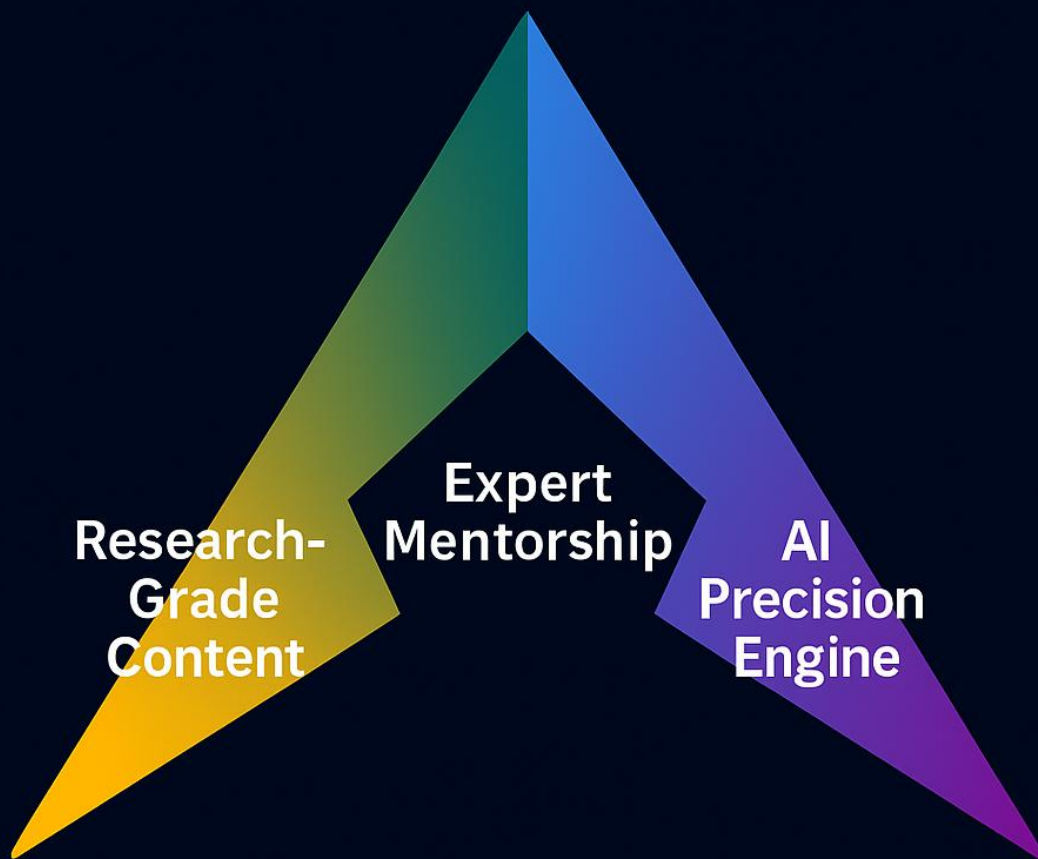


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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 21.05.2026

GS Paper II: International Relations

1. India-Italy Special Strategic Partnership

a. Introduction

India and Italy have upgraded their bilateral relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership, marking an important development in India's engagement with Europe. During talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Rome, both countries agreed on a new roadmap covering trade, defence industry, connectivity corridors, critical minerals, countering money laundering and combating terror financing.

The development is significant because Italy is not only a major economy of the European Union, but also an important Mediterranean power. Its geographical position connects Europe with North Africa, West Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific imagination. For India, closer ties with Italy can support economic diplomacy, defence indigenisation, supply-chain resilience and strategic connectivity.

India's relations with Italy should be seen as part of a broader diplomatic pattern. India is increasingly moving beyond its traditional European focus on France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and is now engaging other important European powers through issue-based partnerships. Italy's role in the European Union, the Mediterranean region and global industrial supply chains makes it a useful partner in India's wider foreign policy strategy.

This partnership therefore needs to be understood not merely as a bilateral upgrade, but as part of India's wider attempt to build issue-based partnerships with important European powers.

b. Key Features of the Partnership

- **Economic Roadmap:** India and Italy have set a bilateral trade target of twenty billion euros by 2029. This indicates that both countries want to move beyond symbolic diplomacy and create measurable economic outcomes.
- **Defence Industrial Cooperation:** Both sides have agreed on a defence industrial roadmap. This reflects a desire to deepen cooperation in defence manufacturing, technology collaboration and industrial partnerships.
- **Critical Minerals and Financial Security:** Agreements have also been concluded in areas such as critical minerals, countering money laundering and combating terror financing. These areas show that the partnership is not limited to trade alone, but also includes economic security and internal security concerns.
- **Connectivity Corridors:** Connectivity corridors were discussed as an important area of cooperation. This is significant because India is increasingly interested in trade and infrastructure routes that connect India with West Asia and Europe. Italy's Mediterranean location gives it relevance in such connectivity frameworks.
- **Diplomatic Upgrade:** The relationship has moved from normal strategic engagement to a Special Strategic Partnership. This suggests higher political trust, long-term planning and a broader convergence of interests.

Taken together, these features show that the India-Italy partnership is multi-dimensional, combining economic, strategic, industrial and security interests.

c. Strategic Significance of the Partnership

- **India's Wider European Strategy**
The upgrade of India-Italy ties reflects India's broader strategy of building strong relations with key European powers. For a long time, India's European engagement was largely centred on a few major countries. However, the changing global order has created space for deeper partnerships with countries such as Italy, which have strong industrial capabilities, maritime relevance and diplomatic influence within Europe.

- **Italy's Geographical Importance**

Italy's geographical location gives it particular importance. Situated in the Mediterranean, Italy acts as a bridge between Europe, North Africa and West Asia. This makes it relevant for India's interest in connectivity corridors, maritime trade routes and Europe–West Asia linkages.

- **Relevance for India's Westward Outreach**

As India looks to expand its economic and strategic reach westwards, Italy can become a useful partner in connecting Indian interests with European markets and Mediterranean trade networks.

Thus, the strategic value of Italy lies not only in bilateral cooperation, but also in its ability to connect India with wider European and Mediterranean geographies.



d. Economic Dimension

- **Trade and Industrial Complementarity**

The trade target of twenty billion euros by 2029 reflects the intention of both countries to give economic substance to the partnership. Italy has strengths in manufacturing, industrial machinery, design, green technology, defence equipment, fashion, luxury goods and advanced engineering. India, on the other hand, offers a large domestic market, skilled labour, a growing industrial base and expanding digital capacity.

- **Link with India's Development Priorities**

This complementarity can support India's broader goals under Make in India, export-led growth and supply-chain diversification. At a time when countries are trying to reduce excessive dependence on concentrated supply chains, India and Italy can work together in sectors such as manufacturing, clean technology, mobility, food processing and advanced industrial systems.

- **Implementation Concerns**

However, economic cooperation will require more than diplomatic announcements. Differences in regulatory standards, market access concerns, tariff issues and India–European Union trade negotiations may affect the pace of cooperation. Therefore, the trade target must be supported by investment facilitation, business-to-business linkages, smoother regulatory coordination and stronger institutional follow-up.

The economic dimension therefore forms the foundation of the partnership, but its success will depend on whether both countries can convert political intent into sustained commercial outcomes.

e. Defence and Industrial Cooperation

- **Importance of Defence Roadmap**

The defence industrial roadmap is one of the most significant elements of the upgraded partnership. India is trying to reduce dependence on defence imports and build long-term partnerships based on co-development, co-production and technology transfer. Cooperation with Italy can help diversify India's defence partnerships and reduce overdependence on a limited number of traditional suppliers.

- **Italy's Defence Capabilities**

Italy has experience in defence technology, shipbuilding, aerospace systems and advanced manufacturing. These capabilities can be relevant for India's defence modernisation and indigenisation objectives. If implemented effectively, the defence roadmap can support domestic manufacturing, private sector participation and technological upgrading in India's defence ecosystem.

- **Practical Challenges**

At the same time, defence cooperation will face practical challenges. Technology transfer, intellectual property rights, procurement timelines, cost negotiations and domestic industrial participation will need careful handling. The success of this roadmap will depend on whether both sides can convert broad intent into concrete projects.

Defence cooperation thus adds strategic depth to the relationship, but it will require patience, trust and project-level implementation.

f. Critical Minerals and Economic Security

- **Strategic Importance of Critical Minerals**

Critical minerals cooperation is strategically important in the present global context. Technologies related to clean energy, semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries, telecommunications and defence systems depend heavily on secure access to minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and rare earth elements.

- **Relevance for India**

India is vulnerable because many global critical mineral supply chains are concentrated in a few countries. Cooperation with reliable partners like Italy can help India diversify sources, promote joint exploration, improve processing capacity and develop recycling technologies. This will strengthen India's economic security and support its transition towards clean energy and advanced manufacturing.

- **From Commerce to Strategy**

Critical minerals are no longer merely a commercial issue. They have become a strategic concern because control over mineral supply chains can influence industrial competitiveness, energy transition and national security.

This makes critical minerals cooperation a natural extension of the economic and strategic logic of the India-Italy partnership.

g. Counter-Terror Financing and Financial Security

- **Security Dimension of the Partnership**

The partnership also includes cooperation against money laundering and terror financing. This gives the relationship an important security dimension.

- **Relevance for India**

For India, illicit financial flows are closely linked with terrorism, organised crime, narcotics, illegal migration networks and cross-border security threats. Terror groups and criminal organisations increasingly use complex financial channels, shell entities, digital assets and informal transfer networks to move funds. Cooperation with European partners can improve financial intelligence sharing, enforcement coordination and legal assistance.

- **Italy's Experience**

Italy also has experience in dealing with organised crime and financial investigations. Therefore, cooperation in this field can help both countries strengthen institutional capacity against transnational criminal networks.

This area shows how modern bilateral partnerships increasingly combine external diplomacy with internal security and financial regulation.

h. Challenges

- **India–European Union Trade Complexities:** The first challenge is the complexity of India–European Union trade negotiations. Issues such as tariffs, labour standards, environmental regulations, intellectual property and market access can slow down economic cooperation.
- **Implementation Gap:** The second challenge relates to implementation. Strategic partnerships often produce broad statements, but their actual value depends on sector-wise timelines, institutional mechanisms and regular review.
- **Defence Collaboration Issues:** The third challenge lies in defence collaboration. Technology transfer, procurement rules, industrial participation and long-term maintenance arrangements must be clearly defined.
- **Geopolitical Uncertainty:** The fourth challenge is geopolitical uncertainty. Europe’s security priorities, the Russia–Ukraine conflict, changing global supply chains and tensions in West Asia can affect the pace and direction of cooperation.

These challenges do not reduce the importance of the partnership, but they show that sustained follow-up will be essential for converting diplomatic ambition into concrete outcomes.

i. Way Forward

- **Sector-Specific Action Plans:** India and Italy should convert the Special Strategic Partnership into clear sector-specific action plans with defined timelines. Economic cooperation must be supported through investment promotion, industry-level dialogues and smoother regulatory coordination.
- **Defence and Technology Cooperation:** In defence, both countries should focus on joint ventures, co-production and technology partnerships that contribute to India’s indigenisation goals. Cooperation should also be expanded in green technology, advanced manufacturing, mobility, clean energy and digital innovation.
- **Critical Minerals and Supply-Chain Resilience:** Critical minerals cooperation should include exploration, processing, recycling and supply-chain resilience. India can also use Italy as a bridge for deeper engagement with the European Union, especially in trade, technology and connectivity.
- **Security Cooperation:** On security, both countries should strengthen institutional mechanisms for countering terror financing, money laundering, organised crime and illicit financial networks. Regular dialogue between enforcement agencies and financial intelligence institutions can make this cooperation more effective.

A focused way forward should therefore combine economic ambition, defence cooperation, supply-chain resilience and institutionalised security dialogue.

Conclusion

The India–Italy Special Strategic Partnership reflects India’s growing emphasis on diversified, issue-based diplomacy with key European powers. By combining trade, defence industry, critical minerals, connectivity and financial-security cooperation, it can strengthen India’s economic resilience and strategic autonomy. Its success, however, will depend on timely implementation, technology partnerships, and sustained institutional engagement.

GS Paper III: Disaster Management

2. Rising Night-Time Heat

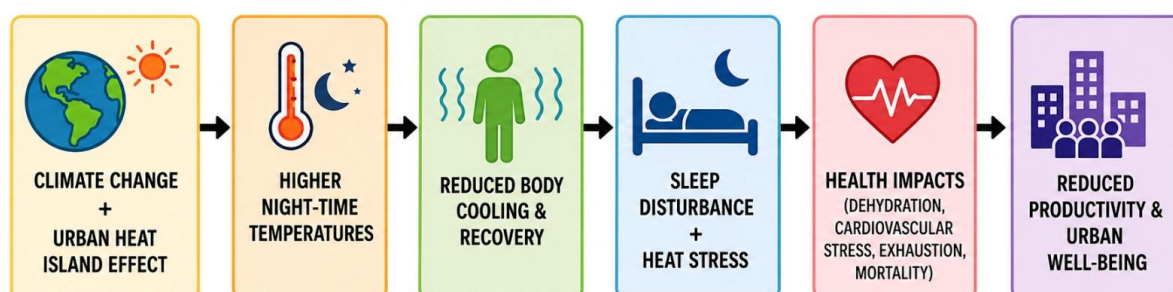
a. Introduction

Rising night-time heat is emerging as a serious climate-related public health risk in Indian cities. While daytime heatwaves receive greater attention, hotter nights can be equally dangerous because they prevent the human body from recovering from heat stress accumulated during the day. This problem is especially severe in low- and middle-income urban housing, where poor ventilation, dense construction and limited access to cooling increase indoor thermal exposure.

The issue lies at the intersection of climate change, urban planning, public health and social inequality. It shows that extreme heat is no longer only an episodic disaster linked to declared heatwaves, but is increasingly becoming a prolonged environmental condition affecting everyday urban life.

This makes night-time heat an important lens to understand how climate change interacts with urban form, housing quality and public health vulnerability.

HOW RISING NIGHT-TIME HEAT BECOMES A PUBLIC HEALTH RISK



b. Key Facts and Emerging Concerns

- **Rising Temperature Trend**
India's average temperature increased by about 0.7 degrees Celsius between 1901 and 2018. Both daytime and night-time temperatures are rising, but projections suggest that night-time temperatures may increase faster in the future.
- **Evidence from Indian Cities**
Recent evidence points to serious risks in Indian urban areas. A Climate Trends study in Chennai found that people living in low- and middle-income houses were often sleeping in indoor temperatures above 32 degrees Celsius, and in some cases even above 35 degrees Celsius. In Ahmedabad, experts have observed a strong correlation between higher night-time temperatures and increased all-cause mortality.
- **Gaps in Heat Governance**
India has made progress in heat governance, with more than 23 States and 200 cities now having Heat Action Plans. However, many of these plans remain focused mainly on officially declared heatwave events. They often do not adequately address prolonged heat exposure, indoor heat stress and night-time thermal discomfort.

These facts show that India's heat challenge is moving beyond outdoor daytime temperature and now requires attention to indoor, night-time and prolonged exposure patterns.

c. Why Night-Time Heat Matters

- **Impact on Human Recovery**

A cooler night plays an important role in human health because it allows the body to recover from daytime heat exposure. During the day, high temperatures place stress on the body's thermoregulation system. If the night remains hot, the body does not get sufficient time to cool down. This makes heat exposure continuous rather than temporary.

- **Health and Productivity Effects**

Such continuous exposure can lead to disturbed sleep, exhaustion, dehydration, reduced productivity, cardiovascular stress and higher mortality risk. The danger is particularly high for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, pregnant women, outdoor workers, people with chronic illnesses and residents of informal settlements.

- **Wider Urban Consequences**

Night-time heat is therefore not merely a matter of discomfort. It is a public health concern that can affect labour productivity, learning outcomes, household well-being and urban resilience.

This is why heat governance must move beyond the visible crisis of daytime heatwaves and recognise the invisible but persistent risks of hotter nights.

d. Urban Heat Island Effect and Night-Time Heat

- **Meaning of Urban Heat Island Effect**

Indian cities are especially vulnerable because of the urban heat island effect. This refers to the condition in which urban areas become hotter than surrounding rural areas because of dense construction, loss of vegetation and heat-absorbing materials.

- **Role of Built Environment**

Concrete, asphalt roads, bricks, metal roofs and glass-fronted buildings absorb heat during the day and slowly release it at night. As a result, cities remain warmer even after sunset. The problem is intensified by shrinking water bodies, declining tree cover, dense high-rise clusters, narrow lanes, poor ventilation and waste heat released by air-conditioners and vehicles.

- **Planning Failure and Local Heat Risk**

This shows that night-time heat is not only caused by global climate change. It is also shaped by local urban planning choices. Poor land-use planning, excessive concretisation and inadequate housing design can convert rising temperatures into a severe health hazard.

Therefore, reducing night-time heat requires not only climate action, but also a fundamental shift in how cities are planned, built and governed.

e. Social Inequality and Climate Justice

- **Unequal Heat Exposure**

The burden of rising night-time heat is deeply unequal. Wealthier households can often protect themselves through air-conditioning, better housing design, insulated buildings and access to reliable electricity. In contrast, low-income households may live in cramped rooms, tin-roofed structures, informal settlements or poorly ventilated rental housing.

- **Vulnerability of Low-Income Households**

For such households, indoor temperatures may remain dangerously high throughout the night. Women, children, elderly persons and people working in physically demanding occupations may face compounded risks. In many cases, the people least responsible for urban emissions and climate change suffer the greatest exposure to heat.

- **Climate Justice Dimension**

This makes night-time heat an issue of climate justice. It highlights the need to design heat policies not only around temperature thresholds, but also around housing quality, income, occupation, health status and access to cooling.

The social dimension of night-time heat shows that climate adaptation must be equity-oriented, otherwise the poorest residents will continue to bear the highest risks.

f. Limitations of Existing Heat Action Plans

- **Achievements of Heat Action Plans:** Heat Action Plans have improved India's preparedness against extreme heat by promoting early warnings, public awareness, medical preparedness and inter-agency coordination. However, their focus is often limited to officially declared heatwave conditions.
- **Narrow Threshold-Based Approach:** This approach has limitations. First, harmful heat exposure may occur even when temperatures do not meet the formal heatwave threshold. Second, people may suffer from prolonged indoor heat, particularly during nights, which is not adequately captured by outdoor daytime temperature data. Third, many plans are emergency-oriented and do not sufficiently address long-term urban cooling.
- **Need for Broader Heat Governance:** Therefore, India's heat governance needs to move beyond short-term disaster response. It must include city design, housing standards, public health surveillance, labour protection and climate-resilient infrastructure.

These limitations underline the need to redesign Heat Action Plans so that they address heat as a chronic urban risk, not only as an emergency event.

g. Way Forward

- **Include Night-Time Heat in Heat Action Plans**
India must revise Heat Action Plans to include night-time heat and indoor thermal exposure as core risk indicators. Heat-risk assessment should not be based only on maximum daytime temperature, but should also consider minimum night-time temperature, humidity, housing conditions and vulnerable populations.
- **Promote Passive Cooling**
Passive cooling methods should be promoted on a large scale. These include reflective roof coatings, whitewashed roofs, cool walls, shaded windows, better insulation and climate-sensitive building design. Such measures are especially important because they reduce heat exposure without creating excessive dependence on energy-intensive air-conditioning.
- **Improve Housing and Building Standards**
Affordable housing and rental housing must include improved ventilation standards. Building codes should encourage cross-ventilation, shaded open spaces, heat-resistant materials and orientation suited to local climate conditions.
- **Strengthen Urban Ecological Planning**
Urban planning must also focus on increasing green cover, restoring water bodies and reducing excessive concretisation. Trees, parks, wetlands and shaded public spaces can lower local temperatures and improve thermal comfort.
- **Integrate Heat-Risk Mapping with Public Health**
Heat-risk mapping should be integrated with public health surveillance, early warning systems and urban planning. Cities must identify neighbourhoods where people face the highest exposure due to poor housing, dense settlement patterns or lack of access to cooling.
- **Protect Vulnerable Groups**
Special attention should be given to vulnerable groups such as elderly persons, children, outdoor workers, informal settlers, low-income households and people with chronic illnesses. Cooling centres, public drinking water points, community shelters and targeted health advisories can reduce immediate risks.

A comprehensive response must therefore combine immediate public health protection with long-term changes in urban planning, housing design and climate governance.

Conclusion

Rising night-time heat shows that climate change is no longer limited to visible daytime heatwaves. It is becoming a continuous public health hazard that affects sleep, health, productivity and urban well-being.

India's response must shift from narrow heatwave management to broader climate-resilient urban planning. This requires passive cooling, better housing design, urban greening, stronger public health

preparedness and heat-sensitive governance. Addressing night-time heat is therefore essential not only for climate adaptation, but also for building healthier, fairer and more resilient Indian cities.

In this sense, night-time heat represents a critical test of India's ability to convert climate adaptation into socially just and health-centred urban policy.

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