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Leh remains tense a day after death of 4 persons

Curfew clamped in the town which witnessed violent protests; dozens of people detained; bodies of people killed handed over to families for last rites; at least 15 suffered serious injuries, says DGP

Vijata Singh
Peerzada Ashiq
NEW DELHI/ SRINAGAR

Leh town of Ladakh remained tense on Thursday amid curfew as the bodies of four local people, who were killed during violent protests, were handed over to the families for last rites. Dozens of people were detained in a crackdown on those suspected to have participated in the street protests on Wednesday. The prominent Buddhist group, Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA), was engaged by the Leh administration to perform the last rites of the four persons. "The bodies were handed over to the families. As per the family wish, all the four, who belong to different villages,



Charred remains of vehicles seen outside the vandalised BJP office in Leh during protests demanding Statehood. ANI

will be cremated in Leh with all respect," Chering Dorjee Lakrook, president of the LBA and also co-chairman of the Leh Apex Body (LAB), said. Violent clashes broke out at the BJP office and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Leh (LAHDC) on Wednesday, leaving scores injured. Extra deployments were made across Leh. Security forces, their vehicles mounted with speakers, kept warning the people from venturing out of their houses. S.D. Singh Jamwal, Director-General of Police,

Ladakh, confirmed Wednesday's deaths, adding that 15 were seriously injured and one injured person was airlifted to Delhi for treatment. Thirty others received minor injuries, and around 30 security personnel were also injured in the violence, he said.

Mr. Jamwal told The Hindu that a case invoking rioting and other sections was registered in Leh and 42 people have been arrested so far.

Protests were held on the 15th day of the three-week hunger strike called by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk and his supporters.

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Mistrust in Ladakh

Legitimate aspirations of a people need to be taken into account

The festering unrest in the Union Territory of Ladakh turned violent on September 24, which resulted in the deaths of four persons and several others being injured. In the eyes of the Centre, the protest leaders had acted in bad faith even as efforts were underway to address their long-standing demands. These are Statehood for Ladakh, inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (which grants autonomy to tribal areas), reservation in jobs for locals, and greater political representation. The leaders and organisations at the forefront of the agitation have, however, said that the arson and violence were carried out by those outside their control. The protesters and the Centre have appealed to the youth of Ladakh to remain calm. The Ladakh protests have been championed by two major civil society coalitions – the Leh Apex Body (LAB), representing Buddhist-majority Leh, and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), representing Muslim-majority Kargil. While these groups do have many disagreements, they are united in a four-point agenda for constitutional safeguards and greater political autonomy for the region. On Wednesday, a shutdown called by the youth wing of LAB turned violent in Leh, which included the burning of the office of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the vandalising of the headquarters of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC).

The Centre and these outfits had reached an agreement in May 2025, which seemingly addressed core concerns through measures such as 95% reservation in jobs for locals (including STs and EWS), 33% reservation for women in the Hill Development Council, strict domicile criteria, and recognition of local languages such as Bhoti, Purgi, Balti and Shina. However, on September 23, the hospitalisation of two elderly protesters, who were on a hunger strike with climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, triggered a fresh round of public protest mostly led by youth. The Centre now alleges that Mr. Wangchuk is instigating violence while a resolution to all demands has been in the works. The Centre has also hinted at the involvement of foreign elements. There is evidently a gap between the perceptions of the protesters and the Centre on both the issues at hand and the way forward. Ladakh is a sensitive security spot for the country. This makes it all the more important that the people of the region are taken into confidence even while troublemakers are brought under control. The legitimate aspirations of the people can be addressed without compromising India's security requirements.

Delhi govt., IIT Kanpur sign MoU for artificial rain trials

Five trials planned from October 7-11 as emergency measure to combat rising air pollution; historic milestone, says CM; Sirsa alleges inaction by previous AAP govt.; experts warn against 'quick fixes'

Nikhil M Babu
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur to conduct cloud seeding trials as an emergency measure to combat rising air pollution.

The first phase of the trial is scheduled between October 7 and 11 in north and north-west Delhi. Operations will be carried out using IIT Kanpur's Cessna 206H aircraft from the Hindon airbase at an estimated cost of ₹3.5 crore. Based on the results, the government will decide the future course of action.

A senior government official explained that the aircraft will fly beneath cloud cover and spray silver iodide, which interacts with existing water droplets to make them heavier and condense as rain.

'Delhi's first trials'

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, along with Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, took part in the signing of the MoU.

Ms. Gupta told reporters that the government is deploying every possible measure to curb pollution. "From mechanical road



CM Rekha Gupta and Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa (centre) after signing the MoU on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

sweeping, using anti-smog guns and mist sprayers to strict dust control, we have taken multiple steps. Now, we are adding cloud seeding to provide relief during peak winter pollution. These will be Delhi's first artificial rain trials, a historic milestone for the city," she said.

Mr. Sirsa confirmed that five trial operations are planned within the October 7-11 window, depending on weather conditions.

"The aircraft is fully equipped, flown by trained pilots, and every operation will be assessed before moving to the next," the Minister said.

He also said approvals have been secured from 13 government agencies, including Aviation, Defence, Home, and Environment, as well as district administrations and meteorological bodies.

'Letters not enough'

Mr. Sirsa criticised the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, saying writing letters was not enough and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government worked to obtain all permissions. He added that IIT Kanpur has secured approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to conduct trials

between October 1 and November 30.

Efforts to introduce artificial rain in Delhi have been under discussion for years. The previous AAP government had initiated talks with IIT Kanpur, but the plan stalled, with then Environment Minister Gopal Rai alleging that the Centre did not respond to repeated requests for permissions. The BJP, after coming to power in February this year, revived the proposal. Trials were initially planned for July and later September, but both were postponed.

'Temporary measure'

Despite the preparations for trials, experts have raised doubts over the move. Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director at the Centre for Science and Environment, said artificial rain is an "expensive temporary measure".

"Even if there is some rain, pollution levels will bounce back quickly during winter. We should focus on long-term solutions to reduce pollution at the sources," she said.

Ms. Roychowdhury said funds earmarked for these experiments should instead go towards ground-level implementation of emission reduction measures across sectors.

HOW CLOUD SEEDING WORKS

The technology involves use of salt flares to target specific types of clouds and stimulate rainfall



UPSC PYQ-2019

Q. In the context of which of the following do some scientists suggest the use of cirrus cloud thinning technique and the injection of sulphate aerosol into stratosphere?

- Creating the artificial rains in some regions
- Reducing the frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones
- Reducing the adverse effects of solar wind on the Earth
- Reducing the global warming

Eight States with international borders, 0.13% of exports

When U.S. President Donald Trump signed off on an additional 25% tariff on imports from India in August 2025, citing trade deficits, the buying of Russian crude, and retaliatory precedent, New Delhi responded with its usual posture – of measured language, closed-door diplomacy and no public retaliation. The choreography was familiar. Washington struck, India absorbed. Official narratives framed it as another episode in bilateral turbulence. But these tariffs cut along fault lines that run inside the country, not just between two capitals. What they expose is not just a trade imbalance but also a deeper spatial imbalance that New Delhi has long refused to reckon with.

India's export economy is heavily centralised. The four States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka account for more than 70% of all merchandise exports. For Gujarat alone, it is over 13%. This concentration is no accident. There has been an alignment of infrastructure, incentives, and political continuity in these zones for decades. Meanwhile, India's most populous States, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, remain on the margins, with barely 5% of the country's outbound trade between them.

A marginalisation of the northeast

Then there is the northeast, whose place in India's export economy is marginal by design. Eight States, with over 5,400 kilometres of international borders, account for just 0.13% of national exports. There is no operational trade corridor linking them to foreign markets. And, no logistical infrastructure to support volume or role in shaping policy. Instead, what exists is a security apparatus calibrated for counterinsurgency and surveillance. Trade has never been part of the mandate.

The northeast remains structurally unrepresented in the institutions that shape India's economic future. Not a single member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council hails from the region. The Board of Trade, tasked with steering India's export strategy, has no substantive voice from Mizoram, Tripura, or Arunachal Pradesh. Schemes such as Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) are rolled out with fanfare in industrial belts stretching from Gujarat to Tamil Nadu. But the hills and the valleys of the northeast are left to navigate global markets without infrastructure, without logistics, and without institutional leverage. This is not mere bureaucratic oversight. It is a cold calculation that the region can be symbolically embraced, yet economically orphaned. As recently as 2024, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade's strategic export plan had 87 pages without a single section on the northeast's corridor. The omission was not protected. It was simply assumed.

In Assam, the tea economy is fraying. Prices stagnate, labour shortages persist, and estates are



Sangman Hansing
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stretched thin. A 25% tariff hike in key western markets threatens to push margins below viability. "We're holding on with fingertips," said a Dibrugarh planter who oversees over 500 workers. "If the US (United States) and EU (European Union) buyers cut orders, we'll have to start scaling back operations immediately."

The region accounts for more than half of India's total tea output, but almost none of the high-value packaging or branding. The bulk is still CTC-grade, sold in auctions, exposed to every market swing. Buyers are in reassessment mode and cost-cutting has begun in the Upper Assam belt and the Dooars. Wages are flatlining. Inputs are thinning. The next to go will be jobs.

At Numaligarh, the refinery runs like a nervous artery through Assam's energy spine. Most of its crude still comes from Oil India and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited fields nearby, but that is changing. The expansion to nine-million metric tonnes per annum means that it must look outward toward Paradip, and, increasingly, toward discounted Russian cargoes.

That is where the risk brews. Washington's tariff play, framed partly as a response to India's Russian alignment, casts a long shadow here. If the next round of sanctions hardens or shipping lanes tighten, it will not show up in Mumbai's balance sheets. It will be Golgathi that will shudder.

A silent border with Myanmar, ASEAN

Since the 2021 coup in Naypyidaw, trade across the India-Myanmar frontier has thinned. Highways once envisioned as arteries of regional integration now vanish into checkpoints, chokepoints, and bureaucratic fog. Once porous and alive with exchange, the border now speaks in silence.

India's two principal gateways to Myanmar, Zakhawthar in Mizoram and Moreh in Manipur, have withered into skeletal outposts. Once central to Act East dreams, they now function more as securitised bottlenecks than trade hubs. Infrastructure remains performative – roads exist on paper, customs offices are understaffed, and cold-chain facilities are nowhere to be found. The scrapping of the Free Movement Regime in 2024 was the final blow, severing not just trade but also kinship, daily life and the interwoven economies of the hills.

Surveillance replaced commerce. These are no longer corridors of trade but containment grids, structured by counterinsurgency logic rather than market demand. Where goods do not move, troops do. And as infrastructure decays, these towns slide from economic relevance into strategic emptiness, mapped not for connectivity but for closure. The border is open only to the idea of closure.

The northeast was once mapped as India's strategic region, a bridge to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The bridge never left the drawing board. In policy circles, trade resilience now means shifting from one product category to

another, electronics to semiconductors, textiles to pharma. Geography is not a part of the equation. The assumption is fixed – trade flows through the same corridors that served colonial ports and post-independence industrial clusters. The northeast remains outside that frame, not by oversight, but by design.

Asia's moves, India's inertia

As China consolidates its grip over northern Myanmar through infrastructure investments, militia alliances and a growing intelligence footprint, India continues to squander its own flanks. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which begins at Moreh, now vanishes into the jungle. Surveillance, not commerce, defines India's frontier stance. Where goods do not cross, border forces do. And when movement is reduced to patrols, borderlands do not stay still; they drift toward disorder.

What is required is not reinvention but basic state function. Trade runs on roads, not rhetoric. It moves through warehouses, not white papers. In the northeast, those arteries are missing. Infrastructure is sporadic, and policy presence is thinner still. New Delhi may ink a free trade agreement with London and issue joint statements in Washington, but the substance of those agreements rarely crosses the Siliguri Corridor. The northeast remains unrecognised in both design and delivery. India effectively negotiates global trade while ignoring the geographies that could anchor it.

By treating Mr. Trump's tariffs as a passing irritant, India sidesteps the deeper structural fault – its trade economy is spatially lopsided. A flood in Gujarat or a labour strike in Tamil Nadu is enough to choke the national pipeline. That is not dispersion, it is dependence. The global chessboard has shifted. Supply chains are in motion. China is repositioning capital. Southeast Asia is building alternative corridors. India claims a role in the Indo-Pacific equation, but its export architecture still rests on a few coastal enclaves. Strategic talk rings hollow when the eastern frontier remains disconnected from the commerce map.

A state cannot claim regional left while its eastern flank remains economically hostile. The northeast has never asked for slogans. It requires the minimum grammar of statecraft: roads that reach markets, policies that recognise geography, and governance that sees beyond electoral math. For decades, the region has been told to wait through insurgencies, cessations, and empty policy acronyms. But the world is moving. Trade disruptions are more frequent. Corridors are shifting. And delay now resembles design.

No single tariff will break India, but repeated regional omissions erode the idea of a cohesive economy. This is not a call for retaliation. It is a demand to reform resilience, not as a concentration of strength, but as the ability to absorb shocks from every part of the map. Until then, the blind spot stays intact.

Hot air

Donald Trump's rant against climate change science is helping no one

President Donald Trump delivered to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) an address that was allergic to facts. Describing climate change as the "greatest con job perpetrated on the world", he said that Europe's decades-long trimming of its carbon footprint had come at the expense of shuttered factories and job losses. In his Luddite conception of the workings of climate change, scientists in the early half of the 20th century had said that global cooling "would kill the world" and when that did not happen they said global warming would. And because the world did not end, he reckons, dishonest scientists now refer to it as 'climate change' to sound correct irrespective of the outcome. Never mind the fact that the average global temperature dip of 0.1°C (from 1945-70) was attributed to an increase in sulphur emissions from burning coal. Never mind that there is an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that has, since the 1990s, provided a forum for thousands of scientists to tease apart the effects of natural variations in climate from that due to human-caused ones. Never mind that climate change – the term – means precisely that global warming does not mean hotter weather everywhere but a larger disruption in the circulation of ocean currents and, therefore, increasingly erratic weather.

Mr. Trump's chagrin is less about the subtleties of climate than it is about what it means to the fossil fuel industry. To him, the increasing adoption of solar and wind energy was evidence of countries being on the "brink of destruction" because of pursuing a "green agenda". That the President of a country, which once led the science of parsing the subtleties of anthropogenic warming, would, one day, stand on one of the world's most prestigious podiums to undermine it, shows that deference to scientific wisdom is a thing of the past. There are legitimate criticisms of the multi-lateral process in place to guide climate action, determining justice and equity in remedial action and whether the impact of the climate crisis is undermined, even by its adherents, by making it subservient to the zero-sum chicanery of trade protectionism. The perspective of the leader of the world's largest economy on these would have been valuable. The complexity of weather changes means that it is reasonable to be perplexed about the mechanics of climate change. Painting it as a harbinger of a Mayan apocalypse has not helped either. Yet, it is clear that due to a slow accretion of hard evidence, falsifiable conjecture and measured prognosis, the scientific process is working the way it should. Despite its inefficiencies, the climate conabulation process has positioned the world towards a post-fossil-fuel future. No rant can change that.



The Saudi-Pakistan deal upends India's strategic thought

The announcement by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia of the conclusion of a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement has, expectedly, rankled nerves in New Delhi. In the statement's text, the part which says "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both" has raised concerns and questions alike, specifically over the trajectory of the India-Saudi dynamic.

India has mobilised a global diplomatic effort to isolate Pakistan following the April 2025 terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which led to the largest military exchange between the two countries since 1971. However, an aim to internationally quarantine Pakistan has fallen short. The Saudi-Pakistan deal is another feather in Islamabad's cap since then.

In May, as Operation Sindoor was launched to militarily target terrorist camps inside Pakistan, diplomats from Saudi Arabia and Iran were in New Delhi as missiles began to fly across the border. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Riyadh on an official visit during this period and had rushed back to India due to the terror strike. Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Adel al-Jubeir arrived soon after to meet External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. But Mr. Adel al-Jubeir's meeting at the Prime Minister's Office turned heads, and while both sides remained tight-lipped, Riyadh, in all likelihood, tried to diffuse an escalating situation.

Linked to geopolitical changes

Beyond South Asia, the events above are also a window into the geopolitical fracas unravelling on multiple fronts in West Asia ever since the terror attack by Hamas against Israel, in October 2023, which has pushed a reorienting of strategic calculation across the wider region. Fast forward to September, and the Riyadh-Islamabad agreement is being downplayed but has wider geopolitical reverberations.



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The Riyadh-Islamabad agreement is being downplayed but is one that has wider geopolitical reverberations

Indian interests are peripheral for Riyadh, but for Pakistan, this deal kill two birds with one stone. It rekindles lost sheen with the Kingdom and challenges New Delhi's security concerns simultaneously.

The pact is also a return to normal for what was a strained time between the Kingdom and Pakistan, the Islamic world's only nuclear weapons power. In 2015, the then Nawaz Sharif government had refused to send troops to join Saudi's campaign against the Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen. For decades, the Saudis have seen the Pakistani military, with its extensive real-world experience in warfare – most of which has come against India – as the best force to strengthen its own domestic and regional security. Moreover, with the United States increasingly being viewed as an unreliable military partner in West Asia, Riyadh is back shopping in its traditional stomping grounds. For Islamabad, the nuclear file is once again delivering dividends, albeit more as a matter of chance than design. Nonetheless, its effectiveness has been on display from Washington to Riyadh.

Reports in the western press have suggested that this deal had been in the making for around three years. In a statement, India's Ministry of External Affairs said that it had been aware that such an agreement was under consideration between the two countries. For long, Pakistan, the only Islamic country in the world with nuclear weapons, has been touted as a supermarket for Riyadh's potential nuclear requirements. The "12-day war" between Israel and Iran, and both taking turns to launch weapons at Qatar, has further raised the stakes.

The fundamentals are solid

Beyond the surface, however, the Saudi-Pakistan pact is representative of multiple changes taking place in the international order. First and foremost, there is a false understanding of India's

bulging outreach to West Asia that an institutional wedge can be installed between Islamabad and the Arab states. These bilaterals are based on Islam, ideology, and theological principles. In Saudi and Pakistan's case, it is a further strengthening around Sunnism. The fundamentals of this relationship are unbreakable. Second, Riyadh is now chasing strategic autonomy, multipolarity, and multialignment, all stated foreign policy aims and theories India wishes to implement as its core tenets to become a major power. This blueprint is aspirational to many others, and often, will put major partner states on the opposite end of Indian strategic interests.

The message for India

The challenge raised by the Saudi-Pakistan formalisation for the centrality of the 'Islamic bomb', a term coined by the Pakistani press in the early 1980s, may not be immense, but is a trailer of how the geopolitical chessboard is being stacked. It also represents a core challenge for India, that its culturally risk-averse strategic thought and the slow pace at which this is changing, are increasingly detached from prevailing realities. The Indian leadership needs to onboard risks that come with both the embrace and mobilisation of power. Else, India risks losing traction if fence-sitting remains the chosen path and there is an adoption of an idealistic view of playing the role of 'chief pacifier' chokes strategic choices.

The world is being re-shaped and will not wait for what India believes is going to be "its time". The Saudi-Pakistan pact is Islamabad – and more specifically the Pakistan Army – using disruptions and crevasses in the global and Western order, to its merit. Another opportunity to reshape how the world functions may not return this century. It is now when Indian calculations need to be right and it needs to act with resolve.

Cooling rights in a sweltering South

Access to air conditioning is currently severely limited in developing countries, including in India. Enhancing this access is urgently required as a public health safeguard and a necessity for adaptation to climate change. Cooling is no longer a matter of comfort for the global South, but a frontline adaptation need

EXPLAINER

Ankita Ranjan

In June 2025, the Government of India (GoI) proposed that all new air conditioning systems (ACs) in homes, commercial spaces and vehicles must operate within the temperature range of 20°C to 28°C, with 24°C as the default setting. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) estimates that this proposal could save 20 billion units of energy annually, amounting to ₹10,000 crores and emissions reduction of 16 million tonnes. While such energy-saving measures are important there are more fundamental issues that need to be addressed. Access to air conditioning is currently severely limited in developing countries, including India. Enhancing this access is urgently required as a public health safeguard and a necessity for adaptation to climate change. By treating cooling primarily as an energy and emissions concern, the need to universalise access to cooling and provision of public facilities that can protect vulnerable populations from heat stress often gets sidelined.

In India, access to air conditioning remains severely inadequate, and the main challenge is insufficiency. Cooling is no longer a matter of comfort for the global South, but a frontline adaptation need. In 2021, only 15% of urban and 1% of rural households in India owned an AC. While efficiency and behavioural measures can reduce the emissions footprint of existing units, without simultaneously prioritising access to the most vulnerable, such policies risk becoming symbolic gestures that are ineffective in confronting deeper inequities at the heart of climate justice.

While the national average of AC ownership in India is approximately 5%, it is overwhelmingly concentrated amongst the urban rich. In 2021, the richest 10% in India, mostly residing in urban areas, owned 72% of the total ACs. This disparity is also reflected in



The per capita electricity consumption for space cooling is 7 GJ in the U.S., which is over 28 times higher than in India, 19 times higher than in Indonesia and 13 times higher than in Brazil. FILE PHOTO

interstate and regional differences.

The inter-country cooling divide is even more stark and inequitable. Developed countries have long enjoyed near universal access to thermal comfort, primarily through widespread heating systems, but more recently through the increased adoption of air conditioning. In 2020, nearly 90% households in the U.S. and Japan owned an AC, as compared to 22% in Central and South America and only 6% in Sub-Saharan Africa. The per capita electricity consumption for space cooling is 7 GJ in the U.S., which is over 28 times higher than in India, 19 times higher than in Indonesia and 13 times higher than in Brazil.

During the European heatwave, which peaked around 42°C in cities like London and Paris, urgent public investments were made in cooling infrastructure, with the current AC ownership doubling in Europe since 1990, and the International Energy Agency (IEA) projecting a four-fold increase by 2050. While several major cities in the global South routinely record temperatures above 40°C, the international discourse around their rising cooling demand is widely framed as a mitigation problem, while it is justified

as a necessary adaptation measure for the North, indicating a troubling hypocrisy.

The imperative of cooling

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 2000 and 2019, heat exposure contributed to approximately 489,000 global deaths, with India alone recording more than 20,000 heat-related deaths in this period. While extreme heat is increasingly recognised as one of the prominent health threats in the global South, the resulting mortality or morbidity rate is not solely a function of rising temperatures. It in fact reflects the acute shortage of protective infrastructure such as thermally secured housing, reliable electricity supply and adequately equipped public health systems. In 2022, the majority of the health care facilities in high-income countries had a reliable power supply, whereas nearly one billion people in the lower-middle and low-income countries were served by facilities with unreliable or no power supply.

In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), 12% and 15% health centres, respectively, had no electricity, while only

50% hospitals in SSA reported having a reliable power supply.

Without adequate energy infrastructure, providing essential services such as neonatal care, climate-controlled emergency rooms, and vaccine refrigeration becomes precarious as they rely on stable cooling systems. During periods of extreme heat, countries like Kenya, Ghana and Burkina Faso have recorded sharp spikes in cardiovascular, respiratory and renal conditions that cannot be treated safely in overheated and underpowered facilities. Beyond hospitals, the lack of cooling access also undermines workplace safety and labour productivity.

In India, almost 80% of the labour force is engaged in sectors such as agriculture, construction and street vending; jobs that require strenuous outdoor activities. Recognising this vulnerability, several Indian States and cities have developed Heat Action Plans (HAPs) that include early warning systems, information sharing, heat shelters and public awareness campaigns. However, their implementation is often constrained due to underfunding, limited institutional coordination and weak legal foundations. Addressing these intersecting challenges in the global South requires an urgent need to integrate heat resilience as a core development priority through policies that focus on stronger labour protection, targeted social safety nets and comprehensive heat action plans.

As low-income nations already face staggering challenges due to economic and energy poverty, without large-scale investments in public infrastructure and access to finance from the North, cooling will remain unaffordable for billions in the South. Closing this gap is important to prevent avoidable deaths, protect livelihoods and build climate-resilient public systems. Therefore, cooling must not be treated as a climate liability to be rationed, but as a non-negotiable development right that is crucial for strengthening equity and enabling adaptation.

THE GIST

▼ In 2020, nearly 90% of households in the U.S. and Japan owned an AC, compared to 22% in Central and South America and only 6% in Sub-Saharan Africa

▼ In India, the national average of AC ownership is around 5%, concentrated mostly among the urban rich

▼ The World Health Organization estimates that between 2000 and 2019, heat exposure caused approximately 489,000 deaths globally



Why India's urban definition is failing its growing towns

In the 2011 Census, an urban unit was defined as either a statutory town or a census town

Niranjana K.P.

The story so far:

Registrar General of India (RGI) and Census Commissioner Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan in a letter dated August 14 to the States' Directorates of Census Operations (DCO) said, "It is proposed to retain the same definition for urban areas for Census 2027 as this will ensure comparability with the previous Census and provide the basis for analysis of urbanisation trends in the country."

In the 2011 Census, an urban unit was defined as either a statutory town or a census town. Statutory towns are areas that are formally notified as urban by the State government. They have urban local bodies like municipal corporations, municipal councils and nagar panchayats. All other places that satisfied the following criteria – a minimum population of 5,000, at least 75% of the

male main working population engaged in non-agricultural activities, and a population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km – are classified as census towns. The census towns remain administratively rural, but they function like urban areas.

What are the limitations?

In India, urban local bodies are more autonomous and have more freedom and control over their finances, while Panchayati Raj institutions are limited to implementing centrally designed welfare schemes. Hence, urban status, if granted to a settlement, would imply development of the area.

The current definition of urban and rural areas is a binary that ignores the complex and evolving nature of the settlements in India. It fails to take into account the settlements that fall in the spectrum between rural and urban. Rapid

urbanisation is transforming many villages into towns both in function and form, yet these areas often lack formal recognition and remain under rural governance.

As a result, settlements such as census towns and peri-urban regions – despite having dense populations, non-agricultural livelihoods, and urban lifestyles – remain excluded from urban governance structures and infrastructure provision, leading to gaps in planning, services, and resource allocation.

Census data from 2001 and 2011 show that 251 census towns identified in 2001 remained under rural governance by 2011, despite meeting urban criteria.

West Bengal illustrates this gap. Data from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses show that a significant number of settlements classified as census towns in 2001 continued to be governed by rural local bodies even a decade later. West Bengal

experienced the highest increase in the number of census towns, with 526 new census towns identified in 2011. However, 251 settlements that had already been classified as census towns in 2001 saw no change in governance status by 2011. This delay highlights how many urbanised settlements are not 'municipalised' – that is, not being converted into statutory towns with elected urban local bodies – leaving infrastructure and planning inadequate.

What are the implications?

As India prepares for its next Census, it is crucial to revisit and revise the definition of what qualifies as "urban." A 2019 research paper published in the journal *Population and Environment*, stresses the importance of population size and density in defining what is 'urban.' The study shows that relying solely on a narrow framework – such as a population size above 5,000 and the percentage of non-agricultural workers – can result in a substantial undercount of urban populations. Depending on the density threshold used, India's urban population in 2011 could be 35-57%, higher than the official 31%.

Many settlements that appear rural on paper actually form part of larger, informal urban clusters that lack any recognition under current Census methods, simply because they fall outside

municipal limits or are divided across administrative units.

The 75% male workforce rule is outdated; small towns may not meet this threshold, yet show clear urban traits. Industries, service jobs, and gig economy work are spreading into villages and semi-urban areas, blurring rural-urban distinctions.

The rule also fails to take into account those who engage in both agricultural and non-agricultural work, often seasonally or concurrently. Many people in semi-rural and transitional areas commute daily or seasonally to nearby towns or cities for work, while still maintaining ties to agriculture, either through land ownership or seasonal farming. The expansion of app-based and gig economy jobs into smaller towns and semi-urban or rural areas highlights how urban-type employment is no longer confined to traditionally urban centres. The 'male workforce' criterion is also problematic, as it ignores the women's informal or unpaid work.

Hence, retaining the outdated definition of 'urban' in the 2027 Census risks misclassifying millions, undercounting urbanised areas, and excluding rapidly growing settlements from appropriate governance and services. A rigid, binary framework no longer reflects India's evolving settlement patterns.

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Rajnath's Morocco visit marks new chapter in India-Africa defence ties

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's maiden visit to Morocco to inaugurate India's first overseas defence manufacturing facility has marked the beginning of a new chapter in the long-standing friendship between India and Morocco.

On Tuesday, Mr. Singh and Morocco's Defence Minister Abdelatif Loudiyi jointly inaugurated Tata Advanced Systems Limited's (TASL) state-of-the-art defence manufacturing facility in Berrechid. The plant will produce India's indigenously developed Wheeled Armoured Platform (WhAP), making it a significant milestone in India's growing global defence footprint.

A senior Defence Minis-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Moroccan counterpart Abdelatif Loudiyi at the inauguration of TASL's state-of-the-art defence manufacturing facility at Berrechid. PTI

try official described Morocco as a gateway to Africa and a potential market for Indian defence equipment. "There is a strong demand in Africa for small arms, bulletproof jackets, armoured vehicles, tanks, and helicopters. This is the right time for India to strengthen its presence in the African defence market

by also establishing Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facilities. Russia has traditionally been the major supplier to the continent, but the Ukraine conflict and subsequent sanctions disrupted its supply chains. Since India has long experience with Russian defence equipment as a major importer,

it has a better understanding of maintaining these systems," the official noted.

On India's defence outreach to African nations, Professor Harsh V. Pant, Vice-President - Studies and Foreign Policy at Observer Research Foundation, said, "India is expanding its defence outreach, particularly focusing on enhancing defence exports. Africa presents good opportunities due to historical links and strategic comfort levels with India. India straddles a unique position in global politics by not being part of either the U.S.-China or Russia-West binaries... Sanctions against Russia may create opportunities for India in the African market due to its neutral stance."



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NCST

Bring back tribals who fled Maoist conflict: NCST

The panel has urged the Chhattisgarh govt. and Centre to come up with a dedicated policy, which includes land, jobs and health coverage, for families displaced from the State due to the violence

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has asked the Chhattisgarh government to allot land for agriculture and housing and provide employment and health coverage to Scheduled Tribe families which had fled the State around 2005 amid escalating conflict between Maoists and security personnel.

"Without such strategy, no person will be willing to return to the State," the NCST said calling for the Union Home Affairs and Tribal Affairs Ministries to "frame a dedicated policy/plan for migrated ST persons from Chhattisgarh to other States".

The panel has cited the 2018 Bru resettlement plan as an example to draw from.

The panel has advised the Chhattisgarh government to include "developmental activities" in its plans to bring back the displaced families. "The prescribed amount of land [not less than 5 acres], employment for livelihood,



Nowhere people: Women and children housed in a relief camp at Konta in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh in March 2006. FILE PHOTO

PMAY Housing, community certificates, and ration may be ensured as per the feasibility," it said. The panel said "minimum development infrastructure" such as primary schools, healthcare centres, anganwadi centres, electricity, and water should be ensured in their habitations.

Nodal officers

The NCST has been hearing a representation from Valasa Adhivasula Samalkya, an association representing some of the displaced tribal families currently based in Telangana since 2022. In the process,

the panel has asked each neighbouring State and Chhattisgarh to appoint nodal officers to address the issues of the displaced families, and called for detailed surveys to be conducted to estimate how many such families exist and in which States they currently reside.

The NCST had also asked the Union government to formulate a dedicated policy for these displaced families multiple times while dealing with this representation.

On September 8, the commission asked the Chhattisgarh government

to examine the Bru resettlement plan of 2018 to create a similar scheme for displaced tribal families, which addresses their concerns wherever they have now settled and also provides for their rehabilitation to their home districts.

Displaced tribals

One official said that most of the displaced tribals had settled in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh from Chhattisgarh. However, even though the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments' district-level survey reports showed that there were 3,335 such families in their States, an independent survey report prepared by the petitioner association indicated the number to be closer to 9,651.

The NCST, taking the survey report of the petitioners on record, called for this report to be sent to the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and also asked the association to prepare similar reports accounting for displaced families who might have moved to Maharashtra or Odisha.



DRDO conducts rail-based launch of Agni-Prime missile

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) successfully test-fired the Intermediate Range Agni-Prime missile from a rail-based mobile launcher on Thursday, under full operational conditions. The Defence Ministry said the next-generation missile, designed for a range of up to 2,000 km, incorporates advanced features and marks the first launch from a specially developed rail-based system capable of rapid, low-visibility deployment with cross-country mobility. The missile's trajectory was tracked by multiple ground stations, with the test meeting all mission objectives.

India, Russia discuss BRICS grain exchange plan to boost agriculture trade ties

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Patrushev here on Thursday and discussed plans of creating a common agricultural food exchange that will help in boosting agriculture trade among the BRICS member-countries. Mr. Modi conveyed his greetings to President Vladimir Putin saying he is looking forward to welcoming him for the 23rd India-Russia annual summit to be hosted here later this year.

"Happy to meet Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Patrushev at the World Food India 2025. We discussed ways to strengthen our win-win cooperation in agriculture, fertilizers and food processing,"



Trade diplomacy : Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Patrushev with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the World Food India 2025 program in New Delhi, on Thursday. DPR PMO

said Mr. Modi after the meeting.

The Russian Embassy said the two sides discussed the ongoing work on a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union. "Additionally, the topic of creating a BRICS Grain Exchange was raised – a move that will help boost mutual agricultural trade,"

said the Embassy.

"Russia highly values its special and privileged partnership with India. India is one of Russia's key allies in the international arena. Every year, Russian-Indian economic cooperation reaches impressive levels. In 2024, the trade turnover between our two countries reached a historic high," said Mr. Patrushev.

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Coffee Board to hold EU rule awareness programmes: CEO

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

The Coffee Board is holding 'extensive' awareness and capacity-building programmes to increase the number of growers registering on its mobile application for EUDR compliance, said the Board's chief executive officer (CEO) and Secretary Kurma Rao.

The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which is expected to come into effect from December 30 for large exporters, mandates proof that coffee is not linked to deforestation after December 31, 2020. It will come into effect for



Growers must prove coffee not linked to deforestation.

small growers from June 30 next year.

Geo-location data

The Coffee Board has provision on its mobile app for the exporters and growers to register and add geo-location data.

The board is interacting with all associations and stakeholders to improve awareness. There are about 4.41 lakh growers. So far, the app has about 9,000 registrations for EUDR compliance.

Coffee exports in 2024-2025 crossed the \$1,000 million mark for the fourth consecutive year to register \$1,803 million. There is slight growth in volume of exports too, he said.

In the local market, the board is working on improving the per-capita consumption. There will be "Walk With Coffee" events across India this year for International Coffee Day fete on October 1, he said.

UPSC PYQ -2022

Q. With reference to the "Tea Board" in India, consider the following statements :

1. The Tea Board is a statutory body.
2. It is a regulatory body attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
3. The Tea Board's Head Office is situated in Bengaluru.
4. The Board has overseas offices at Dubai and Moscow.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 3
- b) 2 and 4
- c) 3 and 4
- d) 1 and 4

UPSC PYQ-2010

Q. Though coffee and tea both are cultivated on hill slopes, there is some difference between them regarding their cultivation. In this context, consider the following statements: (2010)

1. Coffee plant requires a hot and humid climate of tropical areas whereas tea can be cultivated in both tropical and subtropical areas.
2. Coffee is propagated by seeds but tea is propagated by stem cuttings only.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2