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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Extreme Heat, Wet-Bulb Temperature and a Warming World

DOWN TO EARTH

14 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT

SOCIAL ISSUES

GS3

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Extreme Heat, Wet-Bulb Temperature and a Warming World

 **Down to Earth**

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 Source: ujiyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"We measure heatwaves by temperature, but the body feels humidity too. As wet-bulb temperatures rise, which Indian workers and regions are most at risk, and is our heat-action planning keeping up?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[Down to Earth](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources**
HOW

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Rising **wet-bulb temperatures** are turning outdoor life, from sport to daily labour, into a climate-risk frontier, with extreme heat among the fastest-growing climate threats. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **heat, the wet-bulb concept, and India's adaptation and disaster preparedness.**

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Wet-bulb temperature combines heat and humidity and measures real physiological danger, because high humidity stops sweat from cooling the body. Parts of South Asia are nearing dangerous thresholds. **Outdoor and informal workers** bear the heaviest burden. Yet heat is still treated as a seasonal nuisance. The fix: notify heat as a **disaster**, fund **heat-action plans**, protect workers.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Wet-bulb temperature	Heat plus humidity on the body	The true measure of heat danger
Survivability limit	The wet-bulb threshold the body cannot endure	South Asia is approaching it
Heat-action plan	City/state heat-response framework	The main adaptation tool
Heat as a disaster	Formal classification of extreme heat	Unlocks relief and preparedness funds

THE ANALYSIS: WHY HEAT IS NOW A FRONTLINE THREAT

- ❶ **Humidity changes everything.** When sweat cannot evaporate, the body fails to cool even at lower air temperatures.
- ❷ **Approaching limits.** Parts of South Asia are nearing wet-bulb thresholds dangerous for sustained outdoor exertion.
- ❸ **Unequal burden.** Outdoor and informal workers face the heaviest toll in illness, lost hours and deaths.
- ❹ **Policy lag.** Heat is still often treated as a seasonal nuisance rather than a slow-onset disaster.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

wet-bulb temperature combines heat and humidity; a sustained wet-bulb of around 35 degrees Celsius is widely cited as the theoretical limit of human survivability. **The tools:** city and state **Heat Action Plans** (pioneered by Ahmedabad); the **National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health (NPCCHH)**. **The disaster question:** heatwaves are not yet a notified disaster under the central list, a long-debated gap. **Concept:** the climate-health nexus; adaptation; just transition for outdoor labour.

THE DEBATE

Argument for treating heat as a disaster: Extreme heat is a slow-onset disaster causing illness, lost work and deaths; notifying it unlocks funds and forces preparedness.

Argument for adaptation focus: Cooling, scheduling and technology can manage heat risk, and the priority should remain **mitigation** rather than reframing heat alarmingly.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT IT

Define **wet-bulb temperature** clearly (heat plus humidity), then argue that the policy response must catch up with the science: notify heat as a disaster, fund heat-action plans, protect outdoor workers. Connect environment (GS3) and public health. Avoid both alarmism and complacency.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture two thermometers side by side: a dry one reading a survivable number, and a wet one wrapped in a damp cloth reading far higher danger. The body lives by the wet thermometer. As humidity rises, the wet reading climbs toward the line a human cannot cross.

PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC has asked about heatwaves, climate change and disaster management. This editorial connects those to the wet-bulb concept and the case for treating heat as a disaster.

THE ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

Extreme heat, measured by wet-bulb temperature, is now a frontline threat to health and livelihoods; treating it as a disaster and protecting outdoor workers is essential.

Source: Extreme Heat, Wet-Bulb Temperature and a Warming World — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Rising wet-bulb temperatures are turning outdoor activity, from sporting mega-events to everyday labour, into a climate-risk frontier, making extreme heat one of the fastest-growing threats to lives and livelihoods and demanding that heat be treated as a **first-order disaster**.



SUPPORTING

- Wet-bulb temperature, which combines heat and humidity, is a better measure of physiological danger than air temperature alone, and rising humidity is pushing it toward human survivability limits in parts of South Asia.
- Outdoor and informal workers, who cannot escape the heat, bear the heaviest burden in lost working hours, illness and mortality.
- Mega-events and economies built around outdoor activity are increasingly exposed, signalling how pervasively warming reshapes daily life.


COUNTER

Some argue that adaptation, cooling, scheduling, technology, can manage heat risk without alarmism, and that the focus should remain on mitigation rather than reframing heat as a disaster.


WAY FORWARD

Treat extreme heat as a notified disaster, strengthen and fund heat-action plans, protect outdoor workers through wage and scheduling measures, expand cooling and early warning, and pursue mitigation to slow the underlying warming.


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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

"Extreme heat is becoming the defining climate threat to health and livelihoods." Examine the concept of wet-bulb temperature and India's preparedness. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

We have long measured heat by the thermometer. The body, however, also reads humidity, and as the world warms, the gap between what the air says and what the body feels is becoming a matter of survival.

BODY

Wet-bulb temperature, the lowest temperature to which air can be cooled by evaporation, captures the combined effect of heat and humidity on the human body. It matters because the body sheds heat by sweating, and when humidity is high, sweat cannot evaporate, so cooling fails even at air temperatures that sound survivable.

Parts of South Asia are now approaching wet-bulb thresholds beyond which sustained outdoor exertion becomes dangerous. The consequences are unevenly distributed.

Outdoor and informal workers, construction labourers, farmers, street vendors, who cannot retreat to air conditioning, bear the heaviest burden in heat illness, lost working hours and excess deaths. The exposure now reaches into domains once thought immune: sporting mega-events, tourism and any economy organised around outdoor activity find their calendars and their safety margins shrinking. The policy response has lagged the science. Extreme heat is still often treated as a seasonal nuisance rather than the slow-onset disaster it has become.

The way forward is to reclassify it accordingly: notify heat as a disaster so that relief and preparedness funds can flow; strengthen and properly fund city and state heat-action plans; protect outdoor workers through scheduling, shade, hydration and wage protection on red-alert days; expand cooling and early warning; and pursue the mitigation that slows the underlying warming. Heat has become a question of who can survive the afternoon.

CONCLUSION

Extreme heat is no longer a footnote to climate change; it is a frontline threat to health and livelihoods. Treating it as a disaster, and protecting those who work in it, is now essential.


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