

# **GIST OF** **DOWN TO EARTH** **MAGAZINE**

**FEBRUARY 2022 EDITION**

**PART-I**



**Important Articles  
Simplified!**

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

India State of Forest Report 2021:  
Rise in Forest Cover!

Food Inflation Due to Climate Change

Threat to the Natural Habitats of Birds

Starvation Related Deaths

## Index

1. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).....	3
2. India State of Forest Report 2021: Rise in Forest Cover! .....	5
3. Food Inflation Due to Climate Change.....	8
4. Threat to the Natural Habitats of Birds .....	10
5. Starvation Related Deaths .....	13





## Major Concerns

- Environmentalists warned that the state authorities, whose mandate is to ensure the protection of the environment, will now “compete” to clear projects swiftly, to increase state rankings.
- MOEFCCs recent notification basically implies that all it cares about is the “clearance” of projects, not the quality of the assessment or the ability to ensure that the environmental impacts of development projects are mitigated.
- This order is absolutely absurd as how can we grade an institution that is mandated to protect the environment according to the speed at which projects are cleared?
- The time frame for clearances was anyway brought down to 75 days, which was a matter of concern and done with the express purpose of clearing projects at the cost of the environment.

## How do Development projects impact the Environment?

- There is no question that construction, especially large-scale housing, infrastructure or commercial projects, have a massive environmental footprint.
- They add to water usage, wastewater generation, traffic, and solid waste.

## Why SEIAAs Formed?

- Earlier the problem was the system was never upgraded to handle the huge volume of “building” projects. This led to delays and high transaction costs—corruption, in other words.
- So in 2006, MOEFCC decentralised, and outsourced the work to states. It replicated the Central system at the state level, setting up the state environmental impact assessment authorities.
- The SEIAAs are responsible for providing environmental clearance for a bulk of the infrastructure, developmental and industrial projects. Their main purpose is to assess the impact of the proposed project on the environment and people, and to try and minimise this impact.

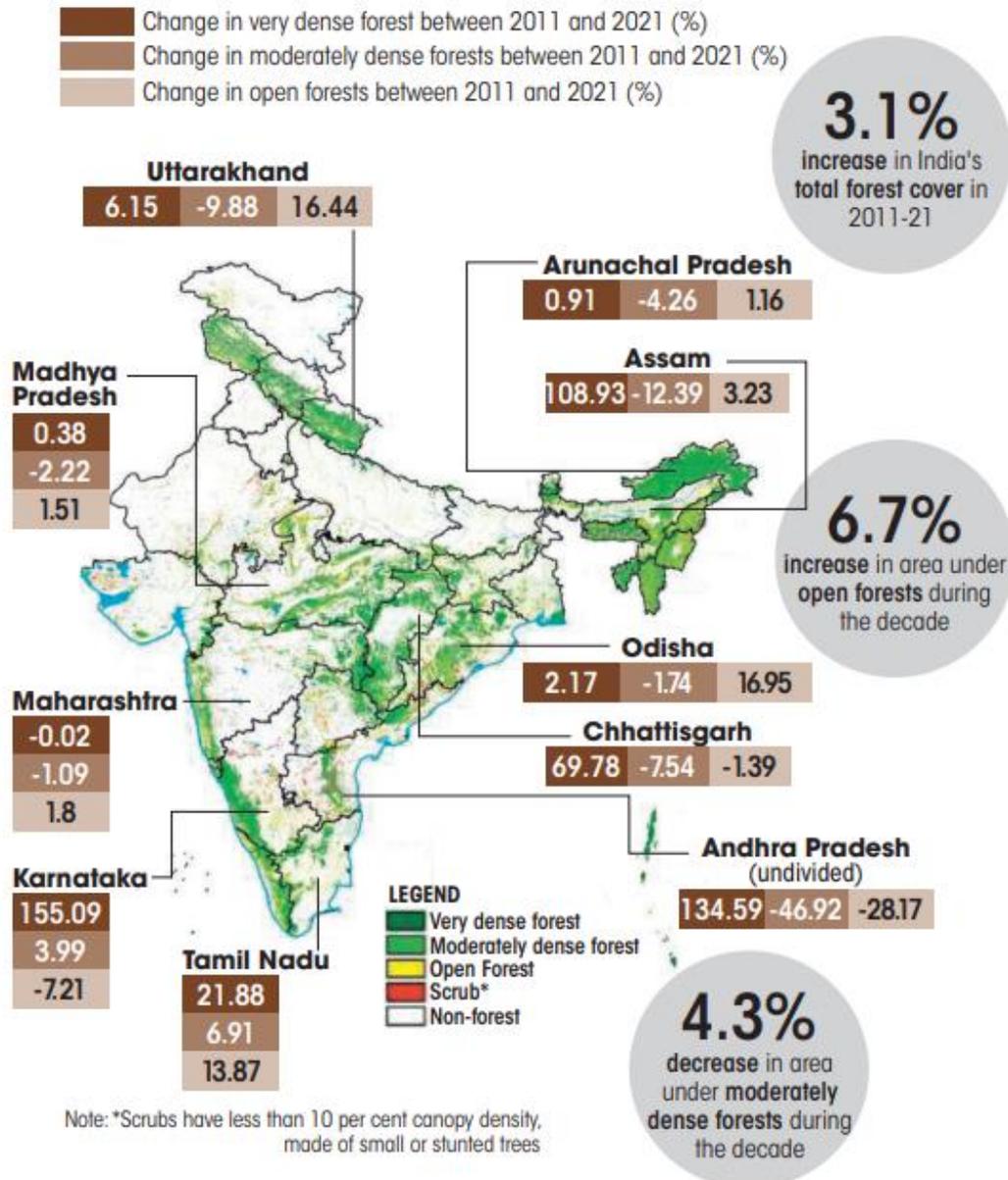
## Conclusion

It can be argued that time taken is not an indicator of the level of scrutiny—and that MOEFCC’s notice is designed only to hold the assessment committees accountable and to ensure that projects are not unnecessarily delayed. But it is not that simple. The fact is this “ranking” is the final nail in the already built coffin of environmental assessments. Over the past decade or so, government after government has systematically decimated the process of decision-making that would allow for assessment or scrutiny. So, the government should build a proper framework or a kind of National Plan for shaping the country in an environment-friendly development mode.



## UNEVEN GREEN COVER

Seven of 10 states with most forest cover have seen a rise in open forests, while only two states have seen a rise in moderately dense forests



- The increase in total forest cover is mainly attributed to an increase in very dense forests (all lands with tree canopy density of 70% and above), which rose by 19.54% between 2011 and 2021. Further, open forest (all lands with tree canopy density between 10-40%) also improved by 6.71% however, moderately dense forest (all lands with tree canopy density between 40-70%) declined by 4.32% between 2011 and 2021.

### What should be the ideal forest cover?

- According to the National Forest Policy, 1988, the country must have 33 per cent of its geographical area under forest and tree cover.

- The same has been listed as an indicator under the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life on land) as well as the "Strategy for New India@75"

### Status of Indian states

- Among the Indian States, Madhya Pradesh leads the green cover having the largest area under forests in 2021 with 11% of India's total forest cover. It is followed by Arunachal Pradesh (9%), Chhattisgarh (8%), Odisha (7%), and Maharashtra (7%).
- The top five states by per cent of State Geographical Area under Forest Cover, 2021 are Mizoram (85%), Arunachal Pradesh (79%), Meghalaya (76%), Manipur (74%), and Nagaland (74%).
- The top five states by Very Dense Forest, 2021 are Arunachal Pradesh accounting for 21% of India's very dense forest in 2021, followed by Maharashtra (9%), Odisha (7%), Chhattisgarh (7%), and Madhya Pradesh (7%).







## 4. Threat to the Natural Habitats of Birds

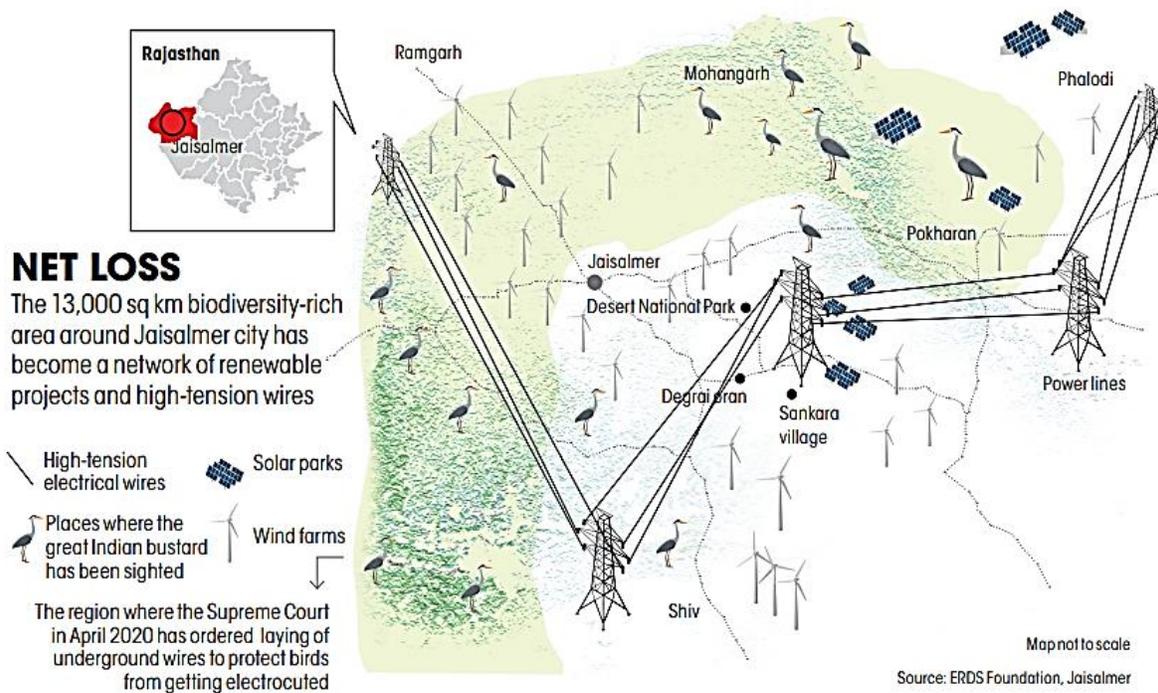
### Relevance

"GS 3: Conservation, Government Policies & Interventions"

### Introduction

- Rajasthan's state bird, the great Indian bustard (gib), listed under the "critically endangered" category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2011 is under serious danger due to rising solar power stations and windmills in the desert area of Rajasthan.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court ordered that orans, treated as open natural ecosystems, should be declared deemed forests.
- So far there has been no development, and the state government is now welcoming power companies to the sacred groves, damaging gib habitat.
- Owing to the rising number of gib deaths, M K Ranjitsinh Jhala, a wildlife conservationist, filed a petition in the Supreme Court in 2019 urging power companies to lay underground wiring in the gib habitat in Jaisalmer.
- In April 2021, the apex court ordered power firms in Rajasthan to lay underground wiring for all projects and install diverters on existing lines in the region.

### HABIT / BIODIVERSITY



- Given their size, any collision with the power lines is fatal. They get electrocuted and die.
- The power lines have formed a web around the gib habitat, leading to a sharp decline in their population in the last few years.

- Many such accidents have occurred since these high-tension wires have been laid.

### **What are the loopholes?**

- Challenging the notion “green is always good”, conservationists insist on looking at solar and wind projects objectively.
- They say situations like the one in Jaisalmer need careful scrutiny and that renewables should not be supported blindly.
- Unlike forests, there are no conservation laws that protect against diversion of biodiversity-rich open natural ecosystems, otherwise termed as wastelands, and governments try to make them “useful and productive” by allowing solar and wind parks on them.
- This is unfortunate as research has shown that under certain environmental conditions, open natural ecosystems can sequester more carbon than if trees were planted on them.
- The value of such ecosystems is being undervalued and the benefits of renewable energy are being overstated.

### **Green Energy is an Uncontrolled Sector**

- If we talk about solar energy, we need to see not only the gains but also the pains.
- In India, renewable energy companies are some of the most unregulated in the world.
- In the US and Europe, wind and solar companies are subject to environmental impact assessments just as any other development project. Large-scale studies are conducted on avian flyways before situating wind farms and power lines.
- In the case of hydroelectricity, the public sector controls over 90 per cent of both installed capacity and power generation. But in the case of solar and wind power, around 95 per cent of it is in the hands of the private sector.

### **Great Danger to The Great Indian Bustard**

- Rajasthan's state bird, the great Indian bustard (gib), listed under the “critically endangered” category by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2011 is under serious danger due rising to solar power stations and windmills in the desert area of Rajasthan.
- Gibs are slow breeders and lay only one egg every year, that too in the wild. The eggs are sometimes destroyed by cattle, or eaten by larger animals.





- The Global Hunger Index 2021 showed that India slipped to 101 among 116 countries, from the 94th position in 2020. We were placed lower than Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

### What NITI Aayog Says?

- Poverty, hunger and malnutrition are interrelated; often, one leads to another.
- In December last year, the NITI Aayog released an index, which used health, education and standard of living as indicators to gauge the poverty level and its intensity.
- It says 25.01 per cent of India's population suffer from multidimensional poverty.
- Under the health indicator, nutrition, child mortality and maternal health were used as sub-indicators, as they have an umbilical relationship with hunger and poverty.

### What does NSSO'S Survey say?

- The National Sample Survey Organisation's 66th survey in 2013 also highlighted the prevalence of hunger in India.
- For instance, it said, almost 1 per cent of the rural population did not get two square meals a day some months of the year; the figure is more than twice for farm labourers.

### Why governments do not accept the reality of people dying of starvation?

- This is because starvation deaths reflect the failure of the government to protect the most fundamental right—the right to life.
- They reflect the failure of expansive welfare measures, ostensibly taken up to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition.
- India has faced millions of starvation deaths in the past due to drought and famine.
- Those were always attributed to the colonial rulers. It is said that famines vanished with the descent of democracy. So, even a few starvation deaths have that power to paint an elected government in colonial hues.

 adda247

**BILINGUAL**



**UPSC CSE  
KA MAHAPACK**

Live Classes, Video Course,  
Test Series & Ebooks

**12 Months Validity**

**BILINGUAL**



**TARGET 5th June (2.0)**  
UPSC CSE 2022 Prelims  
(Paper I + II)  
**COMPLETE BATCH**

Starts Mar 1, 2022 **6 PM to 9 PM**

**BILINGUAL**



**Geography Optional  
Foundation course**  
for UPSC CSE/State PCS 2022-23

Starts Feb 15, 2022 **2 PM to 4 PM**

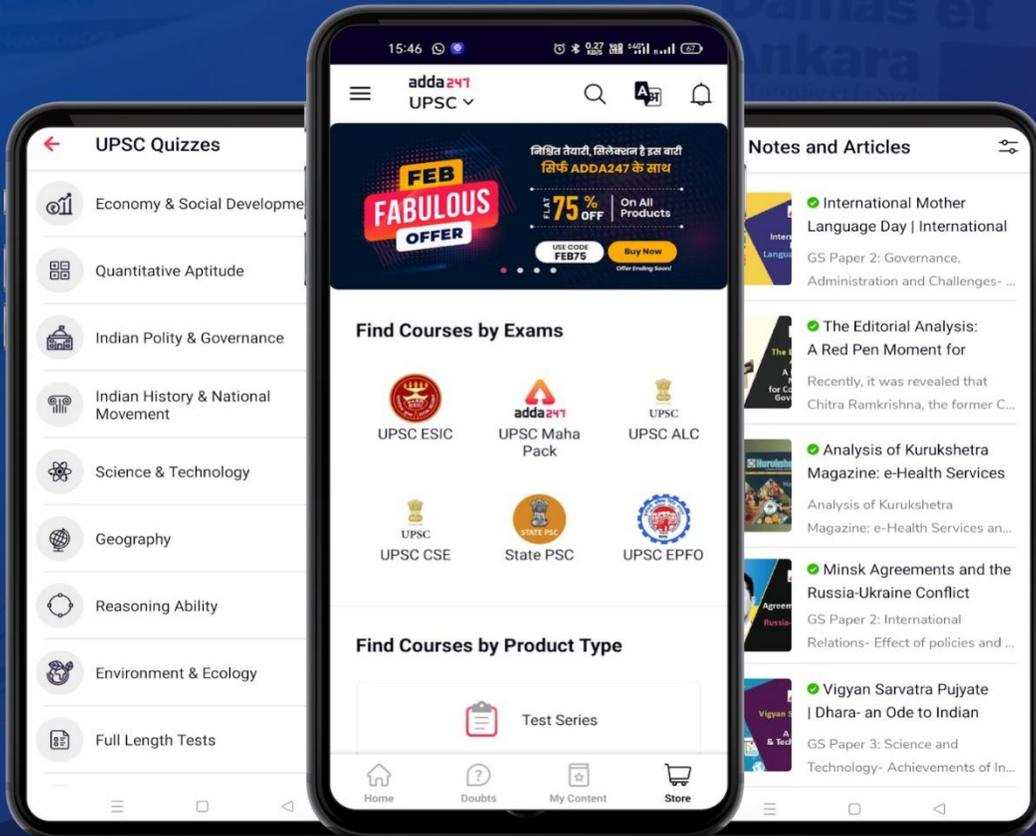
**TEST SERIES  
BILINGUAL**



**UPSC CSE  
PRELIMS 2022**  
Comprehensive Test Series

**70+ TOTAL TESTS**

Prepare for  
**UPSC & STATE PSC EXAMS**



### UPSC Adda247 App Features

- Daily Top News & Headlines
- Daily Current Affairs Articles
- Daily Editorial Analysis
- General Studies Revision Notes
- Daily Current Affairs Quiz with Detailed Solutions
- Topic Wise GS & CSAT Quizzes
- Monthly Current Affairs Magazine
- Gist of Yojana, Kurukshetra & Down to Earth Magazines
- Analysis of Sansad TV Discussions
- All Content Available in Hindi Medium as well!



Download  
Our App Now!

