

Odisha hit by over nine lakh lightning strikes this year

Five States accounted for half of the cloud-to-ground strikes, finds a study

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Five States accounted for half of the lightning strikes in India in 2019, led by Odisha with 9,37,462 or about 16% of the cloud-to-ground strikes.

This is among the findings of an analysis of lightning strikes in India – the most widespread killer among natural calamities – from January to August by the private weather agency Skymet. There were 20 million lightning strikes in that period, with 72% of them being instances of ‘in-cloud’ lightning.

In-cloud strikes result from a friction in a cloud, whereas cloud-to-ground

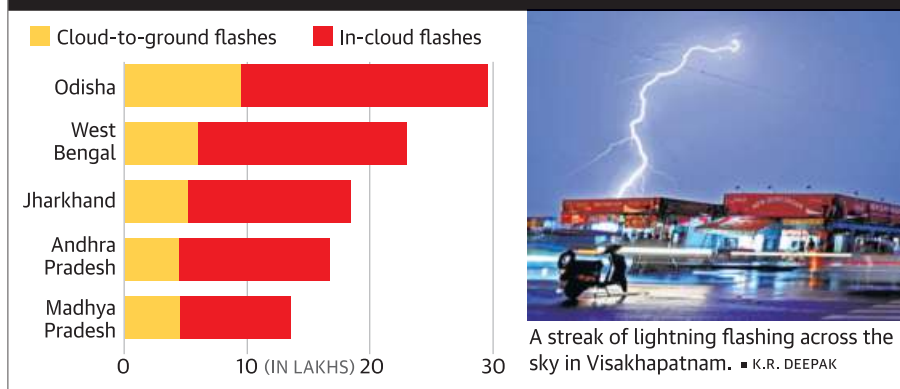
ones, which are responsible for deaths, happen when electric charges travel to the ground.

Odisha accounts for nearly 7,00,000 more total lightning strikes than the second-placed West Bengal, though it had only 3,50,000 more of the cloud-to-ground strikes.

Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh accounted for the rest.

Peak activity in June
June saw the most lightning flashes – 56,04,214 – during the first eight months of 2019, which is when the monsoon sets in. Temperatures are extremely hot dur-

Flash struck | Odisha saw nearly 30 lakh counts of lightning in the first eight months of 2019, the highest in India, according to Skymet



A streak of lightning flashing across the sky in Visakhapatnam. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

ing June, ranging from 32 degrees Celsius to 40 degrees Celsius. A rise in lightning activity begins in May, peaks in June and tapers by August.

Skymet makes its assessment based on 1,700 sensors spread across the country

and claims that it sends alerts 45 minutes before “dangerous lightning” strikes an area.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there were 8,684 deaths in the country due to causes “at-

tributable to forces of nature” during 2016. Of them, 38.2% deaths were due to lightning, 15.4% due to heat and sun stroke and 8.9% due to floods.

A more recent report from the Climate Resilient Observ-

ing Systems Promotion Council (CROPC) that relies on the India Meteorological Department’s lightning forecasts analysed lightning patterns and deaths this year from April 1 to July 31.

Most deaths in U.P.

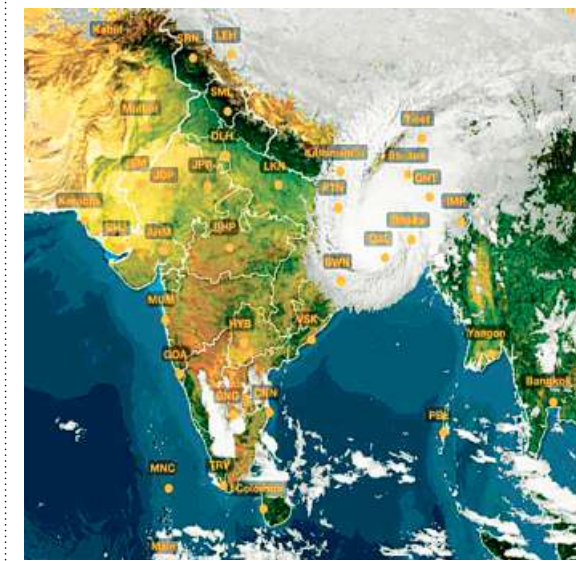
At 224, Uttar Pradesh registered the maximum number of deaths due to lightning, followed by Bihar (170), Odisha (129), and Jharkhand (118).

Varied coping mechanisms and grades of infrastructure determine the level of casualty from lightning in the States. For instance, the CROPC report says, Odisha had the highest number of strikes – 9 lakh-plus – and 129 deaths.

But Uttar Pradesh had 300 strikes and 200 deaths.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18:00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Heavy to very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya, Gangetic West Bengal, Kerala, Mahe, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning at isolated places likely over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, south-interior Karnataka. Sea condition likely to be high to very high along and off West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	
Agartala	10.3	28.0	23.0	Kozhikode	...	34.0	25.0	
Ahmedabad	...	32.0	21.0	Kurnool	...	34.0	24.0	
Aizawl	...	23.0	16.0	Lucknow	...	30.0	16.0	
Allahabad	...	30.0	17.0	Madurai	...	33.0	24.0	
Bengaluru	...	29.0	20.0	Mangaluru	...	29.0	23.0	
Bhopal	...	29.0	19.0	Mumbai	...	30.4	28.0	
Bhubaneswar	...	4.0	28.0	19.0	Mysuru	...	31.0	28.0
Chandigarh	...	1.0	28.0	14.0	New Delhi	...	30.0	16.0
Chennai	...	35.0	26.0	Patna	...	31.0	21.0	
Coimbatore	...	33.0	22.0	Port Blair	...	0.1	32.0	
Dehradun	...	29.0	13.0	Puducherry	...	34.0	24.0	
Gangtok	...	20.0	13.0	Pune	...	31.0	17.0	
Goa	...	33.0	23.0	Raipur	...	29.0	19.0	
Guwahati	...	0.1	29.0	22.0	Ranchi	...	25.0	17.0
Hubballi	29.0	19.0	Shillong	...	9.0	22.0
Hyderabad	...	32.0	21.0	Shimla	...	21.0	9.0	
Imphal	...	10.7	25.0	18.0	Srinagar
Jaipur	...	30.0	19.0	Thiruvananthapuram	...	34.0	24.0	
Kochi	...	0.4	31.0	25.0	Tiruchi	...	34.0	24.0
Kohima	...	26.0	13.0	Vijayawada	...	32.0	20.0	
Kolkata	...	19.7	23.0	20.0	Visakhapatnam	...	30.0	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	...	182	47	...	77	102	...
Bengaluru	...	3	59	44	...	123	126
Chennai	...	4	23	29	...	264	...
Delhi	...	5	26	34	...	320	213
Hyderabad	...	8	50	33	...	249	...
Kolkata	...	7	19	11	...	22	104
Lucknow	...	7	38	37	...	408	...
Mumbai	...	17	56	9	...	59	119
Pune	...	78	11	64	...	60	60
Visakhapatnam	...	25	80	33	...	143	153

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

IN BRIEF



Probe ordered into midday meal anomalies

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal ordered a probe into anomalies in the execution of the midday meal scheme in the State. Various organisations have protested outsourcing of the scheme to NGOs, which have allegedly been serving standard food to children.

IIT Madras student ends life

A 19-year-old first-year student of the Humanities and Social Sciences Department was found dead in her room in a hostel of the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras. The police suspect it was suicide. Police personnel have sent the body for post-mortem.

Puducherry airport to be fully solar powered soon

The Puducherry airport will soon be fully powered by solar energy with the completion of a 500 kW solar plant that can generate 500 to 3,000 units a day. The installation of around 1,500 solar panels has been completed so far. The plant was estimated to cost about ₹3.5 crore, said Vijaya Upadhyay, Director, Puducherry Airport.

MMR falls further in Tamil Nadu

State remains in the third position in the country, behind Kerala and Maharashtra

RAMYA KANNAN
CHENNAI

The latest Sample Registration System (SRS) data on the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has put Tamil Nadu at 63, indicating that the State’s continuing efforts to bring down the number of maternal deaths seem to be working.

As the pace of the fall slows down, the next major drop in the State’s MMR would have to be fuelled by a quantum leap in maternal care activities.

Tamil Nadu remains in the third position in the country, only behind Kerala (42) and Maharashtra (55), as revealed by the SRS data for the 2015-2017 period. MMR is read as the number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births.

While at 63, Tamil Nadu’s MMR is way below the all-India figure of 122, the pace of the fall has slowed down when compared to the previous interval.

Between 2011 and 2013 and 2014 and 2016, the State’s MMR had fallen from 79 to 66 – a drop of 16%.

Just as in the case of Kerala, the rate of reduction is slowing down – something, experts point out, may be expected in States that have steadily falling maternal mortality ratios. The last



The State has launched an intensive three-month study of the health status of mothers. ■ PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION

mile is proverbially, and literally, always hard to cross.

‘Number one State’

The good news, though, is that the health authorities in the State are already on the ball when it comes to this issue. “There are about 2,000 deliveries per day in Tamil Nadu. We are planning to set up a core committee that would monitor the top 10 districts with higher MMR. We noticed that the maximum number of deaths occur during the first month after delivery, post-partum, so that is when we will be paying attention,” she explains.

The government is planning to have its automated registration system for all mothers in the State - Pregnancy Infant Cohort Moni-

toring and Evaluation (PICME) - throw up the ‘high risk’ cases, which can then be followed up on at home. “Not all the 2,000 women who deliver will be ‘high risk’, but the PICME can generate information on the mothers who, for instance, have hypertension or diabetes, or had developed some other complication during the gestation period,” the Health Secretary adds.

Besides this, all gynaecologists – right through the government healthcare set-up – from primary through secondary to tertiary levels, will be linked together so that quick solutions can be found in crisis situations. “If the doctor in the PHC (Primary Health Centre) has some doubts about how to best handle a particular case, she or he can establish contact with another doctor at the secondary or tertiary levels,” Dr. Rajesh says.

Technology has made it easy. Video calls and VoIP calls between doctors will help resolve issues, the State believes.

This is also one way to monitor all deliveries in the State and ensure that experts, who may not be physically present, can chime in as and when necessary. This is expected to lead to gains in reducing MMR.

S. SUNDAR
MADURAI

Thirteen convicts in the Melavalavu massacre case, in which six persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes, including Melavalavu panchayat president Murugesan, were hacked to death in 1996, were released from the Madurai central prison on Saturday.

Police sources said with this, all the 16 convicts – all of whom are caste Hindus – in the sensational murder case have been released. Another convict, Jothi, died in prison in 2010.

The police identified the convicts, released in connection with MGR birth centenary celebrations on account of good conduct, as U. Ponnaiah, K. Manikandan, A. Andichamy, V. Manoharan, N. Renganathan, N. Sakkaramoorthy, M. Alagu, K. Rajendran, P. Sekar, A. Chokkanathan, P. Selvam, P. Chinnaodungan and S. Ramar.

The caste Hindus were agitated after the then district administration chose the Melavalavu panchayat for reserving the post of president for SCs. The elected members were returning to Melavalavu from Madurai when a gang murdered the six persons.

New Assam NRC Coordinator appointed

Prateek Hajela will relinquish charge as the State NRC Coordinator on Nov. 11

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Assam Civil Service officer Hitesh Dev Sarma has been appointed as the new State Coordinator for the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

He has replaced Prateek Hajela, an IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre who ensured publication of the final version of register on August 31 under supervision of the Supreme Court.

Mr. Hajela was transferred to his home State

Madhya Pradesh by the Supreme Court on October 18. He will relinquish charge as the NRC State Coordinator on November 11.

Inter-cadre deputation

Following the apex court’s order, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has already approved the proposal of the Department of Personnel and Training for inter-cadre deputation of Mr. Hajela from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre to

Madhya Pradesh cadre for three years, official sources said. The Assam government had also written to the DoPT stating that it did not have any objection to the transfer.

NRC experience

Until his new assignment, Mr. Sarma was the Secretary of the Urban Development and Finance departments.

He had also handled the NRC exercise during its initial stages five years ago.

Mr. Sarma has his task cut out as those who have been excluded from the NRC have 120 days to appeal against it at Foreigners Tribunals.

If not satisfied with the verdict of the tribunals, they will have the option to move the High Court and the Supreme Court for redress.

The updated final NRC, which validates bona fide Indian citizens of Assam, left out over 1.9 million applicants.

(With inputs from PTI)

WHO initiative to expand access to affordable insulin

It is available in only 1 in 3 of the poorest countries

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the World Diabetes Day on November 14, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is launching an initiative to expand access to affordable insulin. Stating that more than 420 million people worldwide, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, live with diabetes, the WHO noted that many who require insulin do not have access to it, often due to high costs.

The global report on diabetes shows that essential medicines and technologies, including insulin, are generally available in only 1 in 3 of



Over 420 million people across the world live with diabetes.

the poorest countries. According to the International Diabetes Federation Diabetes Atlas (7th Edition), China had the largest num-

ber of patients (11.43 cr.) followed by India (7.29 cr.) in 2017. As per the National Family Health Survey 2015-16, 5.8% women and 8.0% men in India are having blood sugar level above 140 mg/dl, in the age group of 15-49 years.

“The Health Ministry is focused on creating awareness for behaviour and lifestyle changes, screening and early diagnosis of persons with high level of risk factors and their treatment and referral (if required) to higher facilities for appropriate management for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), including diabetes,” noted a senior health official.