

DECEMBER

11

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MK Yadav Sir

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'Historic' deal by EU: What world's first law on regulating AI proposes; its significance

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 10

"DEAL!" TWEETED European Commissioner Thierry Breton just before midnight Friday in Brussels. The EU becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI, Breton declared on social media, after officials reached a provisional deal on the world's first set of comprehensive laws to regulate the use of artificial intelligence. The deal came after a marathon 37-hour negotiation between the European Parliament and the EU member states. The European Parliament will now vote on the proposed AI Act early next year, and a legislation is likely to come into force by 2025.

This legislative framework assumes significance given that the US, the UK and China too are jostling for the lead to set the template for AI regulations and publish their own set of guidelines.

The EU framework

The legislation includes safeguards on the use of AI within the EU, including clear guardrails on its adoption by law enforcement agencies, and consumers have been empowered to launch complaints against any perceived violations.

The deal includes strong restrictions on facial recognition technology, and on using AI to manipulate human behaviour, along-

side provisions for tough penalties for companies breaking the rules. Governments can use real-time biometric surveillance in public areas only when there are serious threats involved, such as terrorist attacks.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the AI Act would help the development of technology that does not threaten people's safety and rights.

The EU legal framework broadly divides AI applications into four risk classes: on one end, some applications will be largely banned, including the deployment of facial recognition on a mass-scale, with some exemptions for law enforcement. AI applications focused on behavioural control will be also banned.

High-risk applications such as the use of AI tools for self-driving cars will be allowed, but subject to certification and an explicit provision for the backend techniques to be made open to public scrutiny.

Those applications that fall in the "medium-risk" category can be deployed without restrictions, such as generative AI chatbots, but there has to be detailed documentation of how the tech works and users have to be explicitly made aware that they are dealing with AI and not interacting with a human. Developers will need to comply with transparency obligations before they release chatbots into the markets,

including details about the contents used for training the algorithm.

Leadership on regulation

Over the last decade, Europe has taken a decisive lead over the US on tech regulation.

On AI, though, the US has tried to lead the way through a new White House Executive Order, which is being offered as an elaborate template for every other country looking to regulate AI.

Washington's move assumed significance, given that over the last quarter century, the US Congress has not managed to pass any major regulation to rein in Big Tech companies or safeguard internet consumers, with the exception of just two legislations: one on child privacy and the other on blocking trafficking content on the net.

In contrast, the EU has enforced the landmark GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) since May 2018 that is clearly focused on privacy and requires individuals to give explicit consent before their data can be processed. It is now a template being used by over 100 countries. Then there are sub-legislations - the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) - that take off from the GDPR's overarching focus on the individual's right over her data.

Different approaches

These developments come as policy-makers across jurisdictions have stepped up regulatory scrutiny of generative AI tools. The concerns being flagged fall into three broad heads: privacy, system bias and violation of intellectual property rights.

The policy response has been different too, across jurisdictions, with the European Union having taken a predictably tougher stance that segregates artificial intelligence as per use-case scenarios, based broadly on the degree of invasiveness and risk; the UK is seen to be on the other end of the spectrum, with a decidedly 'light-touch' approach that aims to foster innovation in this nascent field. The US approach slots somewhere in between. China too has released its own set of measures to regulate AI.

India's approach

New Delhi has pitched itself, especially to nations in the Global South, as a country that has effectively used technology to deliver governance solutions at a mass scale. These solutions are at the heart of what New Delhi calls Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) - where the underlying technology is sanctioned by the government, and is later offered to private entities to develop various use cases. Now, India wants to take the same DPI approach with AI.

LONGER VERSION
indianexpress.com/expained

Context: The European Union becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI.

- The **world's first set of comprehensive laws to regulate the use of artificial intelligence (AI)** after a marathon 37-hour negotiation between the European Parliament and the EU member states.

The EU Framework

- **Facial Recognition:** The agreement incorporates stringent limitations on facial recognition technology and the use of AI for manipulating human behaviour.
 - Strict penalties are outlined for companies found violating these regulations.
- **Surveillance Guidelines:** Governments are authorized to employ real-time biometric surveillance in public areas only under specific circumstances, such as serious threats like terrorist attacks.
- **EU Classification of AI Applications:** This framework categorizes **AI applications into four risk classes**.
 - Certain applications, including mass-scale facial recognition and those focused on behavioural control, face significant restrictions or outright bans.
 - High-risk applications, like AI tools for self-driving cars, are permitted but subject to certification and transparency requirements.

India's Approach

- India has positioned itself, particularly to Global South nations, as a country adept at leveraging technology for scalable governance solutions.
- At the core of India's strategy is Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), a framework where government-sanctioned technology serves as the foundation for developing diverse use cases by private entities.
- Having successfully applied the DPI model, India now aims to adopt a similar approach for Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Trial run on second RRTS stretch begins

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

National Capital Region Transport Corporation on Sunday began the trial run of the Namo Bharat train on the 12-km Duhai-Modinagar section of the Delhi-

Meerut Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) corridor.

The stretch will be operational by March next year and the entire 82-km rapid train corridor will be complete by June 2025, according to officials.

Earlier on October 20, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the priority 17-km stretch between Sahibabad and Duhai in Uttar Pradesh.

Once completed, the RRTS corridor will cut the travel time between Delhi

and Meerut to less than an hour as high-speed trains will be running on it every 15 minutes.

It will be developed at a cost of over ₹30,000 crore, with the trains having the capacity to run at a speed of 180 kmph.

Context: Recently, the National Capital Region Transport Corporation initiated the trial run of the **Namo Bharat train**, covering the 12-km stretch between Duhai and Modinagar as part of the Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transport System (RRTS) corridor.

Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS)

- **About:** RRTS is an integrated, mass transit network which aims to ensure “**balanced and sustainable urban development**” through better connectivity and access across the NCR
- **Launched:** October, 2023.
- **Constructed by:** The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC).
- **NCRTC:** It is a joint venture company of the Central government and the governments of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
- **Objective:** to ensure “balanced and sustainable urban development” through better connectivity and access across the NCR.
- It is a state-of-the-art regional mobility solution, comparable to the best in the world.
- **Speed:** RRTS trains will travel **significantly faster than metro trains**.
- These will operate at a speed of 160 km/hour but are designed to be able to run at speeds up to 180 km/hour.

Namo Bharat Trains

- “Namo Bharat” is the name of India’s first regional rapid train operating between Delhi and Meerut.

Eight Identified RRTS Corridors: Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut, Delhi-Gurugram-SNB-Alwar, Delhi-Panipat, Delhi – Faridabad – Ballabgarh – Palwal, Ghaziabad – Khurja, Delhi – Bahadurgarh – Rohtak, Ghaziabad-Hapur, Delhi-Shahdara-Baraut.

Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI (YUVAi) to feature in GPAI Summit 2023

Context: The Ministry of Electronics and IT has said that the program - '**YUVAi- Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI**' will be featured at the **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit** beginning from upcoming week in New Delhi.

YUVAi- Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI

- **About:** The programme, designed to equip the **youth with essential AI skills**, has garnered attention for its innovative approach and commitment to enabling a future-ready workforce.
- **Collaborative Initiative:** National e-Governance Division, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and Intel India.
- **Aim:** to foster a deeper understanding of AI, to enable school students from class 8 to 12 across the nation with AI skills, and to empower them to become human-centric designers and users of AI.

Features of YUVAiProgramme

- YUVAi programme is being **implemented in multiple cohorts to ensure that maximum students stand** a chance to become future-ready.
- more than **8,500 students registered**, post which, they attended online orientation sessions to learn fundamental concepts of AI.
 - **Teachers also enrolled into the program** and underwent orientation sessions.
- **Shortlisted students attended online deep dive AI training** and mentorship sessions with certified Intel AI coaches and experts – helping students enhance their solutions.
- **Top 50 students were shortlisted** and they were invited to attend a four-day face-to-face rapid modeling workshop.

Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit

- It is a global platform bringing together leaders, policy makers and experts in the field of AI. It will **provide an ideal stage for YUVAi to showcase** its impact and significance.

India offers to cut ICT import duties to fast-track EU FTA

MUKESH JAGOTA

New Delhi, December 10

INDIA HAS SOUGHT to settle a long-standing dispute with the European Union (EU) by offering exclusive import duty concessions for certain information technology products, under the proposed bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with the 27-country customs-cum-monetary bloc.

To address concerns on the information and communication technology (ICT) tariffs, the government is looking at limiting the benefit of the lowering of duties to the EU members. Cutting tariffs for those outside the FTA would oblige India to impose similar duties on imports of these products from all countries on a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) basis.

India imposes 20% import duty on mobile phones and 15% on telecom equipment. While MFN by nomenclature may mean preferential treatment, it just means treating everyone equally in the global trade parlance. It is the basis of all world trade agreements.

"They (EU) are seeking duty concessions, which according to India can be discussed only under the free trade agreement (FTA). India can consider something under the FTA, but not on an MFN basis,"

TRADE WINDS

■ New Delhi is looking at limiting the benefit of the lowering of duties to EU members

India imposes
20% import duty on mobile phones and
15% on telecom equipment

■ There have been six rounds of negotiations covering 23 policy areas or chapters

■ EU had challenged import duties on IT products like mobile phones and components in April 2019

■ India and the EU formally relaunched negotiations on FTA in June 2022



the official added.

India and the EU formally re-launched negotiations on FTA in June 2022. Since then, they have held six rounds of talks, which cover 23 policy areas or chapters.

The EU had challenged the Indian import duties on information technology products like mobile phones and components, base stations, integrated circuits and optical instruments in April 2019.

The EU had claimed that the measures appear to be inconsistent with certain provisions of the Information Technology

Agreement (ITA) of the WTO.

Later, Chinese Taipei and Japan joined the dispute. On April 17, the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) at the WTO had ruled against India saying that tariffs are against its ITA that seeks to remove all duties on IT products.

Japan has filed its motion for the adoption of the Panel report at the DSB meeting at WTO, in response, India filed its notice of appeal.

Continued on Page 5

Context: India recently proposed resolving a longstanding dispute with the European Union by offering exclusive import duty concessions for specific information technology products within the proposed bilateral free trade agreement.

Key Points

- The government is considering restricting the reduction in information and communication technology (ICT) tariffs to EU members, addressing concerns related to these duties.
- Lowering tariffs for non-FTA countries would necessitate India applying equivalent duties to their information technology imports on a Most Favoured Nation (MFN) basis.
- India and the EU formally re-launched negotiations on FTA in June 2022.
- As per the WTO process, bilateral consultation is the first step to resolve a dispute when a complaint is filed.
- If both sides are not able to resolve the matter through consultation, either of them can seek establishment of a dispute settlement panel.

European Union (EU)

- **About:** EU is a supranational political and economic union of 27 member states that are located primarily in Europe.
- **Nuber of Countries:** 27 Countries
- **European Union Countries:** Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.
- **Objective:** EU promotes democratic values in its member nations and is one of the world's most powerful trade blocs.
- **Headquarters:** Brussels (Belgium)

Dual Financing Approach being adopted to Elevate MSMEs' Contribution in Renewable Energy Transition: IREDA CMD at COP28

Context: Recently, Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) underscored the crucial role of lending to MSMEs in the Renewable Energy sector, emphasizing economic and environmental benefits.

Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

- **About:** MSMEs fall under the regulatory purview of the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act of 2006.
- **Classification of MSMEs:**
 - **Micro:** Investment in Plant and Machinery or Equipment: Not more than Rs.1 crore and Annual Turnover ; not more than Rs. 5 crore.
 - **Small:** Investment in Plant and Machinery or Equipment: Not more than Rs.10 crore and Annual Turnover ; not more than Rs. 50 crore.
 - **Medium:** Investment in Plant and Machinery or Equipment: Not more than Rs.50 crore and Annual Turnover ; not more than Rs. 250 crore

Renewable Energy in India

- India stands **4th globally in Renewable Energy Installed Capacity** (including Large Hydro), **4th in Wind Power capacity & 4th in Solar Power capacity** (as per REN21 Renewables 2022 Global Status Report).
- The country has set an enhanced target at the **COP26 of 500 GW** of non-fossil fuel-based energy by 2030.

Eastern region key to India's growth: Shah

**Says Modi Govt
Never Sought
To Block
Caste Survey**

Manoj Chaurasia &
Madan Kumar | TNN

Patna: Union home minister Amit Shah assured on Sunday that the Central government never intended to impede the caste-based survey and highlighted BJP's past support for such surveys in Bihar during its governance alliance in the state.

Addressing the Eastern Zonal Council (EZC) meeting in Patna, Shah acknowledged existing concerns related to Bihar's caste-based survey and expressed optimism that the state government would address these issues.

Shah commended the eastern region for laying the foundation for the country's industrial development, citing its rich mineral resources and water availability. "Many patriots from this region have contributed significantly to the development of the country before and after Independence... the eastern region has also been the centre of many major educational institutions since ancient times," he



The 26th meeting of Eastern Zonal Council saw only Bihar CM Nitish Kumar in attendance. Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, along with her Odisha and Jharkhand counterparts Naveen Pattnaik and Hemant Soren, skipped the meet

trial development, citing its rich mineral resources and water availability. "Many patriots from this region have contributed significantly to the development of the country before and after Independence... the eastern region has also been the centre of many major educational institutions since ancient times," he

said, acknowledging the region's historical significance as a cultural and educational hub, with successful outcomes from competitive examinations.

The event, lasting at least three hours, witnessed Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's presence — notable as he had previously avoided NITI Aayog

meetings and government functions to sidestep encounters with PM Narendra Modi and Shah since breaking ties with the BJP 16 months ago.

During the meeting, Nitish urged the Centre to include Bihar's new reservation law, providing a 65% quota for deprived castes, in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution for legal immunity. The Ninth Schedule comprises laws immune to legal challenges. Referring to the economic conditions of various social groups in the state, Nitish appealed to Shah for special category status for Bihar, which would facilitate financial assistance to the "94 lakh families" identified as "poor" in the recent caste survey in the state.

While several states, including Bihar and Odisha, have called for a national-level caste census, the Modi government has not definitively outlined its stand. Responding to parliamentary inquiries about including caste de-

tails in the general census, the government had said that all census exercises since Independence have focused solely on enumerating details of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

The 26th meeting of EZC — consisting of Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, and Odisha, saw only CM Nitish in attendance. Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, along with her Odisha and Jharkhand counterparts Naveen Pattnaik and Hemant Soren, skipped the meeting.

Emphasising the role of EZC meetings as a mechanism to resolve inter-state matters, Shah urged chief ministers to set aside political differences and address issues liberally. He called for a review of progress in initiatives such as eliminating child malnutrition through Poshan Abhiyan, reducing school dropout rates, and operationalising fast-track special courts for expediting investigations and disposing of rape cases.

Context: Recently, during the Eastern Zonal Council (EZC) meeting in Patna, Union home minister acknowledged the prevailing concerns regarding Bihar's caste-based survey and expressed optimism that the state government would address these issues.

Zonal Councils

- **Statutory Body:** Five Zonal Councils were established in the year 1957 under Section 15-22 of the States Reorganization Act, 1956.
- **At Present There are 6 Zonal Councils—** Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, Southern and North-Eastern.

• **Composition:** The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of these Zonal Councils, while the Chief Ministers of the States included in the respective Zonal Council and the administrator and lieutenant governor of the union territories are its members.

- **Two more ministers from each state** are nominated by the Governor as members of the council.
- **Each Zonal Council has also constituted** a standing committee at the level of chief secretaries.

Objectives:

- Bringing out national integration
- **Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness**, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- **Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate** and exchange ideas and experiences.
- **Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States** for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

DARPG launches scheme and web-portal for National Awards for e-Governance NAeG

Context: Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances DARPG has launched the **scheme and web-portal for National Awards for e-Governance NAeG**.

National Awards for e-Governance Scheme

- **Objective:** To acknowledge and promote excellence in the execution of e-Governance initiatives.
- **Aim:** To foster innovations in successful e-Governance solutions.
- **Nomination Process:** As per a statement by DAPRG, nominations for the National Awards for e-Governance 2024 can be registered and submitted online at www.nceg.gov.in. The deadline for submission is the 29th of this month.
- **Prestigious Recognition:** The Scheme is widely recognized as one of the most competitive and prestigious digital governance awards schemes in the country.

Award Categories

- **Five Categories under which the NAeG 2024:** Government Process Re-engineering, Application of Emerging Technologies for providing Citizen Centric Services, District level initiatives in e-governance, Research on Citizen Centric Services by Academic and Research Institutions, and Replication of Top Technological Initiatives.
- **Prizes:** The department will grant 10 lakh for the Gold Medal and 5 lakh for the Silver Medal, respectively, recognizing outstanding implementation of projects or bridging resource gaps in any area of public welfare.

India defends quality control orders at WTO

US, Canada, 17 other members raised 35 specific trade concerns

ASIT RANJAN MISHRA
New Delhi, 10 December

India has defended the quality control orders imposed across various sectors, holding that the measures were necessary to ensure the quality of products, protection of human, animal, and plant health, and prevention of deceptive practices.

The United States, Canada, Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu had last year raised concerns over India's quality control orders over the years in sectors, such as toys, chemicals, ICT (information and communication technology) products, and automobile parts.

They claimed that India's statements often are not entirely responsive to the questions posed by members, and this has led to an ever-growing list of specific trade concerns.

"We note that since 2019, 19 members have raised 35 specific trade concerns (STCs) with India. Of these, more than a third appear to be related to quality control orders, and more than two-thirds are concerns that members have raised more than once. In fact, members have raised more than half of these 35 specific trade concerns at least three times. Since May 2020, the number of STCs members raised with India has made up at least 13 per cent of the total number of STCs addressed in each meeting," the members had said in a statement to the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade.

Comprehensively responding to the queries at the Committee last month (November 2023), India said it had positively engaged both at a bilateral and multilateral level on all the STCs raised, including those mentioned in the technical statement



INDIA'S STAND

- **Members claim India's** statements are often not entirely responsive to their concerns
- **They question India's** recognition of internationally accredited laboratories and difficulties with foreign inspections
- **India emphasises** the necessity for product quality, health protection, and prevention of deceptive practices
- **Talks of its commitment** to international trade while ensuring the outlined objectives
- **Asserts its engagement** in addressing concerns and highlights its adherence to the technical barriers to trade agreement

PAGE 4 INDIA-US TRADE POLICY FORUM MEET LIKELY IN JAN

India and the United States are gearing up for the annual Trade Policy Forum meeting next month,

where both sides hope to strengthen bilateral relations, resolve trade and investment issues and identify more areas for engagement, people aware of the matter said. SHREYA NANDI writes

and intends to continue this engagement in the WTO Committee as well as bilaterally.

"In accordance with the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement,

India is committed to facilitating international trade while taking steps to ensure the quality of products, protection of human, animal, and plant health and life, protection of the environment, protection of the consumers and prevention of deceptive

practices, among other objectives specific to the products. The quality control orders (QCOs) issued by India are a step in this direction," it said.

On the recognition of internationally accredited laboratories, the countries asked India to provide greater clarity and transparency regarding the steps laboratories can take to obtain such recognition from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). Turn to Page 6 ▶

QUALITY CONTROL ORDERS (Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Economy)

Context: Recently, India has robustly defended the quality control orders implemented across diverse sectors, asserting that these measures are essential for maintaining product quality, safeguarding human, animal, and plant health, and preventing deceptive practices.

- The **United States, Canada, Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu** had last year raised concerns over **India's quality control orders over the years in sectors, such as toys, chemicals, ICT** (information and communication technology) products, and automobile parts.

Quality Control Orders (QCO)

- **About:** QCOs serve as regulatory measures implemented by the government to establish quality standards for specific products or product categories.
- **Objective:** To control the import of sub-standard and cheaper items into the domestic market.
 - This ensures that **customers have access to quality products** meeting prescribed standards.
- **WTO and QCOs:** QCOs cannot be contested at the World Trade Organization (WTO) when imposed on grounds of health, safety, environment, deceptive trade practices, or national security.
- **Role of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):** To guarantee compliance with quality standards outlined in QCOs, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) plays a crucial role.
- **Certification by BIS:** BIS is responsible for certifying products that meet the prescribed standards, catering to both domestic and international manufacturers.
- **BIS Act, 2016:** Under the BIS Act, 2016, the QCOs explicitly prohibit the manufacturing, storing, and sale of non-BIS certified products.

‘Cauvery basin lost nearly 12,850 sq. km of green cover’

T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

Natural vegetation on nearly 12,850 sq. km of land in the Cauvery basin was lost in the 50 years from 1965 to 2016, stated a paper published by scientists and researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru. Karnataka has lost much more than any other State in the basin. It accounts for three-fourths of the lost cover, while Tamil Nadu's share is around one-fifth, the study added.

Pointing out that natural-vegetation cover went down by around 46% all these years, the paper, authored by T.V. Ramachandra, Vinay S., Bharath S., and Bharath H. Aithal, stated that the quantum of

Shrinking greenery

Pattern of natural vegetation cover in the Cauvery basin over the years

Year	Karnataka	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	Total
1965	17,072.81	1,043.64	10,077.78	28,194.23
2016	7,408.50	764.16	7,172.42	15,345.08
Loss	9,664.31	279.48	2,905.36	12,849.15



Source: "Cauvery river: Land use dynamics biodiversity & hydrological status," a paper authored by T. V. Ramachandra, Vinay S., Bharath S. and Bharath H. Aithal, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

reduction of dense vegetation was 35% (6,123 sq. km) and that of degraded vegetation, 63% (6,727 sq. km).

Areas that suffered adverse changes in the extent of forest cover include the Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National

Park and the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. In respect of the Bannerghatta National Park, the moist deciduous forest area, which was about 50% in 1973, stood at 28.5% in 2015 due to "anthropogenic pressure" on the National Park and its environs.

Shrinking greenery

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Source: "Cauvery river: Land use dynamics biodiversity & hydrological status," a paper authored by T. V. Ramachandra, Vinay S., Bharath S. and Bharath H. Aithal, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

Context: Recently, a paper published by scientists and researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, revealed that natural vegetation on nearly 12,850 sq. km of land in the Cauvery basin was lost in the 50 years between 1965 to 2016.

- Karnataka has lost much more than any other State in the basin.

Key Points

- The Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, and the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary have experienced adverse changes in the extent of forest cover.
- In the case of the **Bannerghatta National Park**, the moist deciduous forest area, previously at 50% in 1973, decreased to 28.5% in 2015.
- This reduction is attributed to "anthropogenic pressure" on the National Park and its surroundings.

Cauvery Basin

- **About:** It is the largest river in the Karnataka state.
- **Known as:** Dakshina Ganga (the Ganges of the South) and considered one of the sacred rivers of India.
- **Origin:** Brahmagiri Hills near Madikeri in Coorg.
- **Tributaries:** Harangi, Hemavathi, Lakshmanatirtha, Kabini, Shimsha, Arkavati, Suvarnavathi or Honnuholé, Bhavani, Lokapavani, Noyyal.

NGT sets up panel to check oil spill triggered by cyclone Michaung

Divya Chandrababu

letters@hindustantimes.com

CHENNAI: The southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has formed a high-level committee to ensure the arrest of the spread of an oil spill and prevent it from entering the sea.

The nine-member committee has been instructed to meet on Monday to review steps being taken to prevent the spread of the crude oil into the Ennore creek and further into the sea, recover the oil floating on the water in the aftermath of Cyclone Michaung that brought torrential rain to the city, ensure that the health of the people in the area is protected, assess damage to compensate those affected financially and also suggest measures for strengthening the emergency response system.

"Incessant rain, due to the Michaung Cyclone, has caused the tragedy of oil spillage on the Buckingham Canal leading to substantial damage to marine life. There were several video clippings surfacing on the media, where the public really expressed their concern and safety, as the oil spillage has caused health hazards," said judicial member, Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, and expert member Satyagopal Korlapati of the NGT in the order.

"Even going with the report of the WRD (water resources depart-

ment), the oil has travelled already for 5 kms, it cannot be short of reaching the sea, in which event, it will be absolutely difficult to remove the oil from the water. Therefore, the learned counsel for the CPCL (Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited) suggested that the operations can start from the mouth of the river," they added.

Both Cyclone Michaung and the oil spill hit the city on December 4. The waste oil spill originated from CPCL in the city's northern region. As heavy rainfall had submerged several parts of the city, the CPCL began pumping out the flood water through a storm outlet (culvert). Some oil appears to have entered the storm outlet while water was being pumped out.

NGT took the case suo motu (on its own accord) on December 7 after videos and photos of the oil spill spreading to the Buckingham Canal, a residential area in Thiruvotriyur, and the sea in Nettukuppam and Ennorekuppam area, went viral.

The pollution control board also submitted a report to the court on December 9 and said that the heavy rainfall resulted in the inundation of Chennai's industrial area in Manali area, including the CPCL.

The pollution control board has sent oil samples from various points for analysis and is awaiting the results.

Context: The southern bench of the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has formed a high-level committee to ensure the arrest the spread of an oil spill and prevent it from entering the sea cause by Cyclone Michaung.

National Green Tribunal

- **Formation:** A statutory body established by an Act of the Parliament i.e., **National Green Tribunal, Act, 2010.**
- **Objective:** The effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- **Inspired by:**
 - **United Nations Conference on the Human Environment** held at Stockholm in 1972.
 - **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
 - **Constitution of India under Article 21.**
- **NGT Powers:** The following are the Acts under which NGT can take actions and has authority to take actions:
 - The Water (Prevention and Control of pollution) Act, 1974
 - The Water (Prevention and control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
 - The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
 - The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution), 1981
 - The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
 - The Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- However, the NGT Act does **not** cover two important legislations : The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- **Important points related to NGT:**
 - It is not be bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, or the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
 - It shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
 - It is vested with the powers of a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure
 - Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

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