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Southwest Monsoon Arrives Kerala – IMD Forecasts Below-Normal Season Amid El Niño

4 June 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS1

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Southwest Monsoon Arrives Kerala — IMD Forecasts Below-Normal Season Amid El Niño

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WHY IN NEWS

India's **Southwest Monsoon** officially made landfall in **Kerala on June 4, 2026**, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) confirmed. The arrival was **three days behind** the IMD's own updated forecast and approximately on the normal onset date (June 1). The IMD simultaneously issued a forecast for a **below-normal monsoon season** — projecting **90–95% of the Long Period Average (LPA)** rainfall for June–September 2026. The forecast is overshadowed by a **developing El Niño event** that meteorologists warn could intensify through the second half of the monsoon season.

WHAT IS THE SOUTHWEST MONSOON?

The **Southwest Monsoon** (June–September) is the primary rainy season for India, accounting for approximately **70–75% of India's annual rainfall**. It originates over the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, driven by the differential heating of land and sea during summer.

Onset and Withdrawal Dates (Normal)

LOCATION	NORMAL ONSET	NORMAL WITHDRAWAL
Kerala	June 1	—
Northeast India	June 5–10	—
Delhi/NCR	June 27	—
Mumbai	June 10	—
Northwest India	July 15	September 1
Entire India	July 15	October 15

IMD 2026 FORECAST

PARAMETER	FORECAST
Total seasonal rainfall	90–95% of LPA
LPA (1971–2020 average)	87 cm
Classification	Below normal (< 96% of LPA)
El Niño conditions	Developing — risk of intensification July–August
Most at-risk regions	Northwest India (UP, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan)
Best performing region	Northeast India and Eastern India (relatively normal)

Below normal is defined by IMD as rainfall between 90–95% of the LPA. A deficient monsoon (<90% LPA) triggers drought protocols under NDMA guidelines.

EL NIÑO — THE KEY RISK FACTOR

El Niño is a periodic warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean that occurs every 2–7 years. It disrupts the Walker Circulation — the atmospheric system that drives monsoon moisture over the Indian subcontinent.

El Niño → Indian Monsoon Impact

EL NIÑO STRENGTH	TYPICAL IMPACT ON INDIAN MONSOON
Weak	Marginal deficit (5–10%)
Moderate	Below-normal to deficient (-10 to -20%)
Strong	Severe drought risk (>-20%)

Historical strong El Niño years that caused poor monsoons in India: **1972, 1987, 1997, 2002, 2009.**

The 2026 El Niño is classified as **moderate and intensifying** by NOAA and IMD. Down to Earth (June 4, 2026) flagged scientific concern that it could rival the historic **1876–78 El Niño** which caused catastrophic famines across South Asia.

IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

India's **kharif crops** — sown between June and September — are directly dependent on the Southwest Monsoon. Key kharif crops include:

CROP	KEY STATES	MONSOON DEPENDENCY
Rice (paddy)	West Bengal, UP, Punjab, Odisha	High
Maize	Karnataka, Maharashtra, MP	High
Soybean	MP, Maharashtra	Very high
Pulses (arhar, urad, moong)	UP, MP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan	Very high
Cotton	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana	Moderate-High
Sugarcane	UP, Maharashtra	Moderate
Groundnut	Gujarat, Rajasthan, AP	High

A below-normal monsoon raises risks of:

- ❶ **Lower kharif output** → food price inflation, especially in pulses and vegetables
- ❷ **Reduced reservoir storage** → water stress in rabi season (October–March)
- ❸ **Groundwater depletion** → long-term agricultural vulnerability
- ❹ **Rural income stress** → reduced consumer demand in rural India

IMD FORECAST ACCURACY

IMD uses a **multi-model ensemble** approach and issues forecasts in two stages: the **April Long-Range Forecast** (first estimate) and the **Updated May Forecast** (revised). The May forecast has typically been more accurate. The current 90–95% forecast was issued in the updated May forecast cycle.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims

- SW Monsoon onset in Kerala: **June 4, 2026** (normal: June 1)
- IMD 2026 forecast: **90–95% of LPA** (below normal)
- LPA: **87 cm** (1971–2020 average)

- El Niño: developing, moderate and intensifying
- Below-normal definition: 90–95% of LPA
- Deficient: < 90% of LPA; Excess: > 110% of LPA

Mains Angles

- 1 **GS1 — Physical Geography:** Explain the mechanism of the Southwest Monsoon. How does El Niño disrupt monsoon circulation over the Indian subcontinent?
- 2 **GS3 — Food Security:** Examine the implications of a below-normal monsoon for India’s kharif agricultural output, food inflation, and rural economy.
- 3 **GS3 — Disaster Management:** What policy measures should India activate when monsoon forecasts indicate below-normal rainfall?

FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
Monsoon arrival (Kerala)	June 4, 2026
IMD forecast	90–95% of LPA (below normal)
LPA (1971–2020)	87 cm
El Niño status	Developing; moderate and intensifying
Most at-risk region	Northwest India
Key kharif crops at risk	Pulses, soybean, paddy
IMD classification of “below normal”	90–95% of LPA
IMD classification of “deficient”	< 90% of LPA

Source: Southwest Monsoon Arrives Kerala — IMD Forecasts Below-Normal Season Amid El Niño —
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