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A Strong El Nino Is Building: What the WMO's Latest Forecast Means for India

31 July 2026 ·

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A Strong El Nino Is Building: What the WMO's Latest Forecast Means for India

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

The World Meteorological Organization's Global Seasonal Climate Update for July-September 2026, published in late July, forecasts a strong El Nino developing rapidly over the coming months, with a near-universal signal for above-normal temperatures globally.

THE FORECAST, IN NUMBERS

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Forecasting body	World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
Report	Global Seasonal Climate Update, July-September (JAS) 2026
Forecast strength	Strong El Nino event developing
Multi-model ensemble anomaly	Approximately 2.0°C above baseline in the relevant Pacific monitoring region
Global temperature signal	Near-universal likelihood of above-normal temperatures across most land areas
Associated risks	Elevated risk of heatwaves, droughts and heavy rainfall events , depending on region

WHAT EL NINO IS, IN BRIEF

El Nino is the warm phase of the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a periodic warming of central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean surface temperatures that disrupts normal atmospheric circulation patterns worldwide. It is one of the most significant natural drivers of year-to-year climate variability, with well-documented, though not perfectly consistent, effects on the Indian monsoon.

ENSO PHASE	TYPICAL INDIAN MONSOON ASSOCIATION
El Nino (warm phase)	Historically associated with below-normal or delayed monsoon rainfall , though the correlation is probabilistic, not deterministic
La Nina (cool phase)	Historically associated with above-normal monsoon rainfall
Neutral	Monsoon behaviour driven more by other factors, such as the Indian Ocean Dipole

WHY THE TIMING MATTERS FOR INDIA

Because this El Nino is forecast to strengthen specifically through the July-September window, its most direct interaction is with the tail end of India's southwest monsoon season and the transition into the winter northeast monsoon and rabi-sowing period, rather than the monsoon's onset phase, which had already been underway.

SECTOR	CHANNEL OF IMPACT
Agriculture	Late-season monsoon disruption can affect kharif crop maturation and reservoir replenishment heading into rabi sowing
Food inflation	Historically, strong El Nino years have coincided with pressure on pulses, oilseed and vegetable prices in India
Reservoir and water-year planning	A weaker monsoon tail directly affects the reservoir-storage baseline for the dry season that follows
Heatwave risk	Strong El Nino years have historically correlated with more intense and frequent heatwave conditions in parts of India

THE FORECAST UNCERTAINTY CAVEAT

El Nino's relationship with the Indian monsoon is a genuine probabilistic association, not a fixed rule; several past El Nino years have still delivered near-normal Indian monsoon rainfall because of offsetting factors, most notably a favourable phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD). The India Meteorological Department factors both ENSO and IOD signals into its own seasonal forecasts, which is why Indian agencies typically caveat single-driver ENSO forecasts rather than treating them as a standalone prediction for India specifically.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1: Important geophysical phenomena, climatology; distribution of key natural resources.

GS Paper 3: Agriculture and cropping patterns; food security; disaster and disaster management.

Prelims pointers:

- **ENSO** (El Nino-Southern Oscillation): the coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon with three phases, **El Nino, La Nina, Neutral**.
- El Nino: warming of central/eastern equatorial Pacific surface waters; historically associated with below-normal Indian monsoon rainfall.
- Counterbalancing factor: the **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)**, which can offset or reinforce El Nino's monsoon effect.
- WMO's **Global Seasonal Climate Update** is issued periodically and covers rolling forward-looking seasonal windows (here, July-September 2026).

 FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA**THE FORECAST:**

WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update, JAS 2026: strong El Nino forecast, ~2.0°C anomaly.

Near-universal signal for above-normal global temperatures.

ENSO BASICS:

El Nino: warm Pacific phase, typically linked to below-normal Indian monsoon rainfall.

La Nina: cool Pacific phase, typically linked to above-normal Indian monsoon rainfall.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD): the key offsetting/reinforcing factor that determines whether El Nino years still deliver a near-normal Indian monsoon.

INDIA-SPECIFIC STAKES: KHARIF CROP MATURATION, RESERVOIR REPLENISHMENT, RABI-SOWING WATER AVAILABILITY, FOOD INFLATION RISK.

Sources: World Meteorological Organization, India Meteorological Department, United Nations

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