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MAGAZINE NOTES

A Monsoon of Extremes: Deficit and Deluge in the Same Season

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ENVIRONMENT

GS3

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A Monsoon of Extremes: Deficit and Deluge in the Same Season

 **Down to Earth** Chapter 1 · 3 min read

Feature analysis for Down To Earth July 2026, built from verified reporting and primary data.

The 2026 southwest monsoon has produced a paradox that is becoming the new normal for India: a season that is simultaneously dry and violent. By **14 July 2026**, all-India cumulative rainfall was running about **21 per cent below the Long Period Average (LPA)**, deep into deficient territory, even as the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** issued **red alerts** for extreme rainfall across **Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra**. Delhi's monsoon arrived late, with the IMD confirming a July onset that finally broke a punishing pre-monsoon heat spell. The story of this fortnight is not drought or flood, but both at once, unevenly distributed across the subcontinent.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE DEFICIT

The monsoon delivers roughly three-quarters of India's annual rainfall and irrigates the kharif crop that feeds the country. A deficit of this scale by mid-July matters because the reproductive window for sowing paddy, pulses and oilseeds is narrow. The IMD's July outlook signalled **below-normal rainfall** across most of the country, with only the northwest, northeast and parts of east-central India expected to see normal or above-normal totals.

INDICATOR	JULY 2026 STATUS	SIGNIFICANCE
All-India rainfall vs LPA	About 21 per cent below (14 July)	Deficient category
July outlook	Below normal for most regions	Kharif sowing at risk
Pacific driver	Weak El Nino, may strengthen	Historically weakens monsoon
Red-alert states	Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra	Flood and landslide risk
Delhi onset	Late, July arrival confirmed	Heat relief delayed

WHY EL NINO IS THE SEASON'S PIVOT

The core physical driver is the **El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**. Weak El Nino conditions persisted over the central-eastern Pacific through the season, and climate models flagged a possible strengthening during the monsoon months. El Nino years are statistically associated with **weaker Indian monsoon rainfall**, because the warming of the Pacific shifts convection eastward and away from the Indian landmass.

When this couples with a warming Indian Ocean and a fluctuating **Madden-Julian Oscillation**, rainfall becomes concentrated into short, intense bursts separated by long dry spells. That is precisely the deficit-plus-deluge signature seen in July.

THE COMPOUNDING HEAT STORY

The monsoon deficit cannot be read apart from the heat that preceded it. North India's 2026 pre-monsoon season pushed temperatures toward **50°C**, with **Sri Ganganagar** in Rajasthan recording **48.2°C on 27 May 2026**, briefly the hottest place on the planet, and record power demand for cooling. Yet, as told to Parliament on **22 July 2026**, the government held that 2026 did not see unusually severe heatwaves by historical benchmarks even though temperatures crossed 45°C. The tension between lived experience and statistical classification is itself an exam-relevant debate about how heatwave thresholds are defined.

This volatility is the through-line of CSE's **State of India's Environment 2026**, which recorded **extreme weather on 99 per cent of days in 2025**, up from 88 per cent in 2024. A monsoon that swings between failure and fury is the agricultural face of that statistic.

CONSEQUENCES FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER

A weak, erratic monsoon threatens reservoir recharge, groundwater tables and hydropower generation just as cooling demand peaks. For rain-fed farmers, who dominate India's cropped area, delayed and deficient rain compresses incomes in a year when rural distress is already acute. Reservoir levels feeding both irrigation and drinking supply become the summer's critical variable.

Way forward for a Mains answer: strengthen **district-level agro-advisories** and IMD nowcasting, expand **micro-irrigation** and watershed recharge under existing schemes, diversify toward less water-intensive crops in deficit belts, and integrate ENSO forecasting into crop-insurance and sowing calendars. The deeper lesson is that adaptation must be built for variability itself, not for an average season that no longer arrives on schedule.

UPSC ANGLE

GS1 covers the mechanism of the Indian monsoon and El Nino. **GS3** covers cropping patterns, drought and flood management, and disaster response. A high-value Prelims fact is that rainfall below **90 per cent of LPA** is classed as deficient. For Mains, link monsoon variability to food security, farmer income and the water-energy-food nexus, using the verified figures above rather than generalities.



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