The Driest September in 17 years

What is the issue?

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- The September of 2018 has seen a rainfall deficiency of 22.3% until the third week.
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- It makes it the driest September in 17 years, with rainfall almost a third below normal.
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How has rainfall been?

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- According to IMD (India Meteorological Department) data, 12 of the country's 36 meteorological subdivisions have registered deficient rainfall.
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- This is a departure of nearly 20% from the Long Period Average (average annual rainfall for the period 1951-2000).
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- It covers Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Rajasthan, Haryana (including Delhi and Chandigarh), the entire North-East, Rayalaseema and North Interior Karnataka.
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- South India has been dry this September, with a deficiency of over 46%.
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- Not much rain is expected in the remainder of the month too leaving September with a deficiency of over 30%.
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- Never since 2001, with a 35.8% shortfall, has September been so dry.
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- The month is thus set to end up being the driest September since 2001.

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- The shortfall has meant that there has been a 9% deficiency in the overall rainfall in June-September monsoon.
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- Eastern and north-eastern India has a deficiency of almost 25% over the season.
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What is the possible reason?

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- According to the IMD, there were only six significant low pressure systems (LPS) this season.
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- One or two LPS formed almost every day but most of these were not strong enough to bring in rain.
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- So the lack of strong LPS developing over the Bay of Bengal side is likely the only cause of low rainfall.
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- One of the reasons for this is that around the same time, some cyclonic activity in the west Pacific region was taking place.
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- The moisture over the Bay of Bengal got sucked in by those systems.
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- Evidently, Japan and Philippines had some good rainfall.
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- Besides this there might not be any “external cause” behind the low rainfall in this month.
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- In natural systems like monsoon, a drought can occur once in a few years without any external cause.
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- So though the rainfall deviation is large, it doesn’t seem to be a result of any major atmospheric abnormality.
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- Suggestions that a developing weak El Niño in the Pacific Ocean might have forced a suppression of rainfall are ruled out.
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Will it affect agriculture?

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- The poor rainfall activity is unlikely to significantly impact agricultural production.
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- The main reason for this is that much of kharif plantings happen in June-July.
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- Most parts, except Bihar, Jharkhand and the North-East states, received enough rains for farmers to take up sowing operations.
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- Some areas such as Marathwada, North Karnataka and Gujarat (especially Saurashtra) did experience dry spells during the crop’s vegetative growth phase.
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- But the situation is nowhere close to the drought situation seen in 2014 and 2015.
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- There are concerns over the cotton crop in Gujarat’s main Saurashtra belt where moisture stress could affect yields.
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- But fortunately, no large-scale pest attacks have been reported in the country’s major cotton-growing areas this time.
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- Given all these, this year’s kharif crop would not be as good as in the last two years.
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- But there is certainly no possibility of a repeat of the 2014 and 2015 drought situations.
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- Moreover, further rainfalls, as predicted, would help bolster the soil and sub-soil moisture in the coming rabi sowing season.
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- However, the Australian and U.S.'s meteorology departments have forecasted an El Nino event to take place after November.
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- El Nino is the abnormal warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean Waters, seen to adversely impact rains in India.
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- This could possibly have a bearing on the winter rains, which are crucial for crops such as wheat, mustard and chana.
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Source: Indian Express

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