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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Monsoon Under a Shadow: On El Nino and Climate Risk

DOWN TO EARTH

11 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT**GEOGRAPHY****GS1****GS3**

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The Monsoon Under a Shadow: On El Nino and Climate Risk

 **Down to Earth**

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GS1
GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A weak monsoon hurts farms; an erratic one brings both droughts and floods. How should India prepare for a monsoon that is becoming less reliable and more extreme?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[Down to Earth](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources**
HOW

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

As the **southwest monsoon** sets in, forecasts warn of a **hotter, drier and more erratic season** under a developing **El Nino**, with regional outlooks flagging a dual threat of dry spells and cloudbursts. For an aspirant, this is a strong **GS1 (geography, monsoon) and GS3 (agriculture, disaster management) lead**. The key insight: climate change is making the monsoon not just **weaker** but **more erratic**, and India must prepare for variability, not only deficit.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

A developing **El Nino** points to **below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures**, while regional outlooks warn of a **dual threat**: long **dry spells** punctuated by intense **cloudbursts**, raising both drought and flash-flood risk. The monsoon underpins **agriculture, water and the rural economy**. The response: stronger **forecasting, climate-resilient farming, water harvesting**, and disaster readiness for both extremes, **resilience to variability**, not just deficit relief.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
El Nino	Warm phase of the Pacific cycle	Linked to weak Indian monsoons
Erratic monsoon	Same/less rain in fewer, intense events	Drought and flood risk together
Cloudburst	Sudden, intense localised rainfall	Triggers flash floods, landslides
Climate-resilient agriculture	Crops/practices that withstand stress	Buffers an unreliable monsoon

THE ANALYSIS: A WEAKER AND MORE ERRATIC MONSOON

- 1 **El Nino tilts the odds.** Its warm phase is associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall.
- 2 **Erraticism is the deeper shift.** Climate change compresses rainfall into fewer, more violent events.
- 3 **The dual threat is real.** Long dry spells and sudden cloudbursts raise drought and flash-flood risk together.
- 4 **The stakes are wide.** Agriculture, water, hydropower and the rural economy all depend on the monsoon.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

El Nino (and the wider **ENSO**, the *El Nino-Southern Oscillation*); the **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)**; the **Madden-Julian Oscillation**. **Forecasters:** the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**; regional bodies such as **ICIMOD** for the *Hindu Kush Himalaya*. **Concepts:** **rain-fed agriculture**; **kharif** sowing; reservoir and hydropower dependence; cloudbursts, flash floods and **GLOFs**. **Tools:** **climate-resilient crops**; **micro-irrigation** and water harvesting; **early-warning systems**; the *National Disaster Management Authority*. **Linkage:** *food security, rural incomes, inflation and disaster management*.

THE DEBATE

Argument for caution: Seasonal forecasts are uncertain and the monsoon has always varied, so alarm and costly preparation may be premature.

Argument for readiness: Climate change is making the monsoon measurably more erratic; the cost of being unprepared for droughts and floods is far higher than the cost of preparation.

The balanced verdict: Forecast uncertainty argues for **preparation, not complacency**. India should build resilience to variability, sharper forecasting, climate-resilient farming, water buffering, and disaster readiness for both dry spells and floods.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A weak answer asks only whether rainfall will be “normal.” The strong answer recognises that the danger lies in the distribution, the same total rain delivered in fewer, more violent bursts, and prepares for both drought and flood at once. The move is from “how much” to “how erratic.” The same lens applies to temperature extremes and to any climate-sensitive system.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Developing El Nino -> below-normal rainfall + above-normal heat. Plus climate change -> rain compressed into fewer, intense events -> long dry spells + sudden cloudbursts. The impact: rain-fed agriculture + water + hydropower at risk. The response: better forecasting + climate-resilient crops + water harvesting + flood/drought disaster readiness -> resilience to variability.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Strengthen forecasting and early-warning** systems for rain, heat and cloudbursts.
- ② **Promote climate-resilient agriculture**, micro-irrigation and water harvesting.
- ③ **Prepare disaster systems** for both drought and flash floods and landslides.
- ④ **Integrate climate risk** into agricultural and water-resource planning.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

“Climate change is making the Indian monsoon more erratic, not just more deficient.” Examine the implications for agriculture and disaster management. (250 words)

“The danger is no longer only a weak monsoon but an unreliable one; readiness now means preparing for drought and flood in the same season.”

El Nino / ENSO · Indian Ocean Dipole · Madden-Julian Oscillation · IMD · ICIMOD · cloudburst · rain-fed agriculture · kharif.

How should a farming nation prepare for a monsoon that is becoming less predictable?

Connects to GS1 PYQs on the monsoon and Indian climate and GS3 on agriculture and disaster management; a probable question is the variability-versus-deficit framing above.

today’s urban heat-risk article (the heat side of the same warming); static GS1 on the monsoon mechanism and GS3 on disaster management.

Sources: Down To Earth, India Meteorological Department, ICIMOD

Source: The Monsoon Under a Shadow: On El Nino and Climate Risk — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Forecasts of a hotter, drier Himalayan monsoon under a developing El Nino, bringing both long dry spells and sudden cloudbursts, signal that India’s monsoon is becoming more erratic and extreme, demanding preparation for variability and disaster risk rather than only for a deficit.

✓ SUPPORTING

- A developing El Nino is associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall and above-normal temperatures across the region.
- Climate change makes rainfall more erratic, with long dry spells punctuated by intense cloudbursts, raising both drought and flash-flood risk.

- The monsoon underpins agriculture, water, hydropower and the rural economy, so its unreliability has wide economic consequences.

COUNTER

Some argue that seasonal forecasts are uncertain and that the monsoon has always varied, so alarm and costly preparation may be premature.

WAY FORWARD

Strengthen forecasting and early warning, promote climate-resilient agriculture and water harvesting, prepare for both drought and flash floods, and integrate climate risk into agricultural and disaster planning.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"Climate change is making the Indian monsoon more erratic, not just more deficient." Examine the implications for agriculture and disaster management. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The southwest monsoon is India's true finance minister, shaping farms, water and the rural economy. This year it arrives under a shadow, with forecasts warning of a hotter, drier and more erratic season.

BODY

The immediate trigger is a developing El Nino, the warm phase of the Pacific Ocean's temperature cycle, which is associated with below-normal monsoon rainfall and above-normal temperatures across India and the wider region. Regional outlooks for the Hindu Kush Himalaya warn of a dual threat: long dry spells that can parch crops and reservoirs, punctuated by sudden, intense cloudbursts that trigger flash floods and landslides.

This captures the deeper shift: climate change is making the monsoon not merely weaker but more erratic, compressing the same or less rainfall into fewer, more violent events. The consequences are

wide.

Agriculture, much of it still rain-fed, faces uncertain sowing and yields; reservoirs and hydropower depend on well-distributed rain; and erratic rainfall threatens both rural incomes and urban flooding. The caution that seasonal forecasts are uncertain and the monsoon has always varied is fair, but it argues for preparation, not complacency, since the cost of being unready is far higher than the cost of readiness.

The response must match the new reality: sharpen forecasting and early-warning systems, promote climate-resilient crops, micro-irrigation and water harvesting to buffer dry spells, prepare disaster systems for flash floods and landslides, and build climate risk into agricultural and water planning. The goal is resilience to variability, not just relief after a deficit.

CONCLUSION

India must stop preparing only for a weak monsoon and start preparing for an unreliable one. In a warming world, resilience to extremes is the new measure of readiness.

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