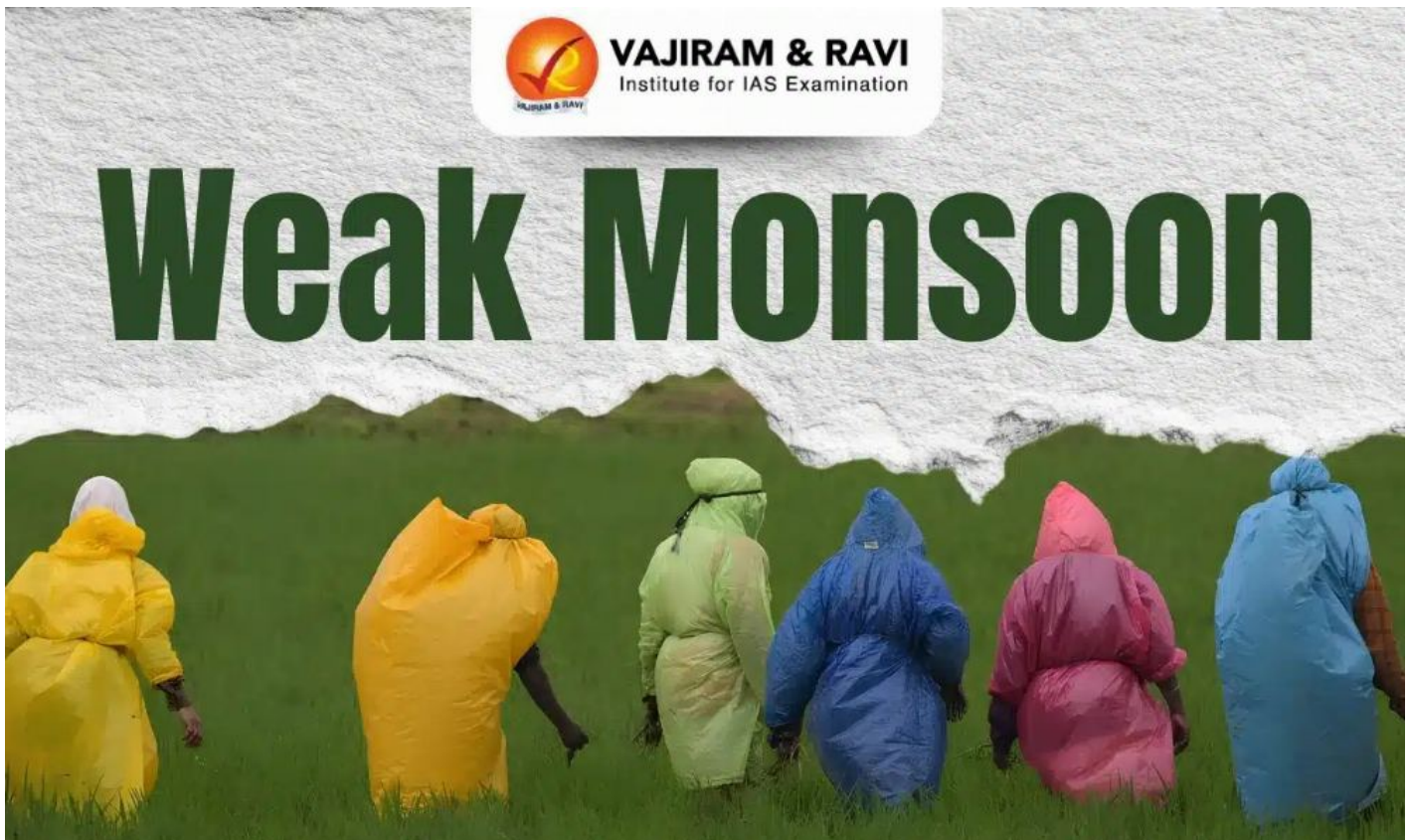


Weak Monsoon and El Niño: Why India May Be Better Prepared This Time

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Weak Monsoon Latest News

- India has prepared contingency plans for more than 300 vulnerable districts as a weak monsoon and El Niño conditions threaten rainfall, crop output, and rural incomes.

Weak Monsoon in India

- The southwest monsoon is the backbone of India's agricultural and water economy. It provides about 70-75% of the country's annual rainfall during the June-September season and is essential for:
 - Kharif crop sowing
 - Groundwater recharge
 - Reservoir storage
 - Hydropower generation
 - Drinking water supply

- A weak or delayed monsoon can reduce crop yields, lower farm incomes, weaken rural demand, and affect overall economic growth.
- This is especially serious because nearly half of India's farmland is still not irrigated, and a large share of the population depends directly or indirectly on farming.
- The **India Meteorological Department (IMD) defines normal monsoon rainfall as 96% to 104% of the long-period average of 87 cm.**
- For 2026, the IMD has forecast rainfall at around 90% of the long-period average, which would make it the weakest monsoon in more than a decade.

Why This Year's Situation Is Concerning

- So far, monsoon rainfall has been about 43% below average, and rainfall through the week ending July 2 is expected to remain weak.
- June, which was expected to be one of the relatively better rainfall months, has instead seen a deficit of more than 40%.
- At this time of year, the monsoon usually covers almost the entire country. This year, however, it has covered only around half of India's landmass, adding to concerns about kharif sowing.
- The immediate worry is not only lower total rainfall, but also patchy spatial distribution and delayed advance. These factors can be damaging even if seasonal rainfall later improves.

El Niño and Other Weather Factors

- Although El Niño has emerged in the equatorial Pacific, it is not yet the main reason for the June rainfall deficit. Its impact on India usually comes with a lag of more than a month.
- Other factors have played a bigger role so far:
 - Weak low-pressure systems
 - Weak monsoon currents
 - An unfavourable phase of the **Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)**
- The MJO is a moving system of winds and clouds that influences rainfall across the tropics.
- During most of June, the rain-bearing part of the MJO was far from India, while the part affecting the Indian region actually suppressed rainfall. As it shifts, rainfall conditions may improve somewhat in early July.
- Still, as the season progresses, **El Niño's** influence is expected to strengthen, which may continue to weigh on monsoon performance.

India's Contingency Planning

- To reduce the impact of weak rainfall, the government has prepared contingency plans for more than 300 districts. Of the 315 districts identified as vulnerable, the government has classified:
 - 111 districts as high priority, where less than one-fourth of the farmland is irrigated and
 - 76 districts as medium priority
- States have been advised to encourage farmers in rain-fed areas to shift from water-intensive crops to short-duration and less water-intensive crops, such as Pulses, Millets and Oilseeds.

- The government has also asked states to repair and strengthen Ponds, check dams, Water-harvesting structures and other local water conservation systems.
- These are meant to preserve soil moisture and improve water availability during dry spells.

Why India May Be Better Prepared This Time

- Even though the threat is real, India may be better placed than before to handle a weak monsoon.
- **Stronger Water Position**
 - The past two years saw relatively good rainfall, so many of the country's major reservoirs are at healthier storage levels. This offers some protection against immediate water stress.
- **Better Rainwater Conservation**
 - A large share of work under the rural employment guarantee programme has gone into:
 - Rainwater harvesting
 - Water storage
 - Soil moisture conservation
 - Local water infrastructure
 - This has improved the country's ability to absorb rainfall shocks.
- **Improved Groundwater Situation**
 - Official reports suggest that groundwater conditions have improved in recent years in several areas, reducing vulnerability somewhat.
- **Lower Dependence on Hydropower**
 - The rapid rise of solar and wind power has reduced India's dependence on hydropower, helping conserve reservoir water for irrigation and drinking needs.
- **Better Preparedness in Farming**
 - There are signs that early warnings of a weak monsoon may already have influenced farmer behaviour. In some regions, farmers have begun sowing kharif crops using pre-monsoon showers, while governments are pushing adaptive crop choices.

Limits of Preparedness

- India is better prepared than it was a decade ago, but that does not mean the risks are minor. A poor monsoon can still:
 - Reduce yields of rice, maize, cotton, soybean, and sugarcane
 - Hurt farm incomes
 - Weaken rural consumption
 - Affect inflation, especially food inflation
 - Create stress in rain-fed regions
- Also, around 75% of the country's area currently has more than 20% rainfall deficiency, which means the stress is widespread.
- The key point is that India's resilience has improved, but it will still need timely planning, intervention, and support to limit the impact.

The Larger Lesson

- The current monsoon uncertainty highlights a deeper issue: under climate change, even “normal” monsoons may come with greater regional and local variation.
- In other words, the challenge is no longer only whether rainfall is above or below average, but also when, where, and how intensely it falls.
- That is why the long-term solution lies in building greater climate resilience through:
 - Crop diversification
 - Better irrigation efficiency
 - Water harvesting
 - Drought-resistant crops
 - Improved forecasting and local planning

Source: IE | TH

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