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MAGAZINE NOTES

Down to Earth July 2026 - A Monsoon of Extremes and the Water Question

1 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Down to Earth July 2026 - A Monsoon of Extremes and the Water Question



Down to Earth

July 2026

GS3

Down to Earth

CSE · Fortnightly

EDITION
July 2026
MAINS:
GS Paper 3

The July 2026 fortnight of Down To Earth reads as a single argument told through four datasets: India's environment is now defined by volatility, and that volatility is colliding with a stalling rural economy. A southwest monsoon running well below its long-period average through mid-July, an International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) audit showing two-thirds of the world's mines exposed to water risk, a NABARD sentiment survey recording income stagnation in more than half of rural households, and an International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast that renewables will overtake coal in global power generation in 2026 together sketch a country and a planet in fast transition. The reporting sits against the backdrop of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) flagship State of India's Environment 2026, which found extreme weather on 99 per cent of days in 2025 and seven of nine planetary boundaries breached.

For the UPSC aspirant, this edition is a masterclass in GS Paper 3: the environment-development trade-off, resource security, agrarian distress and the energy transition are not separate silos here but a connected system.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- **A monsoon of extremes.** All-India rainfall sat around 21 per cent below the Long Period Average (LPA) by mid-July even as red alerts for extreme downpours were issued for Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Weak El Nino conditions frame a season of deficit and deluge at once.
- **Mining's water reckoning.** A first-of-its-kind ICMM audit of more than 12,000 facilities across 148 countries found 65.7 per cent facing significant water risk, with central India named among global compound-risk hotspots.
- **The rural income freeze.** NABARD's bi-monthly survey found roughly 53 per cent of rural households reporting no income change and about 20 per cent reporting a decrease, against a rising cost of living.
- **Renewables pass coal.** The IEA projects global electricity demand to grow 3.6 per cent in 2026 as renewable generation overtakes coal for the first time, with India's demand forecast to rebound 7 per cent.

KEY CONCEPTS

CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS FOR UPSC
Long Period Average (LPA)	50-year mean of monsoon rainfall used as the normal benchmark	Deficits and surpluses are measured against LPA; below 90 per cent is deficient
Planetary boundaries	Nine limits within which humanity can operate safely	SOE 2026 flags seven breached, including ocean acidification
Baseline water stress	Ratio of water demand to renewable supply in a basin	Core metric in the ICMM mining-water audit
El Nino	Warming of the central-eastern Pacific	Generally linked to weaker Indian monsoon rainfall
Just transition	Shifting to clean energy while protecting workers and the poor	Frames the coal-to-renewables debate and e-bus livelihoods
Rural Economic Conditions and Sentiments Survey	NABARD bi-monthly gauge of rural income and sentiment	Primary data source on agrarian distress

PRELIMS POINTERS

- All-India southwest monsoon rainfall was about **21 per cent below LPA** as of 14 July 2026.
- The **ICMM** report covered more than **12,000 facilities across 148 countries; 65.7 per cent** face water risk.
- **NABARD** survey: about **53 per cent** of rural households reported no income change; about **20 per cent** reported a decrease.
- IEA: global power demand to grow **3.6 per cent in 2026**; renewables’ share rising toward **37 per cent by 2027**; solar PV adds about **600 TWh** in 2026.
- SOE 2026: extreme weather on **99 per cent of days in 2025**; **seven of nine** planetary boundaries breached; roughly **97,000 hectares** of forestland diverted between 2020-21 and 2024-25.

UPSC GS RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 anchors every thread: monsoon variability and agriculture, water as a shared resource, mineral and energy security, and the renewable energy transition. **GS Paper 1** connects through Indian monsoon geography and physical drivers such as El Nino. **GS Paper 2** appears in governance responses to agrarian distress and disaster management. The recurring Mains theme is the environment-development balance, best answered with the primary figures assembled in this issue rather than generic assertions.

4 Chapters in this Edition

1

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

2

Mining's Water Reckoning: Two-Thirds of Global Mines at Risk

3

The Rural Income Freeze: When Half of Rural India Stops Earning More

4

Renewables Pass Coal: The Global Power Tipping Point of 2026



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