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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

For India, Weakening Monsoon and Fertiliser Crisis: A Double Whammy

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For India, Weakening Monsoon and Fertiliser Crisis: A Double Whammy

The Indian Express 23 May 2026 GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"How should India structurally reduce its vulnerability to monsoon variability and imported fertiliser shocks — through MSP reform, micro-irrigation, or nano-urea/indigenous capacity?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

Indian Express warns of a twin shock for Indian agriculture — early signs of a sub-par 2026 southwest monsoon coinciding with global fertiliser supply disruptions from the West Asia crisis, Russia-Belarus sanctions and Chinese export curbs — that together threaten kharif sowing on a rain-fed base of around 50% of net sown area, rural incomes in a sector employing 46% of the workforce, and food inflation. Pre-emptive policy action is needed across urea and DAP buffer stocks, irrigation contingency planning, PDS calibration and accelerated transition to nano-urea and bio-fertilisers.

THE MONSOON VARIABLE

India's agriculture remains structurally exposed to monsoon variability. Around 50% of net sown area is rain-fed. Kharif crops — sown June through October and harvested October through November — account for roughly 70% of annual agricultural production. The principal kharif crops include rice (around 74% of total annual rice output), bajra, jowar, maize, cotton, soybean, tur and urad. The sector employs about 46% of the Indian workforce and contributes around 18% of GDP.

The IMD's Long Period Average (LPA) of southwest monsoon rainfall is 868.6 mm on the 1971-2020 baseline. The First Stage forecast for 2026 was issued in April 2026, with the Second Stage update due in late May. Early indicators suggest a below-normal trend, though final calibration awaits the Second Stage release.

INDICATOR	VALUE
Long Period Average (1971-2020)	868.6 mm
Net sown area rain-fed	~50%
Kharif share of annual agricultural GVA	~70%
Rice (annual share from kharif)	~74%
Agriculture share of workforce	~46%
Agriculture share of GDP	~18%

Even a 5-10% deviation from LPA can have asymmetric consequences in rain-fed districts where alternative irrigation is absent.

THE FERTILISER VARIABLE

The fertiliser supply chain is the second pressure point — and the more acute one.

INDICATOR	VALUE
Residual urea imports via Hormuz region	~70%
Ammonia via Hormuz region	~75-80%
DAP import dependence	Almost 100%
MOP import dependence	Almost 100%
Global MOP from Belarus, Canada and Russia	~85%
FY27 fertiliser subsidy (Budget 2026 estimate)	~₹1.71 lakh crore
FY27 ICRA projected outlay	~₹1.9 lakh crore

Three concurrent disruptions compound the vulnerability. The West Asia crisis — the Iran-Israel war that began in June 2025 — has reactivated Hormuz risk through which around 70% of India's urea imports and 75-80% of ammonia transit. The Russia-Belarus sanctions regime, in place since 2022, has constrained global potash flows, with roughly 85% of global MOP originating in Belarus, Canada and Russia. China's phosphate export curbs from 2023 through 2025 have tightened the global DAP market.

For India, the fiscal consequence is direct: the Budget 2026 allocated around ₹1.71 lakh crore for the FY27 fertiliser subsidy (~₹1.16 lakh crore for urea, ~₹54,000 crore for non-urea under the NBS regime); ICRA projects the actual outlay could rise toward ₹1.9 lakh crore under West Asia-driven import-price pressure.

THE SUBSIDY REGIME THAT DISTORTS USE

The structural problem in Indian fertilisers is not just import dependence — it is the subsidy regime that distorts use patterns.

Urea is under statutory price control. The MRP has been fixed at around ₹242 per 45-kg bag since 2018, with subsidy paid directly to manufacturers via the Fertiliser Industry Coordination Committee (FICC).

Non-urea fertilisers — DAP, MOP and complex NPK — operate under the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) regime since April 1, 2010, with market-determined retail prices.

The result is an affordability gap: urea is cheap to the farmer; DAP, MOP and complex NPK are progressively more expensive. The farmer over-applies urea (nitrogen) and under-applies phosphorus and potassium. The recommended N:P:K application ratio is 4:2:1; recent kharif data has shown the ratio drifting to roughly 10.9:4.9:1 — heavily nitrogen-skewed, with consequences for soil health, micronutrient depletion, yield plateaus and groundwater nitrate contamination.

INDIA'S IRRIGATION FOOTPRINT

India has built substantial irrigation infrastructure, but the rain-fed half of the cropped area remains the residual frontier.

- Net irrigated area: ~75 million hectares
- Gross irrigated area: ~100 million hectares
- PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY, 2015) — Har Khet Ko Pani umbrella
- Per Drop More Crop component — micro-irrigation, drip and sprinkler
- Atal Bhujal Yojana (December 2019) — groundwater management in seven priority states

Micro-irrigation reduces both water use and fertiliser use because nutrients can be delivered through drip systems. Scaling Per Drop More Crop is therefore a double dividend — water security and fertiliser efficiency.

MSP, PDS AND THE CROP-CHOICE QUESTION

India's Minimum Support Price covers 23 mandated crops, but actual procurement is heavily concentrated in rice and wheat through the FCI. Pulses have seen MSP increases but FCI procurement of pulses remains limited. PM-AASHA, launched in 2018, was designed to expand price support beyond the cereal regime through three mechanisms — Price Support Scheme, Price Deficiency Payment Scheme, and Private Procurement and Stockist Scheme.

The cereal-heavy MSP system has consequences. It incentivises water-intensive paddy and wheat in regions with declining water tables (Punjab, Haryana), and it suppresses crop diversification toward pulses, oilseeds and millets that are less water- and fertiliser-intensive.

NANO-UREA AND THE DOMESTIC INNOVATION

Nano-urea, developed by IFFCO and now produced by IFFCO and RCF, offers one of the most promising substitution pathways. A 500-ml bottle of nano-urea liquid is positioned as equivalent to one 45-kg bag of conventional urea, with claimed savings in subsidy outlay and reduced field-application volumes. IFFCO estimates suggest nano-urea adoption could reduce subsidy burden by around ₹2,500 crore per year at scale.

Field acceptance has been uneven and efficacy debates continue, but the trajectory is consistent with reducing both import dependence and subsidy pressure if scaled with farmer training and transparent field-trial publication.

THE BROADER POLICY ARCHITECTURE

A range of schemes already exists; the test is pre-emptive activation, not policy invention.

SCHEME	YEAR	FUNCTION
PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana	2015	Irrigation expansion; Per Drop More Crop
Atal Bhujal Yojana	December 2019	Groundwater management
PM Fasal Bima Yojana	2016	Crop insurance
Soil Health Cards	February 2015	~26 crore cards distributed
PM-AASHA	2018	Price support architecture
PM PRANAM	2023	Alternative nutrients promotion
NMEO-Oilseeds	2024-25 to 2030-31	Edible-oil self-reliance
National Green Hydrogen Mission	2023	5 MMT green hydrogen by 2030

The Strategic Fertiliser Reserve — modelled on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve — is the gap in the architecture that the editorial highlights. India holds strategic crude reserves at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur; an analogous fertiliser reserve, particularly for urea and DAP, would provide a buffer against the import-shock cycle that 2025-26 has exposed.

GREEN AMMONIA: THE LONG HEDGE

The longer-term hedge against the Hormuz-dependent urea regime is domestic green ammonia. Conventional urea production via the Haber-Bosch process uses ammonia produced from natural gas; green ammonia uses hydrogen produced from renewable electricity, eliminating the fossil-fuel input.

The National Green Hydrogen Mission, launched in 2023, targets 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen production by 2030. Major Indian players — Reliance, Adani, NTPC Green, IOCL and GAIL — have announced green-ammonia projects in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. The current cost gap is significant (green ammonia around $500-700 per tonne against conventional at $300-400) but the gap is expected to narrow toward parity by 2030 under carbon-pricing scenarios.

THE PRE-EMPTIVE FRAMEWORK

The editorial's call is for action before the shock is fully observed.

1. **Strategic Fertiliser Reserve** — for urea, DAP and MOP, modelled on the SPR.
2. **Irrigation contingency mapping** — rain-fed districts with stress-tested alternatives.
3. **PDS strengthening** — to absorb food inflation in the lean months.

4. **Nano-urea acceleration** — farmer training, field-trial transparency, distribution scaling.
5. **Import diversification** — Brazil, Algeria, Trinidad and Tobago for urea and ammonia; Canada for potash.
6. **Green ammonia pivot** — National Green Hydrogen Mission, 5 MMT by 2030.
7. **Demand-side substitution** — PM PRANAM (2023), bio-fertilisers, organic farming.
8. **Micro-irrigation scaling** — Per Drop More Crop under PMKSY.
9. **MSP and crop-choice review** — pulses, oilseeds, millets incentivisation.

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- **IMD Long Period Average:** 868.6 mm (1971-2020 baseline); First Stage forecast April 2026; Second Stage late May 2026.
- **Rain-fed share of net sown area:** ~50%.
- **Kharif share of annual agricultural production:** ~70%.
- **Agriculture sector share:** ~46% of workforce, ~18% of GDP.
- **Fertiliser import dependence:** ~70% of residual urea via Hormuz; ~75-80% of ammonia via Hormuz; DAP and MOP nearly 100% imported; ~85% global MOP from Belarus, Canada, Russia.
- **FY27 fertiliser subsidy:** ~₹1.71 lakh crore budgeted in Budget 2026; ~₹1.9 lakh crore projected by ICRA on West Asia-driven import-price pressure.
- **Urea pricing:** Statutory MRP around ₹242/45-kg bag since 2018; subsidy paid to manufacturers via FICC.
- **Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS):** Operative from April 1, 2010 for DAP, MOP, complex NPK.
- **N:P:K ratio:** Recommended 4:2:1; recent kharif data around 10.9:4.9:1.
- **Net irrigated area:** ~75 million hectares; Gross irrigated area: ~100 million hectares.
- **PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):** 2015; Per Drop More Crop component.
- **Atal Bhujal Yojana:** December 2019; groundwater management.
- **PM Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):** 2016; crop insurance.
- **Soil Health Cards:** Since February 2015; ~26 crore cards distributed.
- **PM-AASHA:** 2018; PSS, PDPS, PPSS components.
- **PM PRANAM:** 2023; Promotion of Alternate Nutrients for Agriculture Management.
- **NMEO-Oilseeds:** 2024-25 to 2030-31; edible-oil self-reliance mission.
- **National Green Hydrogen Mission:** 2023; 5 MMT green hydrogen by 2030.

- **Nano-urea:** IFFCO/RCF; 500-ml bottle positioned as one bag equivalent.
- **MSP regime:** 23 mandated crops; FCI procurement concentrated in rice and wheat.

Mains Questions:

1. "A twin shock of below-normal monsoon and an import-dependent fertiliser regime threatens India's agricultural stability." Examine and suggest a pre-emptive framework.
2. Critically evaluate the dual subsidy regime for urea (statutory price control) and non-urea (Nutrient-Based Subsidy) and its consequences for the N:P:K ratio.
3. Discuss the case for a Strategic Fertiliser Reserve modelled on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.
4. Examine the green-ammonia transition under the National Green Hydrogen Mission and its potential to reduce India's fertiliser import dependence.

Keywords: Long Period Average 868.6 mm, IMD First Stage forecast, IMD Second Stage forecast, rain-fed agriculture, kharif crops, Hormuz dependence, Iran-Israel war, Russia-Belarus sanctions, China phosphate curbs, FY27 fertiliser subsidy, ₹1.71 lakh crore (Budget 2026), ₹1.9 lakh crore (ICRA projection), urea MRP ₹242, Nutrient-Based Subsidy April 2010, FICC, N:P:K ratio 4:2:1, 10.9:4.9:1, PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana 2015, Per Drop More Crop, Atal Bhujal Yojana December 2019, PM Fasal Bima Yojana 2016, Soil Health Card February 2015, 26 crore cards, PM-AASHA 2018, PM PRANAM 2023, NMEO-Oilseeds 2024-25, National Green Hydrogen Mission 2023, 5 MMT target, Haber-Bosch, nano-urea, IFFCO, RCF, Strategic Fertiliser Reserve, Strategic Petroleum Reserve, MSP, FCI

> *The deeper warning of this Indian Express editorial is that India's agricultural vulnerability is no longer purely meteorological — it is geopolitical. The Hormuz Strait, the sanctions on Belarus and Russia, the Chinese export-curb cycle and the West Asia war are now as central to Indian kharif outcomes as the southwest monsoon itself. The response cannot remain seasonal and reactive — it must become strategic and pre-emptive. A Strategic Fertiliser Reserve, an accelerated green-ammonia pivot, a diversified import basket and a reformed subsidy regime that does not distort soil chemistry are no longer optional. The double whammy of weather and geopolitics is the new normal; the policy architecture must catch up.*

Sources: Indian Express, PIB

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Indian Express argues that India faces a twin agricultural shock — early signs of a sub-par 2026 southwest monsoon coinciding with global fertiliser supply disruptions from the West Asia crisis, Russia-Belarus sanctions and Chinese export curbs — that

together threaten kharif sowing on a rain-fed base of around 50% of net sown area, rural incomes in a sector employing 46% of the workforce, and food inflation; pre-emptive policy is needed across urea and DAP buffer stocks, irrigation contingency planning, PDS calibration and accelerated transition to nano-urea and bio-fertilisers.

✓ SUPPORTING

- India's agricultural exposure to monsoon variability is structural — around 50% of net sown area remains rain-fed; kharif crops account for roughly 70% of annual agricultural GVA with rice contributing around 74% of total annual rice output; the agriculture sector employs about 46% of the workforce and contributes around 18% of GDP; the IMD Long Period Average for southwest monsoon rainfall is 868.6 mm on the 1971-2020 baseline, with the IMD's First Stage forecast issued in April 2026 and the Second Stage forecast updating in late May.
- The fertiliser supply chain is acutely vulnerable — around 70% of residual urea imports and 75-80% of ammonia transit the Hormuz region, DAP and MOP are nearly 100% imported, around 85% of global MOP comes from Belarus, Canada and Russia (Belarus and Russia under sanctions since 2022), and Chinese phosphate export curbs from 2023-25 have tightened the global market; the FY27 fertiliser subsidy was budgeted at around ₹1.71 lakh crore but is projected by ICRA to rise toward ₹1.9 lakh crore on the back of West Asia-driven import-price pressure.
- The fertiliser subsidy regime distorts use patterns — urea is under statutory price control with an MRP of around ₹242 per 45-kg bag since 2018 and subsidy paid directly to manufacturers, while non-urea (DAP, MOP, complex NPK) operates under the Nutrient-Based Subsidy regime since April 1, 2010 with market-determined prices; the resulting affordability gap pushes the N:P:K ratio away from the agronomically recommended 4:2:1 toward roughly 10.9:4.9:1 in recent kharif data.
- India's policy architecture against this twin shock includes PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (2015) with the Per Drop More Crop component, Atal Bhujal Yojana (December 2019), PM Fasal Bima Yojana (2016), Soil Health Cards (around 26 crore issued since February 2015), PM-AASHA (2018), PM PRANAM (2023), NMEO-Oilseeds (2024-25 to 2030-31) and the National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023) targeting 5 MMT green hydrogen by 2030 — tools that need to be activated pre-emptively, not reactively.

⚠ COUNTER

Critics will note that monsoon outlooks remain uncertain through the Second Stage forecast and that prematurely activating buffer-stock and contingency measures may impose unnecessary fiscal cost; nano-urea adoption has faced field-acceptance and efficacy debates; and structural fertiliser subsidy reform faces political resistance that no single monsoon season will resolve.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Build strategic fertiliser reserves (urea, DAP, MOP) analogous to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve; prepare irrigation contingency maps for rain-fed districts; strengthen PDS to absorb food inflation; accelerate nano-urea adoption with farmer training and field-trial transparency; diversify fertiliser imports across Brazil, Algeria, Trinidad and Tobago for urea/ammonia and Canada for potash; pivot to green ammonia under the National Green Hydrogen Mission with its 5 MMT target by 2030; scale PM PRANAM (2023), bio-fertilisers and organic farming on the demand side; expand micro-irrigation under PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana's Per Drop More Crop component; and review the cereal-heavy MSP regime to incentivise pulses, oilseeds and millets that are less water- and fertiliser-intensive.

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📣 MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"A twin shock of below-normal southwest monsoon and an import-dependent fertiliser regime threatens India's kharif sowing, rural incomes and food inflation." Examine the structural vulnerabilities and suggest a pre-emptive policy framework spanning irrigation, fertiliser reserves and the nano-urea transition. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Indian Express argues that India faces a twin agricultural shock — early signs of a sub-par 2026 southwest monsoon coinciding with global fertiliser supply disruptions — that together threaten kharif sowing, rural incomes and food inflation; pre-emptive policy action is required across reserves, irrigation contingency, PDS calibration and the nano-urea transition.

BODY

India's agricultural exposure to monsoon variability is structural — around 50% of net sown area remains rain-fed; kharif crops account for roughly 70% of annual agricultural GVA; rice contributes around 74% of annual rice output. The sector employs about 46% of the workforce and contributes around 18% of GDP. The IMD Long Period Average is 868.6 mm (1971-2020 baseline); the First Stage forecast was issued in April 2026 and the Second Stage updates in late May.

On fertilisers, around 70% of residual urea imports and 75-80% of ammonia transit the Hormuz region; DAP and MOP are nearly 100% imported; around 85% of global MOP comes from Belarus, Canada and Russia; Chinese phosphate export curbs from 2023-25 have tightened the global market; the FY27 fertiliser subsidy was budgeted at around ₹1.71 lakh crore in Budget 2026 with ICRA projecting actual outlay near ₹1.9 lakh crore on West Asia-driven price pressure. The subsidy regime distorts use patterns — statutory urea MRP at around ₹242 per 45-kg bag since 2018 with subsidy to manufacturers, versus Nutrient-Based Subsidy since April 1, 2010 for non-urea — pushing the N:P:K ratio away from the recommended 4:2:1 toward roughly 10.9:4.9:1.

The policy architecture exists — PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (2015) with Per Drop More Crop, Atal Bhujal Yojana (December 2019), PM Fasal Bima Yojana (2016), Soil Health Cards (around 26 crore issued since February 2015), PM-AASHA (2018), PM PRANAM (2023), NMEO-Oilseeds (2024-25 to 2030-31) and the National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023) targeting 5 MMT of green hydrogen by 2030.

CONCLUSION

The way forward is to activate the policy architecture pre-emptively — build a Strategic Fertiliser Reserve, prepare irrigation contingency maps for rain-fed districts, strengthen the PDS, accelerate nano-urea adoption, diversify imports across Brazil, Algeria, Trinidad and Tobago (urea/ammonia) and Canada (potash), pivot to green ammonia under the National Green Hydrogen Mission, scale PM PRANAM and bio-fertilisers on the demand side, expand micro-irrigation, and review the cereal-heavy MSP regime to incentivise pulses, oilseeds and millets. The double whammy can be absorbed only if the response is built before the shock is fully observed.

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