lunisolar; the Islamic Hijri is purely lunar.
- 2 Surya Sankranti:** The moment when the Sun moves from one zodiac sign (rashi) to the next — 12 such transitions occur in a solar year. A lunar month that contains none of these transitions becomes Adhik Maas. The most astronomically significant Sankrantis are Makar Sankranti (Sun enters Capricorn, ~January 14) and Mesh Sankranti (Sun enters Aries, marking the solar new year in many Indian traditions).
- 3 Surya Siddhanta:** One of India's oldest surviving mathematical astronomy texts (c. 4th–5th century CE). It computed the length of the solar year to within 24 minutes of the modern value and laid down the rules for calculating planetary positions, eclipses, and — crucially — the Surya Sankrantis that underpin the Adhik Maas calculation. Translated into Arabic as part of the Abbasid-era knowledge transfer, it influenced medieval Islamic astronomy.
- 4 Purushottam Maas — mythological origin:** According to the Padma Purana, the Adhik month once had no patron deity (regular months are each presided over by a deity — e.g., Kartika by Vishnu, Shravan by Shiva). Rejected by all deities as “inferior,” the month appealed to Lord Vishnu, who embraced it, named it after himself (Purushottama), and declared it especially meritorious for devotional practice. This narrative exemplifies the Vaishnava theological motif of divine grace elevating the lowly.
- 5 NEP 2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems:** The National Education Policy 2020 established a dedicated IKS Division under the Ministry of Education. IKS encompasses Ayurveda, Yoga, Vastu, classical mathematics (Vedic/Sulba Sutras), and Jyotisha (astronomy/astrology). The Surya Siddhanta and the lunisolar calendar tradition fall squarely within the Jyotisha corpus — making astronomical concepts like Adhik Maas directly relevant to the IKS policy push.

KEYWORDS

Adhik Maas, Purushottam Maas, Mal Maas, Hindu lunisolar calendar, Surya Sankranti, intercalary month, Surya Siddhanta, Adhik Jyeshtha 2026, Purushottam Purnima, Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, Metonic cycle, Saka Calendar, GS1 culture, traditional calendar systems

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