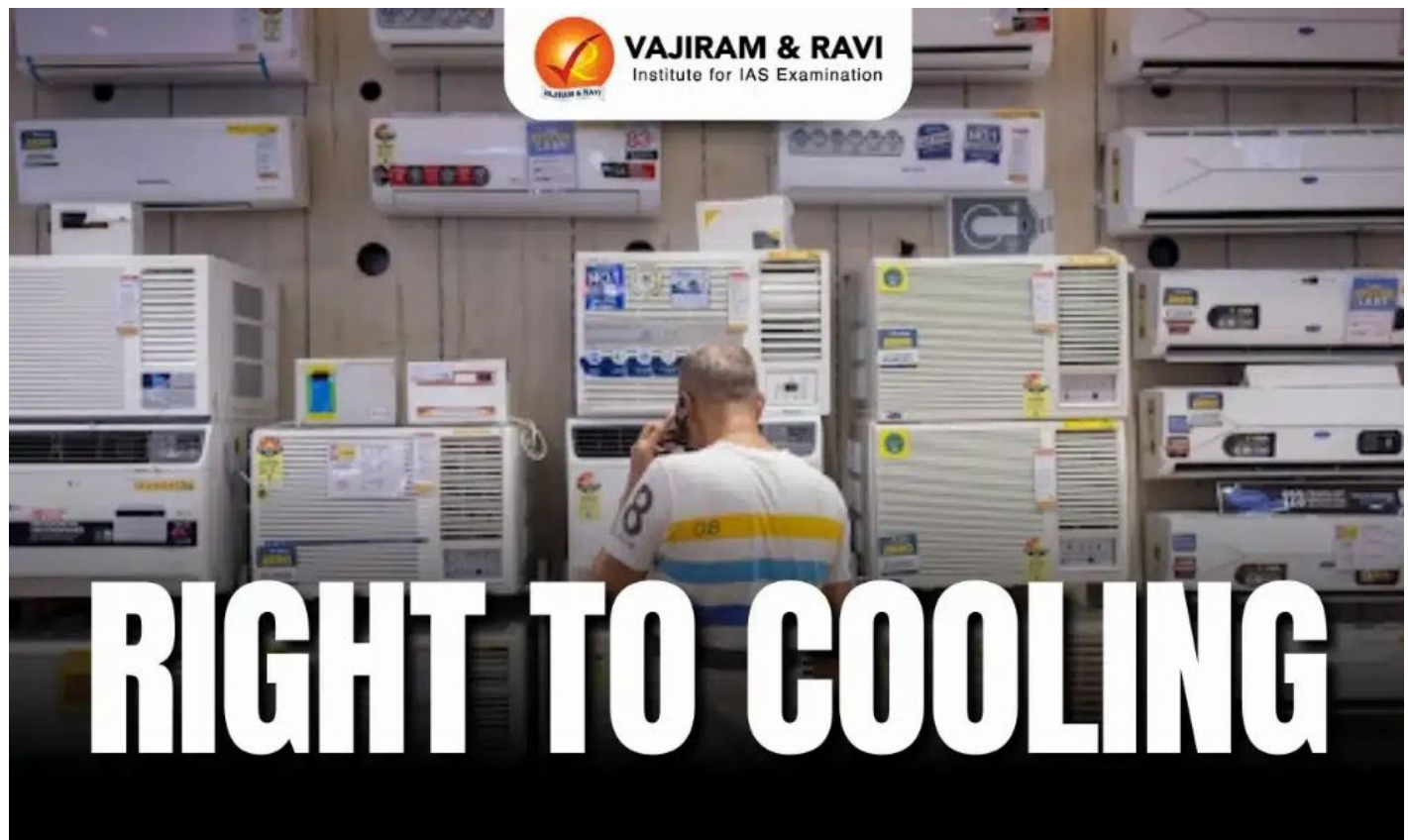


## Right to Cooling in the Global South - Explained

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### Right to Cooling Latest News

- The government's proposal to regulate air conditioner efficiency has reignited debate on the **Right to Cooling** as a public health and climate justice imperative in India and the Global South.

### Introduction

- The intensifying heatwaves across the **Global South**, including India, have turned cooling into an essential public health safeguard rather than a luxury.
- In June 2025, the Government of India proposed regulations requiring all new air conditioners to function within a temperature range of 20°C to 28°C, with 24°C as the default setting.
- While the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** (BEE) projects that such a move could save 20 billion units of electricity annually and cut emissions by 16 million tonnes, the debate extends far beyond efficiency.
- It raises urgent questions of equity, climate justice, and the universal right to cooling.

### Access to Cooling in India and the Global South

- Cooling access in India remains severely inadequate. In 2021, only 13% of urban households and 1% of rural households owned air conditioners, with overall national penetration at around 5%.
- The disparity is stark: Delhi reports 32% household ownership, while low-income states such as Bihar and Odisha report just 1%, despite recording extreme heat conditions.
- Globally, the contrast is sharper. Nearly 90% of households in the U.S. and Japan own an air conditioner, compared to 22% in Latin America and just 6% in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Per capita electricity consumption for cooling in the U.S. is 28 times higher than in India.
- Despite these inequities, the discourse on cooling in the South is often framed as a climate burden, while in the North it is justified as a health necessity.

## Health and Productivity Implications

- Extreme heat is no longer just a climate phenomenon but a direct public health hazard.
- According to the **World Health Organisation** (WHO), heat exposure caused 489,000 global deaths between 2000 and 2019, with India recording over 20,000.
- The lack of reliable electricity, inadequate thermally secure housing, and under-equipped public health infrastructure amplify vulnerabilities.
- The **International Labour Organisation** (ILO) estimates that over 70% of the global workforce was exposed to excessive heat in 2020, causing 23 million occupational injuries and nearly 19,000 deaths.
- In India, where 80% of workers are in agriculture, construction, or street vending, the absence of heat-resilient workspaces threatens both health and livelihoods.

## Policy Interventions and Heat Action Plans

- Several Indian states and cities have initiated **heat action plans**, including early warning systems, public shelters, and awareness drives.
- However, weak institutional capacity, limited funding, and poor legal backing have restricted their effectiveness. Millions remain vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, productivity losses, and income insecurity.
- The government's regulatory approach to air conditioner efficiency is commendable for energy savings, but risks being symbolic if not paired with stronger investments in affordable cooling access for the vulnerable.

## Climate Justice and the Right to Cooling

- Developed countries historically invested heavily in heating systems, often backed by subsidies and unchecked emissions.
- Today, developing nations like India face a similar need for cooling but with fewer resources and under mounting international pressure to decarbonise.
- Global emissions from cooling stand at one billion tonnes annually, far lower than heating-related emissions, yet the cooling demand is projected to triple by 2050, with India's share growing eightfold.
- For the Global South, the challenge is twofold: **achieving efficient cooling** while **ensuring universal access**.
- Thus, cooling must be recognised not merely as a **mitigation liability** but as a **development right** tied to health, equity, and livelihood security.

- Bridging the gap requires financial and technological support from developed nations, large-scale public investment, and integration of cooling into climate adaptation strategies.

**Source:** TH

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