



DREAMS AND DOUBTS OF A GREEN REVIVAL

Focus: GS-III Environment and Ecology

Introduction

Teeming wildlife; cities breathing fresh air; and clearer rivers, were all small signs of hope amid a dire, once-in-a-century pandemic.

There is now a term to describe this unique moment in human history: the anthropause.

What is the 'Anthropause' period?

- Researchers in the UK are set to study the “anthropause”, a term they have coined to refer to the coronavirus-induced lockdown period and its impact on other species.
- ‘Anthropo-’ (for ‘human’) and pause – to signify the pause in Human Activities.

Anthropause: The Positive effects

- In the Himalayas, wild grasses sprung back healthier due to the near absence of cattle grazing in the eclipsing summer.
- Migratory birds and animals stepped into urban areas in many parts of the world.
- The ongoing lockdown has pushed pollution levels in Delhi to a 5-year low.
- Nagpur, for instance, recorded a sharp drop in Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels.
- Mumbai, too, showed a drop in particulate matter and other pollutants.
- Stories of better visibility of wildlife in the forests abounded during the first phase of the lockdown from all over the country as a result of reduced human interference.



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- The state of a number of rivers in India—including the Yamuna, the Ganga, and the Cauvery—improved in this lockdown due to reduced human activity.
 - The Gangetic dolphins—the endangered freshwater mammals—were spotted from the Kolkata ghats after many decades.

Reasons for Rivers becoming cleaner

1. Closure of Industries,
2. Good winter rainfall,
3. High snowfall now melting with summer,
4. Reduction of irrigation water demand,
5. Stoppage of sand mining and
6. Reduction of cultural activities, including puja, bathing and cremations.

Being vary of the Temporary Nature of the Positive Effects

- However, globally, daily carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are already roaring back to pre-pandemic levels, according to a recent study.
- Rivers are cleaner but their water quality is nowhere near good; skies are bluer but the particulate matter is still largely above the World Health Organization's prescribed standards.

Are there any Animals that could be adversely affected?

- There are some animals for whom the lockdown may have made things more challenging, considering their on humans for food.
- For instance, for various urban-dwelling animals, such as rats, gulls and monkeys who depend on food provided or discarded by humans, the lockdown would have made life more difficult.
- Reports of poaching incidences for consumption and local trade more than doubled, although there was no evidence of stockpiling of wildlife products for future trade

Concerns over Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020



- According to most experts, the EIA 2020 seeks to further dilute whatever little environmental protection exists in the country, in an effort to accelerate development projects.
- New research indicates that forest land the size of Nagaland has been diverted for mining and power projects since 2014 alone.
- In the new draft, the two most significant changes are provisions for a post facto clearance of projects, even if they had commenced illegally, and an abandoning of the public trust doctrine.
- The 2020 draft offers no remedy for the political and bureaucratic stronghold on the EIA process, and thereby on industries.
- It proposes to bolster the government's discretionary power while limiting public engagement in safeguarding the environment.
- While projects concerning national defence and security are naturally considered strategic, the government gets to decide on the "strategic" tag for other projects.
- The new draft exempts a long list of projects from public consultation.

What's exempt?

- All inland waterways projects and expansion/widening of national highways will be exempt from prior clearance. These include roads that cut through forests and dredging of major rivers.
- The 2020 draft also exempts most building construction projects of built-up area up to 1,50,000 sq m.

The big shift

- The two most significant changes in the new draft are the provisions for post-facto project clearance and abandoning the public trust doctrine.
- Projects operating in violation of the Environment Act will now be able to apply for clearance.
- In an order on the Supreme Court held "ex post facto environmental clearances" contrary to law saying Environment law cannot countenance the notion of an ex post facto clearance.
- The 2020 draft also spells out how the government will take cognisance of such violations.



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- There is no scope for any public complaint about violations. Instead, the reliance is on the violators to disclose, suo motu, that they broke the law.

Old way vs new path

- The e-auction of 41 coal blocks—almost all of them in pristine and protected forests - in a bid to become self-reliant in energy and restart the economy, the fears of negating the small gains that have been made on the environmental front have returned.
- The ministry of environment, forests and climate change accelerated environmental clearances during the lockdown for 30 projects that would cut through forests, snap wildlife habitats, and pollute rivers and air, drawing condemnation from environmentalists.

-Source: Livemint

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