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IMD Yellow Alert for Delhi-NCR: 43–45°C Heatwave; SW Monsoon Onset on Track for Kerala May 26

19 May 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS3

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IMD Yellow Alert for Delhi-NCR: 43–45°C Heatwave; SW Monsoon Onset on Track for Kerala May 26

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WHY IN NEWS:

The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** issued a **yellow heatwave alert** for **Delhi-NCR** on May 19, 2026, with maximum temperatures recorded at **43–45°C** across the capital region. IMD simultaneously issued an **orange alert** (severe heatwave) for **Wardha and Yavatmal districts of Vidarbha, Maharashtra**. The northwest India plains — including Rajasthan, UP, Haryana, and Punjab — are forecast to remain under heatwave to severe heatwave conditions until **May 24**. IMD also confirmed that the **Southwest Monsoon** onset over Kerala remains on track for **May 26, 2026** — five days ahead of the normal date of June 1.

DELHI HEATWAVE — MAY 19, 2026

PARAMETER	DATA
Maximum temperature (Delhi)	43–45°C (recorded May 19)
Normal maximum for May 19	~40°C
Departure from normal	+3 to +5°C
IMD alert level	Yellow (heatwave — temperature $\geq 40^\circ\text{C}$; 4.5°C above normal)
Duration forecast	Until May 24, 2026
Relative humidity	10–20% (very dry; typical pre-monsoon conditions)
Hottest station	Barmer, Rajasthan (~48°C)

Heatwave Classification (IMD Standards)

CATEGORY	PLAIN STATIONS (BELOW 1,000M)	COASTAL STATIONS	HILLS (ABOVE 1,000M)
Heatwave	Max temp $\geq 40^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 4.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal	Max temp $\geq 37^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 4.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal	Max temp $\geq 30^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 4.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal
Severe heatwave	Max temp $\geq 40^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 6.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal	Max temp $\geq 37^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 6.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal	Max temp $\geq 30^{\circ}\text{C}$ AND $\geq 6.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal
Extreme heatwave	Max temp $\geq 45^{\circ}\text{C}$	Max temp $\geq 41^{\circ}\text{C}$	—

Delhi's $43\text{--}45^{\circ}\text{C}$ with $3\text{--}5^{\circ}\text{C}$ above normal qualifies as a **heatwave** (yellow alert). Barmer's $\sim 48^{\circ}\text{C}$ qualifies as an **extreme heatwave**.

VIDARBHA ORANGE ALERT — MAHARASHTRA

DISTRICT	ALERT LEVEL	DETAILS
Wardha	Orange (severe heatwave)	Max $44\text{--}46^{\circ}\text{C}$; 6.5°C above normal
Yavatmal	Orange (severe heatwave)	Max $44\text{--}46^{\circ}\text{C}$; 6.5°C above normal
Nagpur	Yellow	Max $42\text{--}43^{\circ}\text{C}$
Akola	Yellow	Max $43\text{--}44^{\circ}\text{C}$

Vidarbha is Maharashtra's most heat-prone inland region — cotton-growing belt, low tree cover, and proximity to the Deccan Plateau's hot air mass make it vulnerable to extreme pre-monsoon heat.

IMD ALERT COLOUR CODE

COLOUR	MEANING	ACTION
Green	No warning	Watch
Yellow	Be Aware — heatwave	Watch and prepare
Orange	Be Prepared — severe heatwave	Alert; action likely needed
Red	Take Action — extreme heatwave	Immediate action required

SOUTHWEST MONSOON — 2026 OUTLOOK

Onset Forecast: Kerala May 26

IMD's forecast for **Southwest Monsoon onset over Kerala: May 26, 2026** — five days earlier than the normal date of **June 1**.

PARAMETER	2026 STATUS
SW Monsoon onset Kerala	May 26 (normal: June 1; 5 days early)
Seasonal rainfall (June–September)	92% of Long Period Average (LPA) — classified as Below Normal
LPA (1971–2020 baseline)	~868.6 mm for the country as a whole
Below Normal definition	90–95% of LPA
El Niño probability (June–August)	High (NOAA ~62%; PAGASA ~79%) — a key factor suppressing rainfall

Why Early Onset?

- The **Mascarene High** (pressure system over Indian Ocean) has strengthened earlier than normal, pumping moisture northward
- **Arabian Sea branch** of the monsoon is building strength; Bay of Bengal branch on schedule
- However, despite early onset, total seasonal rainfall is forecast at 92% LPA — early does not mean bountiful

El Niño Impact

El Niño (warm SST anomaly in central-eastern equatorial Pacific) is associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall in India:

EL NIÑO PHASE	EFFECT ON INDIA MONSOON
El Niño active	Below Normal to Deficient rainfall (historically)
La Niña active	Above Normal to Normal rainfall
ENSO Neutral	Normal rainfall

El Niño probability for June–August 2026 is high (NOAA: ~62%; PAGASA: ~79%), which explains the 92% LPA forecast. Notable below-normal monsoon years linked to El Niño: 1987, 2002, 2009, 2014.

IMD ALERT SYSTEM AND HEAT ACTION PLANS

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines

- **Heat Action Plans (HAPs):** All states/UTs mandated to have HAPs; district-level coordination
- **National Heat Portal:** Real-time heat health alert system
- Vulnerable populations: outdoor workers, elderly, infants, people with chronic illness
- **NIMHANS + ICMR** coordination for heat-health surveillance
- **Ahmedabad HAP (est. 2013):** India’s pioneering city-level HAP; model for other cities; run by IIPH (Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar) in partnership with AMC (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation)

IMD Forecast Services

SERVICE	DETAIL
National Weather Forecasting Centre (NWFC)	24×7 operational centre; Delhi; issues national forecasts
Extended Range Forecast (ERF)	3–4 week outlook; issued weekly
Seasonal Forecast	April–June issued in April; June–September issued in April and updated in May
District-level forecasts	5-day district-wise weather forecasts for all 700+ districts
Agri-Met services	Weekly agro-meteorological bulletins for farmers (in collaboration with IMD and ICAR)

NORTHEAST INDIA — CONTRASTING CONDITIONS

While northwest India burns, **Northeast India** is seeing the opposite extreme on May 19:

- **Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh:** Heavy to very heavy rainfall + thunderstorms forecast
- **Brahmaputra flood season:** Pre-monsoon rains causing early flash floods in Assam's flood plains
- **Cyclone risk:** Bay of Bengal heating up — IMD monitoring for potential pre-monsoon cyclone development

URBAN HEAT ISLAND EFFECT: DELHI-NCR

Delhi's temperatures are exacerbated by the **Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect**:

- Concrete, asphalt, and reduced green cover trap solar radiation
- Delhi's green cover is ~20% of city area — below the 33% norm for Indian cities
- Air conditioning units release waste heat — creating a feedback loop
- UHI can add **2–5°C** to city temperatures relative to surrounding rural areas

Delhi Heat Action Plan (DHAP): Delhi has a Heat Action Plan but its implementation has been criticised as inadequate — cooling centres are limited, worker protections weak.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Disaster Management / Environment

- **Heatwave classification:** IMD's criteria for heatwave, severe heatwave, extreme heatwave; colour-coded alert system
- **Monsoon:** SW monsoon onset; LPA; El Niño–monsoon linkage; below-normal classification
- **Urban Heat Island effect:** causes, consequences, [mitigation](#)
- **Heat Action Plans:** NDMA guidelines; Ahmedabad model; cooling centres

GS Paper 1 — Geography

- **SW monsoon:** onset, withdrawal, progress across India; role of Mascarene High, Arabian Sea branch, Bay of Bengal branch
- **Vidarbha:** geographic characteristics; heat vulnerability

Keywords: IMD, yellow alert, heatwave, Delhi-NCR, Vidarbha, orange alert, SW Monsoon onset, Kerala, LPA, Below Normal, El Niño, Mascarene High, Urban Heat Island, Heat Action Plan, NDMA.

Sources: Business Standard, IMD, PIB

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HEATWAVE — DELHI-NCR (MAY 19, 2026):

Max temperature: 43–45°C (3–5°C above normal)

IMD alert: Yellow (heatwave)

Hottest in India: Barmer, Rajasthan (~48°C; extreme heatwave)

Maharashtra: Orange alert for Wardha and Yavatmal (Vidarbha) — severe heatwave

IMD HEATWAVE CLASSIFICATION:

Heatwave: Max temp $\geq 40^\circ\text{C}$ AND $\geq 4.5^\circ\text{C}$ above normal (plain stations)

Severe heatwave: Max temp $\geq 40^\circ\text{C}$ AND $\geq 6.5^\circ\text{C}$ above normal

Extreme heatwave: Max temp $\geq 45^\circ\text{C}$

IMD ALERT COLOURS:

Green = watch | Yellow = be aware | Orange = be prepared | Red = take action

SW MONSOON 2026:

Onset over Kerala: May 26, 2026 (normal: June 1; 5 days early)

Seasonal forecast: 92% of LPA = Below Normal rainfall

LPA (1971–2020): ~868.6 mm (India average, June–September)

Below Normal definition: 90–95% of LPA

El Niño probability (Jun–Aug 2026): High — NOAA ~62%; PAGASA ~79% — primary suppressor of rainfall

IMD — KEY FACTS:

Under: Ministry of Earth Sciences

HQ: New Delhi (Mausam Bhawan)

Established: 1875

National Weather Forecasting Centre (NWFC): 24×7 operational centre

AHMEDABAD HEAT ACTION PLAN:

India's first and model city-level HAP; established 2013

Partners: AMC (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation) + IIPH Gandhinagar (Indian Institute of Public Health)

Serves as the national template for city-level heat response

URBAN HEAT ISLAND (UHI):

Effect: Cities are 2–5°C hotter than surrounding rural areas

Causes: concrete/asphalt surfaces, waste heat from AC, reduced green cover

Delhi's green cover: ~20% (below 33% norm)

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