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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# Monsoon 2026 Arrives Under El Niño Shadow — Below-Normal Season Ahead

DOWN TO EARTH

4 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS3

GS1

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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# Monsoon 2026 Arrives Under El Niño Shadow — Below-Normal Season Ahead

Down to Earth   4 June 2026   **GS3**   **GS1**

Source: [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

## EDITORIAL SUMMARY

*Down to Earth* reports that the **Southwest Monsoon reached Kerala on June 4, 2026 — three days behind schedule** and nine days behind IMD’s updated forecast. The IMD simultaneously downgraded the seasonal rainfall projection to **90% of the Long Period Average (LPA)**, classifying 2026 as a **below-normal monsoon year**. The arrival coincides with a **rapidly developing El Niño event** that climate scientists warn could rival the catastrophic **1876–78 El Niño** — which triggered devastating famines across South Asia — raising urgent concerns about kharif crop production, reservoir storage, and water security across India.

## THE 2026 MONSOON — KEY PARAMETERS

PARAMETER	VALUE
Monsoon arrival (Kerala)	June 4, 2026
Normal arrival date	June 1
Delay	3 days
IMD forecast (June–Sept)	90% of LPA
LPA (1971–2020)	87 cm
Classification	Below normal (90–95% = below normal)
El Niño status	Developing; moderate–strong trajectory

## EL NIÑO 2026 — SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT

El Niño is a **periodic warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific** that disrupts the **Walker Circulation** — the east-west atmospheric loop that drives monsoon moisture delivery over India. When the Pacific warms, the Walker Circulation weakens, reducing the convection that pulls moisture-laden air from the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal toward the Indian subcontinent.

### Why Scientists Are Alarmed About 2026

*Down to Earth* cites analysis from climate scientists at IITM Pune and NOAA that the 2026 El Niño has two characteristics that elevate risk:

- ❶ **Rapid intensification:** Pacific sea-surface temperatures are rising faster in 2026 than in any El Niño year since 1997–98 (which caused a severe pan-Asian drought)
- ❷ **Superposition with Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):** A negative IOD — which also suppresses Indian monsoon — may develop concurrently, compounding the El Niño effect

**The 1876–78 comparison:** The Great Famine of 1876–78, triggered by one of history’s strongest El Niño events, killed an estimated **5–10 million people** in India (then British India). While India’s food distribution, storage, and early warning systems are incomparably better today, a strong El Niño combined with governance failures could still cause serious humanitarian stress.

## STATE-WISE VULNERABILITY

REGION	EXPECTED MONSOON	RISK LEVEL
Northwest India (UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi)	80–85% of normal	Very High
Central India (MP, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh)	88–93% of normal	High
Southern India (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra)	92–97% of normal	Moderate
Eastern India (West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar)	95–100%	Low
Northeast India	98–105%	Low (may be above normal)

## AGRICULTURE AT RISK: THE KHARIF STAKES

India’s **kharif 2026** production depends heavily on the June–August rainfall window. Key crops at risk:

CROP	PRODUCTION (2025-26 BASELINE)	RISK FROM 10% DEFICIT
Rice	~120 MT	Medium (irrigated areas partially insulated)
Pulses (arhar, urad, moong)	~24 MT	Very High (largely rainfed)
Soybean	~14 MT	Very High (rainfed, Central India)
Coarse cereals (maize, jowar, bajra)	~48 MT	High
Cotton	~35 million bales	High
Oilseeds	~28 MT	High

**Inflation risk:** Pulses and vegetables are most price-volatile during monsoon failures — a 15–20% crop shortfall in pulses could drive retail pulse prices up 30–50% by October–November.

## WATER RESERVOIR STATUS

India's **150 major reservoirs** (CWC monitoring) were at **42% capacity** as of June 1, 2026 — near normal for this time of year. A below-normal monsoon would mean:

- Reservoirs ending the season at 75–80% capacity (vs. 90%+ in a normal year)
- Reduced availability for the **rabi season** (October–March) especially for wheat in the Indo-Gangetic Plain
- Lower hydropower generation — adding to India's energy stress

## POLICY RESPONSE OPTIONS

*Down to Earth* recommends:

- 1 **Pre-position contingency grain stocks** — FCI should increase buffer over and above the mandated minimum
- 2 **Activate NDMA drought protocols** — early warning systems and relief codification for 100+ vulnerable districts
- 3 **Accelerate drip/micro-irrigation** — budget ₹10,000+ crore from PMKSY for irrigation efficiency in pulses and oilseeds belts

- ④ **Price stabilisation fund** — activate for pulses and vegetables; pre-commit to imports if domestic production falls short
- ⑤ **Drinking water security** — identify 200+ drought-vulnerable districts for AMRUT/JJBY drinking water backup plans

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### Prelims

- Monsoon arrival Kerala: June 4, 2026 (normal: June 1)
- IMD forecast: 90% of LPA (below normal)
- LPA: 87 cm (1971–2020)
- El Niño: Moderate–strong; rapidly intensifying
- Below normal defined: 90–95% of LPA
- Deficient: < 90% of LPA
- India’s major reservoirs: 150 (CWC monitoring)
- Catastrophic El Niño reference: 1876–78

### Mains Angles

- ① **GS1 — Climatology:** Explain how El Niño suppresses the Southwest Monsoon over India. What is the Indian Ocean Dipole’s role in amplifying or mitigating El Niño effects?
- ② **GS3 — Food Security:** Analyse the impact of a below-normal monsoon on India’s kharif agricultural output and food price inflation. What policy interventions are available?
- ③ **GS3 — Disaster Management:** Examine India’s preparedness for drought. How effective are the NDMA drought guidelines, and what gaps remain in early warning and relief systems?

## FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
Monsoon arrival	June 4, 2026 (3 days late)
IMD forecast	90% of LPA (below normal)
LPA	87 cm (1971–2020 base)
El Niño	Moderate–strong; rapidly intensifying
Most at-risk region	Northwest India
Key crops at risk	Pulses, soybean, cotton, coarse cereals
Major reservoirs capacity (June 1)	~42% (CWC)
Historical reference	1876–78 El Niño (catastrophic; 5–10 million deaths in India)

Source: Monsoon 2026 Arrives Under El Niño Shadow — Below-Normal Season Ahead — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari](#) →<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/dte-southwest-monsoon-elnino-2026/>

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