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# Concrete Fever: India's Urban Heat Crisis and the Limits of Heat-Action Plans

THE HINDU

30 May 2026

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# Concrete Fever: India's Urban Heat Crisis and the Limits of Heat-Action Plans

 The Hindu

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE



*"India's Heat Action Plans focus on warnings and emergency rooms, but the structural driver — unchecked urban concretisation — is largely outside their remit. As a city planner, how would you reconcile climate-resilient urban form with India's housing and infrastructure demand?"*

THE HINDU | EDITORIAL | MAY 30, 2026

Argues that India's heatwave crisis is being amplified by unchecked concretisation of cities (the **URBAN HEAT ISLAND, UHI, EFFECT**

) and that state-level **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** remain **reactive, under-funded, and structurally disconnected** from urban planning, labour protection, and land-use law.

## THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

India's heatwave response is treating a built-environment crisis as if it were a meteorological one — and unless heat-resilient urban form becomes a mandatory pillar of city master plans, no amount of advisory or hospital surge capacity will keep urban poor outside lethal heat budgets.

## WHAT THE EDITORIAL DIAGNOSES

LAYER	WHAT'S WORKING	WHAT'S BROKEN
<b>Early warning</b>	IMD heatwave forecasts; SMS alerts; HAPs in <b>23+ states + 100+ cities</b> since the Ahmedabad pioneer (2013)	No legal force; advisories ignored at workplace level; few outdoor-work prohibitions
<b>Emergency response</b>	Cooling centres; ORS distribution; ICU surge capacity in some Tier-1 hospitals	Patchy in Tier-2/3 cities; informal-sector workers (construction, street vendors, gig delivery) have no fallback
<b>Structural / planning</b>	<b>National Mission on Sustainable Habitat</b> (under NAPCC, 2008)	UHI is not embedded in Master Plans or local building byelaws; cool-roof mandates rare; tree cover loss continuing

## WHY "CONCRETE FEVER" IS STRUCTURAL

The **Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect** — cities being 2-6°C hotter than rural surrounds — has three structural drivers:

- ① **Albedo loss** — concrete and asphalt absorb solar radiation (low albedo ~0.1-0.2) vs vegetation (~0.25) and white roofs (~0.6).
- ② **Heat retention** — buildings, roads, and parking lots store daytime heat and release it at night (so urban nights stay hot, denying recovery).
- ③ **Reduced evapotranspiration** — paved surfaces don't transpire; lost tree cover compounds.

**Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai** have recorded **night-time temperatures above 30°C** even when day peaks are not extreme — a public-health signature of UHI.

## INDIA'S HEAT CRISIS — RECENT NUMBERS

- **2024:** ~250+ confirmed heatstroke deaths (NCDC official); independent estimates ~1,500+ (excess mortality)
- **2026 forecast:** IMD's seasonal outlook flagged **below-normal monsoon (92% of LPA)** — increases heat-stress exposure
- **Lancet Countdown 2024:** India lost ~**191 billion potential labour hours** to heat exposure in 2023
- **CSE State of India's Environment 2026:** 7 of 9 planetary boundaries breached; heat extreme frequencies rising

## EXISTING POLICY ARCHITECTURE — WHY IT'S INSUFFICIENT

INSTRUMENT	LIMITATION
<b>National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC, 2008)</b> — 8 missions including Sustainable Habitat	No binding city-level targets; cooling not prioritised
<b>India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP, 2019)</b>	Focuses on refrigerants + space cooling demand; weak on passive-cooling urban design
<b>State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs)</b>	Inconsistent quality; few have urban-heat modules
<b>Smart Cities Mission (2015-)</b>	Cool-roof + green infrastructure components present but not mandated
<b>Heat Action Plans (HAPs)</b>	Reactive — focus on warnings, hospital readiness; no urban-form levers

## WHAT THE EDITORIAL RECOMMENDS

- ① **Embed heat resilience in city Master Plans** — minimum tree-canopy targets (e.g., 30% of plot area), mandatory cool-roof provisions, restriction on heat-island-prone materials in vulnerable wards.
- ② **Building byelaws** — light-coloured/reflective roofs for new construction; ventilation/passive-cooling design standards.
- ③ **Outdoor-work regulation** — legal heat-thresholds above which open-air construction, road work, and gig delivery must pause (paid). Currently absent in Indian labour codes.
- ④ **Cooling-as-a-public-good** — public cooling centres mandated per population norm (1 per 50,000 in heat-stress wards); transit cooling at bus stops and stations.
- ⑤ **Heat-mortality data infrastructure** — mandate state heat-death notification (currently optional and under-reported).
- ⑥ **HAP-2.0 framework** at MoHFW + MoHUA + MoLE convergence — not standalone disaster-management exercises.

## UPSC HOOKS

PAPER	ANGLE
<b>GS1</b>	Urbanisation, urban geography, climate-society interaction, public health geography
<b>GS3</b>	Climate change adaptation, disaster management (heatwave was added to NDMA Heat-Wave Guidelines 2019; not yet a notified “disaster” under DM Act 2005), labour welfare under climate stress
<b>Mains</b>	“India’s Heat Action Plans remain reactive responses to a structural urban-form problem. Discuss the reforms needed to embed heat resilience in city master plans.”
<b>Prelims</b>	Ahmedabad HAP (first in India, 2013); ICAP launched 2019; NAPCC 2008 (8 missions including Sustainable Habitat); Lancet Countdown; CSE SoE 2026 (7/9 planetary boundaries breached)

## CROSS-LINKS

- Related: India’s NDC 2031-2035 (47% emissions intensity cut by 2035, 60% non-fossil capacity by 2035, Cabinet March 2026)
- Related: AP Green Energy Corridor Phase-III (May 29, 2026) — supply-side decarbonisation parallel to demand-side adaptation
- Related: 2026 SW Monsoon onset (May 24, early) but 92% LPA forecast — heat-stress + monsoon-deficit double bind

## COUNTER-VIEW

Critics of mandatory cool-roof / heat-resilient byelaws argue:

- **Cost burden on builders + housing affordability** — adds 5-15% to construction cost
- **Enforcement deficit** — most Indian cities can barely enforce existing FAR, fire safety, parking norms
- **Climate justice** — wealthy households can afford AC; mandates may not reach informal settlements where the impact is most severe

**Editorial position:** these are implementation challenges, not arguments against the mandate — they call for **graduated rollout** with targeted subsidies for low-income housing.

Source: Concrete Fever: India’s Urban Heat Crisis and the Limits of Heat-Action Plans — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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