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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

High Heat — On India and Warming

 THE HINDU

24 April 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS1

GS3

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High Heat — On India and Warming

 The Hindu

24 April 2026

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The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India is experiencing increasingly severe heatwaves. Is India's governance framework adequate for a warming world — and what structural shifts in urban planning, agriculture, and energy are required?"

THE CORE ARGUMENT

India is experiencing an accelerating warming trend — April 2026 brought severe heatwaves with temperatures 4–5°C above normal across North and Central India. The editorial argues that climate change is no longer a future risk but a present governance emergency: the IMD's April–June 2026 forecast projects above-normal heatwave days across most of the country. India's policy response — while improving — remains fragmented, urban-centric, and inadequately funded. The piece calls for systemic adaptation: stronger Heat Action Plans (HAPs) beyond major cities, agriculture-specific cooling protocols, vulnerable-population registries, and integration of extreme heat into disaster management frameworks at par with floods and cyclones.

INDIA'S WARMING — THE EVIDENCE

Temperature Trends

TREND	DATA
India's average temperature rise	+0.7°C since 1901 (IMD long-term record)
Rate of increase (recent decades)	~0.2°C per decade (accelerating)
April 2026 anomaly	4–5°C above normal in North/Central India
IMD April–June 2026 forecast	Above-normal heatwave days across East, Central, NW India
Heat-related deaths in India (2025)	4,419 (CSE State of India's Environment 2026)

Geophysical Changes

India is experiencing multiple interconnected geophysical shifts linked to warming:

- ❶ **Monsoon disruption** — Earlier onset in some years; erratic patterns; extreme precipitation events increasing
- ❷ **Glacier retreat (Himalayan)** — ~70% of Himalayan glaciers retreating; GLOF (glacial lake outburst flood) risk increasing
- ❸ **Cyclone intensification** — Arabian Sea cyclones becoming more intense; Bay of Bengal cyclone seasons extending
- ❹ **Sea level rise** — ~3 mm/year along India's coastline; threatens coastal cities (Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata)
- ❺ **Groundwater depletion** — 21 Indian cities could run out of groundwater by 2030 (NITI Aayog report)

THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND PROBLEM

Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect adds 2–5°C to city temperatures:

- Concrete, asphalt, and metal surfaces absorb and re-emit heat
- Loss of urban green cover reduces evapotranspiration cooling
- Waste heat from vehicles, buildings, industries
- **Delhi UHI:** Summer temperatures 3–4°C above surrounding rural areas

Solutions for Urban Heat

INTERVENTION	MECHANISM
Green roofs and walls	Evapotranspiration; insulation
Cool roofs (reflective paint)	Reflects solar radiation; reduces indoor cooling demand
Urban forests	Direct shading + cooling (Miyawaki forests gaining traction)
Permeable pavements	Water retention; reduces surface heating
Heat corridors	Wind channels through urban layouts (incorporated in new town planning)

AGRICULTURE — MOST VULNERABLE SECTOR

IMPACT	DETAIL
Wheat	Temperature >34°C during grain-filling → crop failure; 1°C rise = 4–5% yield loss
Rice	Night temperature rise → reduced grain quality and weight
Pulses	Extreme heat during flowering → pod failure
Kharif delay	Heat-stressed soil reduces germination rates

Adaptation options: Heat-tolerant varieties (e.g., DBW303 wheat by ICAR), shift in sowing windows, soil moisture conservation, and precision irrigation.

INDIA'S HEAT GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

National Level

BODY/INSTRUMENT	ROLE
IMD	Heatwave forecasts, colour-coded alerts
NDMA	National guidelines on heat management (2016)
MoHFW	National Action Plan on Climate Change and Human Health (NAPCCHH)
NAPCC	National Action Plan on Climate Change — 8 missions including water and green India

Gaps

- ❶ **HAPs exist for ~100 cities** — but India has 640+ districts; rural areas unprotected
- ❷ **No national Heat Act** — heat not legally classified as a “disaster” under Disaster Management Act 2005 in all states
- ❸ **Cooling centre availability** — uneven; often inaccessible to informal workers
- ❹ **Vulnerable population registry** — no systematic identification of high-risk individuals

UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS1 — Geography	Geophysical changes: monsoon, glaciers, sea level, cyclones
GS3 — Environment	Climate adaptation, extreme heat, NDMA, HAPs
GS2 — Governance	Gap between national climate policy and local implementation

Mains Keywords: Urban Heat Island, Heat Action Plan, NDMA, NAPCC, wet-bulb temperature, IMD colour-coded alerts, Ahmedabad HAP, extreme heat governance

Probable Question: “Extreme heat is India’s most underrated climate risk. Critically examine India’s preparedness to manage it.” (GS3 Mains)

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