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Cooling India Without Cooking the Planet

 **DOWN TO EARTH**30 June 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Cooling India Without Cooking the Planet

Down to Earth 30 June 2026 **GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Access to cooling is becoming a survival need, yet cooling itself warms the planet. How would you reconcile the right to cool with climate goals?"

Source: [Original editorial](#) [Down to Earth](#)

✓ **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Each summer arrives hotter, and with it a surge in the demand for cooling that is fast becoming a matter of survival rather than comfort. By 2030, an estimated 160 to 200 million Indians could face lethal heatwaves annually, and appliance sales are climbing sharply year on year. But the most common response, conventional air conditioning, both consumes coal-fired power and leaks potent refrigerants, meaning the cure quietly worsens the disease. How India cools itself has become one of its defining climate questions.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Heat is making cooling a survival need for hundreds of millions, yet conventional cooling burns power and leaks refrigerants, warming the planet further. The escape from this vicious cycle is not less cooling but cleaner cooling: the India Cooling Action Plan, passive building design, efficient appliances, low-GWP refrigerants and heat-action plans, all riding on a greening grid. Access and climate can be reconciled.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)	2019 roadmap for sustainable cooling	Global first; targets demand, refrigerant and energy cuts
Global-warming potential (GWP)	How strongly a refrigerant warms the planet	HFC leaks make conventional ACs a hidden climate driver
Passive cooling	Design that cools without energy (shading, ventilation, cool roofs)	Cuts cooling need at source, before any appliance runs
Heat action plan	City or state plan to protect people during heatwaves	The frontline adaptation tool for the most exposed
Vicious cycle	Cooling demand driving the warming that raises it	The trap sustainable cooling must break

THE ANALYSIS

- ❶ **Cooling is now a survival need.** With up to 160 to 200 million Indians facing lethal heat by 2030, access to cooling is an equity and public-health imperative (<https://ujjayari.com/vocab/imperative/>), not a discretionary comfort.
- ❷ **Conventional cooling warms the planet.** Air conditioners draw heavy power, often coal-fired, and leak high-GWP hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants, so unmanaged growth accelerates warming.
- ❸ **The cycle is self-reinforcing.** More heat drives more cooling, which drives more emissions, which drives more heat. Breaking this loop, not simply meeting demand, is the real task.
- ❹ **India already has a frame.** The India Cooling Action Plan of 2019 made India an early mover, setting targets to cut cooling demand, refrigerant use and cooling energy across a twenty-year horizon.
- ❺ **Passive design is the cheapest lever.** Shading, ventilation, cool roofs and thermally sensible building codes reduce how much cooling is needed at all, the gain that comes before any appliance is switched on.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

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CARRY THESE INTO THE EXAM HALL.

India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) released 2019 by MoEFCC; a global first; 20-year horizon.

ICAP targets: cut cooling demand 20 to 25 per cent, refrigerant demand 25 to 30 per cent, cooling energy 25 to 40 per cent by 2037-38.

By 2030, an estimated 160 to 200 million Indians could face lethal heatwaves annually.

Refrigerant phase-down under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol (HFCs).

Tools: heat action plans, cool roofs, BEE star labelling, Eco Niwas Samhita and thermal building codes.

Concepts: passive cooling, global-warming potential, adaptation versus mitigation (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/mitigation/>).

THE DEBATE

For prioritising access: For hundreds of millions facing lethal heat, affordable cooling is a matter of life and dignity. Efficiency mandates or refrigerant rules that raise the price of an air conditioner risk pricing out the poor, who need cooling most. Access must come first.

For prioritising clean cooling: Unchecked, cooling growth on a coal grid with leaky refrigerants deepens the warming that is driving the demand. Meeting today's need with dirty technology mortgages tomorrow's climate. The way to serve the poor durably is efficient, clean cooling, not more of the polluting kind.

Balanced verdict: The two goals are complementary, not rival. Efficient appliances lower running costs, benefiting poorer users most; passive design cuts the need for cooling before cost even arises; and clean refrigerants avoid locking in warming. The right policy expands access through clean, efficient, well-designed cooling, so that reaching the vulnerable and protecting the climate are the same project.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

When a need is soaring, the first question is not "how do we supply more" but "how do we need less to get the same outcome." Passive cooling reduces the need before any appliance runs; efficiency then serves the residual demand cleanly. This "reduce demand, then green supply" order applies to water, energy and transport policy alike, and usually delivers the cheapest, fastest wins.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

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Rising heat → surging cooling demand → conventional ACs (coal power + HFC leaks) → more emissions → more warming (vicious cycle) || Break it: passive design + cool roofs → less demand; efficient appliances + low-GWP refrigerants → clean supply; heat action plans → protect the exposed; greener grid → clean power = cooling access WITHOUT runaway warming

THE WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Design cooling out first.** Mandate (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/mandate/>) passive-cooling features, cool roofs and thermal building codes so structures need less active cooling from the start.
- ❷ **Raise appliance efficiency.** Tighten star-labelling standards and phase out inefficient units, cutting both bills and grid load.
- ❸ **Switch refrigerants.** Accelerate the shift to low-GWP refrigerants in line with the Kigali Amendment.
- ❹ **Scale heat-action plans.** Expand and fund city and state heat-action plans, early warnings, shaded public spaces and worker protections for the most exposed.
- ❺ **Green the grid.** Match rising cooling load with renewable power so that expanding access does not expand emissions.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

Frame cooling as a climate-justice and adaptation issue with a mitigation trap. Argue that passive design and efficiency reconcile access with emissions, using the ICAP targets and heat-exposure data as anchors.

“Cooling is becoming a right, not a luxury, and met through efficiency, passive design and clean power, that right can be honoured without cooking the planet that made it necessary.”

ICAP released 2019, 20-year horizon; demand cut target 20-25%, refrigerant 25-30%, energy 25-40% by 2037-38; up to 160-200 million exposed to lethal heat by 2030; Kigali Amendment to Montreal Protocol; BEE star labelling; Eco Niwas Samhita.

The right to cool versus the duty to cut emissions poses an intergenerational (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/intergenerational/>) and intra-generational equity dilemma, a core climate-justice question.

Connects to GS3 questions on climate change, energy efficiency, disaster (heatwave) management and sustainable development (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/sustainable-development/>).

Montreal Protocol and Kigali Amendment, heat-action plans, energy efficiency (BEE), building codes, grid decarbonisation (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/decarbonisation/>) and disaster management.

Sources: *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>)

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• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

As heatwaves intensify, India's surging cooling demand risks a vicious cycle of more emissions and more warming, so the India Cooling Action Plan, passive-cooling design, energy-efficient appliances and heat-action plans together offer a path to climate-resilient cooling.

✓ SUPPORTING

- Cooling demand is rising fast from heat, urbanisation and incomes, and by 2030 an estimated 160 to 200 million Indians could face lethal heatwaves each year.
- Conventional air conditioning consumes power, often from a coal-heavy grid, and leaks potent refrigerants, so uncontrolled cooling growth accelerates the warming it responds to.
- The India Cooling Action Plan sets India apart as an early mover, targeting cuts in cooling demand, refrigerant use and cooling energy over its horizon.

⚠ COUNTER

For hundreds of millions facing lethal heat, access to affordable cooling is a survival and equity imperative that cannot be constrained in the name of long-term climate goals.

→ WAY FORWARD

Break the cycle through passive-cooling building design, strict appliance efficiency and low-GWP refrigerants, expanded heat-action plans and cool roofs, and a greener grid, so cooling access rises without runaway emissions.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

Rising heat is turning cooling from a comfort into a survival need, even as it drives emissions. Discuss how India can meet its cooling demand sustainably. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Rising heat is turning cooling from a comfort into a matter of survival, but the way India cools itself will decide whether it eases the crisis or deepens it. The challenge is to expand access without accelerating warming.

BODY

By 2030, an estimated 160 to 200 million Indians could be exposed to lethal heatwaves each year, and appliance sales are climbing steeply. Conventional air conditioning is doubly problematic: it draws large amounts of electricity, often from a coal-dominated grid, and leaks hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants with high global-warming potential.

Left unmanaged, cooling demand feeds the very warming it responds to, a vicious cycle. The response cannot be to deny cooling to people who need it to survive; that is neither just nor feasible.

It is to make cooling clean and efficient. The India Cooling Action Plan of 2019, a global first, provides the frame, targeting reductions in cooling demand, refrigerant use and cooling energy over a twenty-year horizon.

Around it must sit passive-cooling building design, cool roofs, strict appliance-efficiency standards, a rapid shift to low-GWP refrigerants, and city and state heat-action plans that protect the most exposed. A greening grid ties it together.

CONCLUSION

Cooling is becoming a right, not a luxury, in a hotter India. Met through efficiency, passive design and clean power, that right can be honoured without cooking the planet that made it necessary.


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