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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# An Early Arrival, A Dry Promise: The 2026 Monsoon's Shadow

 **DOWN TO EARTH**

5 July 2026

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

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# An Early Arrival, A Dry Promise: The 2026 Monsoon's Shadow

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5 July 2026

**GS1**
**GS3**

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## THE LIFT LINE

The monsoon arrived early and then forgot to rain. An early handshake means little when the season that follows leaves the reservoirs and the farmer waiting.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The 2026 monsoon under an El Nino shadow is a live case that connects physical geography, climatology, agriculture and water governance, and it supplies fresh data for questions on the Indian monsoon.

**GS Paper 1:** Physical geography of the monsoon, the influence of El Nino and the Indian Ocean Dipole, and the distribution of rainfall across India.

**GS Paper 3:** Agriculture (rain-fed farming, cropping seasons), food security, water resource management and the economy's exposure to the monsoon.

**Prelims relevance:** The Long Period Average and the “normal” rainfall band, El Nino and ENSO, the Indian Ocean Dipole, kharif crops, and schemes such as PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana and Atal Bhujal Yojana (<https://ujyari.com/terms/atal-bhujal-yojana/>). These are classic Prelims hooks.

**Mains relevance:** The monsoon-agriculture-inflation chain is a recurring Mains theme. A good answer uses the El Nino nuance (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/nuance/>) (it does not guarantee drought) and links rainfall to reservoirs, sowing and prices.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The southwest monsoon delivers about 70 to 75 per cent of India's annual rainfall, and roughly half of the country's cultivated area is entirely rain-fed, so the season shapes the year's agriculture, water storage and food prices. IMD measures rainfall against the Long Period Average (about 87 cm for 1971 to 2020), with 96 to

104 per cent of the LPA (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/lpa-long-period-average-monsoon/>) counted as “normal.”

In 2026 the story is an uneven arrival followed by a dry promise. The monsoon reached the Andaman Sea early, around mid-May, but set in over Kerala only around June 4, slightly later than the usual June 1 date. But June ended with a nationwide rainfall deficit of about 40 per cent, and central India, the rain-fed farm core, was worse at about 50 per cent below normal. IMD’s July 2026 outlook projects below-normal rainfall, below 94 per cent of the LPA, and its seasonal forecast, revised down in late May, puts the June-to-September season at about 90 per cent of the LPA, below normal.

The driver is an El Nino that has set in and is strengthening through the season, forecast to peak toward autumn. Crucially, the Indian Ocean Dipole is neutral, meaning there is no offsetting positive-dipole boost to rescue the season, unlike some past El Nino years. Reservoirs are already stressed: the Central Water Commission’s mid-June reading showed live storage well below the same period a year earlier.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The central argument is that India’s monsoon dependence is a structural vulnerability (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/vulnerability/>), and that an El Nino year exposes it, but the outcome is not predetermined. Good water management can soften a deficient season; complacency can turn it into distress.

### The early-onset trap

An early onset is not a good-rainfall guarantee. In 2026, the monsoon arrived early and then stalled, so timing and quantity diverged. This is the danger of reading the onset date as a season forecast.

### El Nino, but not automatically a drought

El Nino tends to suppress monsoon rainfall but does not guarantee drought. Roughly half of El Nino years produced monsoon droughts; some, like 1997, saw a strong El Nino yet no drought because a positive Indian Ocean Dipole offset it. The 2026 risk is precisely the combination: an active, strengthening El Nino paired with a neutral dipole that offers no relief.

INDICATOR (2026)	READING	IMPLICATION
Monsoon onset	Early over Andaman (mid-May), Kerala around June 4	Uneven start, then stalled
June rainfall	About 40% deficit nationally	Central India near 50% short
July forecast	Below 94% of LPA	Below-normal month ahead
Seasonal forecast	About 90% of LPA	Below-normal season
El Nino	Present and strengthening	Suppresses rainfall
Indian Ocean Dipole	Neutral	No offsetting relief

## The downstream chain

A deficient monsoon flows through the economy. Kharif sowing of rice, maize, cotton and soybean falls behind, reservoirs run low for irrigation and drinking water, and food inflation rises. With food inflation already above 4 per cent, a significant rain deficit could add materially to headline inflation, a live concern for policymakers.

### HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use the **exposure-versus-adaptation frame**: a climate risk is dangerous not just because of the hazard (a weak monsoon) but because of the exposure (rain-fed farming) and the adaptive capacity (irrigation, storage, resilient crops). India cannot control El Nino, but it can shrink exposure and raise adaptation. This frame moves an answer from fatalism (“El Nino will hurt us”) to policy (“here is how we blunt (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/blunt/>) the blow”), which is what examiners reward.

### THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

El Nino strengthens plus neutral dipole (no relief) -> below-normal July and season -> June deficit and low reservoirs -> kharif sowing lags and water stress -> food inflation rises -> blunt it with irrigation, storage and resilient crops

### WAY FORWARD

- ① **Expand efficient irrigation.** Scale micro-irrigation under “Per Drop More Crop” in PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana to cut dependence on rainfall.
- ② **Recharge and store water.** Push watershed development, [aquifer](https://ujiyari.com/terms/aquifer/) recharge under Atal Bhujal Yojana and better reservoir management to buffer dry spells.
- ③ **Diversify crops.** Shift toward less water-intensive crops such as millets and pulses, and promote climate-resilient seed varieties.
- ④ **Ready the safety net.** Prepare [contingency](https://ujiyari.com/vocab/contingency/) plans, timely crop-insurance payouts and buffer-stock releases to protect farmers and contain food inflation.
- ⑤ **Sharpen forecasting and advisories.** Use IMD’s extended forecasts to guide sowing decisions district by district.

### PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about the El Nino and La Nina phenomena and their effect on the Indian monsoon, and about the significance of the monsoon for Indian agriculture and about water resource management (monsoon and ENSO questions appear across recent years). This editorial supplies current data and the dipole nuance.

**Practice question (Mains, GS1/GS3, 15 marks):** “El Nino weakens the Indian monsoon but does not doom it; the outcome depends on the Indian Ocean Dipole and on India’s water management.” Examine this statement in the light of the 2026 monsoon. (250 words)

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>)

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