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Strengthening Forest Fire Management in India

The report, '**Strengthening Forest Fire Management in India**', jointly prepared by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the World Bank has been released recently.

- Repeated fires in short succession are reducing diversity of species and harming natural regeneration, while posing a risk to over 92 million in India who live in areas of forest cover.
- The objective of this assessment is to strengthen knowledge on forest fires by documenting current management systems, identifying gaps in implementation, and making recommendations on how these systems can be improved.
- Further, the report seeks to understand how forest fires are deterring India's efforts to meet its climate change goals.

Forest Fires

- Fire can play a vital role in keeping the forests healthy, recycling nutrients, helping tree species regenerate, removing invasive weeds and pathogens, and maintaining habitat for some wildlife.
- As populations and demands on forest resources have grown, the cycle of fire has spun out of balance. So, there is a need to improve the prevention and management of unwanted forest fires.
- Forest fires have become an issue of global concern. In many other countries, wildfires are burning larger areas, and fire seasons are growing longer due to global warming.
- Globally, forest fires release billions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere, while hundreds of thousands of people are believed to die due to illnesses caused by exposure to smoke from forest fires and other landscape fires.

- Tackling forest fires is significant for India as it has set ambitious policy goals for improving the sustainability of its forests. As part of the **National Mission for Green India** under India's **National Action Plan on Climate Change**, the government has committed to increase forest and tree cover.
- Further, under its **Nationally Determined Contribution**, India has committed to bringing 33 percent of its geographical area under forest cover and to create additional sinks of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tons worth of CO₂ stored in its forests by 2030.
- So, prevention and management of forest fires is important to achieve these goals.

Key Findings

- **Forest fires in India are both widespread and concentrated**
 - At least 60 percent of districts in India are affected by forest fires each year.
 - While states in the Northeast account for the greatest share of fire detections, the largest area affected by fire is in the Central region .
- **Fire potential and behavior is shaped by a combination of natural and social factors**
 - India's monsoons are largely responsible for the seasonal nature of forest fires in the country. Forest fires peak during the dry months of March or April before the arrival of the monsoon.
 - Nearly all forest fires in India, as in other parts of the world, are caused by people as important goods and services obtained from forests (such as fodder for their livestock) are generated or gathered through the aid of fire.
 - Shifting societal and cultural practices also play a role, as with the use of fire in traditional shifting cultivation (jhum).
- **A vacuum exists at the level of national policy**
 - A cohesive policy framework with a clear strategic direction provides the foundation for successful Forest Fire Prevention and Management (FFPM) which is absent at the policy level.
 - Though MoEFCC had issued national guidelines on FFPM in 2000, they are no longer being implemented.
 - **A shortage of dedicated funding for FFPM** at the central and state level has been a perennial issue, which has been documented by the Comptroller and Auditor General in various states.

- **India has developed robust detection systems for forest fires**
 - Using satellite data, Madhya Pradesh was the first state to develop an SMS-based system to alert field staff of active fires burning in their area. Since then, Forest Survey of India (FSI) has rolled out a nationwide system.
 - Satellite-based detection has helped fill a gap left by under-resourced ground detection. As these satellite systems continue to be upgraded, they would benefit from greater integration, including the increased collection of field-based reporting for verifying satellite-derived fire alerts, as well as improved data sharing between the states and FSI.
- **Post-fire management is not being treated as part of the FFPM process**
 - Post-fire data collection is an essential part of the fire management process and crucial to producing informed FFPM plans and policies.
 - A lack of standard protocols for collecting and reporting information on fires, including their causes, has made it impossible to aggregate data across states.
 - The states will need help from MoEFCC and the research community in developing standard methods and protocols for assessing ecological impacts and economic damages from fire.

Way Forward

- **Policy**
 - A national policy is required to consolidate existing guidelines and to issue comprehensive guidelines for FFPM which should be aligned with the climate change policies.
 - The policy should also define the respective roles and responsibilities of the MoEFCC, state forest departments, and disaster agencies, and establish a mechanism for the provision of regular funding for FFPM to the states.
 - The process of formulating the national policy should be open, consultative, clearly defined, and time-bound.
- **Staffing, capacity, and management practices**
 - Inadequate resources and lack of sufficient staff on the ground are some of the reasons for ineffective prevention, detection, suppression, and post-fire practices.
 - Ground-based detection will continue to be essential along with the introduction of new remote sensing technologies. So, training should be provided to field officers, seasonal firewatchers, and community volunteers involved in firefighting.

- **Coordination with other agencies and entities**
 - Since forest fires are not typically treated as disasters, the disaster management authorities have so far played a minor role in FFPM.
 - Stronger collaboration between the State Forest Departments (SFDs), the disaster management authorities and research entities would enable states to innovate new science-based management approaches for preventing fires and rehabilitating fire-affected areas.
 - **Technology**
 - FSI has begun the **development of systems for early warning and fire danger rating**, and these efforts should be continued.
 - **Digitization of management boundaries** by the state forest departments should be completed so that FSI can more accurately determine which fires to report and to whom.
 - Fire alert systems can also be improved by integrating ground-based detection with the satellite-based alert systems.
 - **Community Engagement**
 - Sensitization of communities should be done to ensure that fire is used responsibly in a way that promotes forest health, while seeking to avoid damaging and out-of-control fires.
 - Provision of training should extend beyond state-managed forests to community institutions in regions such as the Northeast, where communities are responsible for managing most of the forest estate.
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World Economic Outlook Report

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released the World Economic Outlook Report.

IMF has forecasted a growth rate of 7.3% for India in the current year of 2018 and that of 7.4 percent in 2019.

Estimates For Global Growth

- Estimates for **global growth has been projected at 3.7% for 2018-19**. It is 0.2% point lower for than forecast for global GDP-growth made in April 2018.
- In most advanced economies, slower expansion in working-age populations and projected lackluster productivity gains are the major reason for slow growth rates.

- **Impact of Protectionism**

- Escalating **trade tensions** and the potential **shift away from a multilateral, rules-based trading system** are key **threats to the global growth**.
- An intensification of trade tensions and the associated rise in **policy uncertainty could dent business and financial market sentiment**, trigger financial market volatility, and slow investment and trade.
- **Higher trade barriers would disrupt global supply chains** and **slow the spread of new technologies**, ultimately lowering global productivity and welfare.
- More **import restrictions would also make tradable consumer goods less affordable**, harming low-income households disproportionately.

- **Growth Outlook**

- **The United States and European Union**

- In the United States, growth momentum is still strong as fiscal stimulus continues to increase, but the **forecast for 2019 has been revised down due to recently announced trade measures, including the tariffs imposed on \$200 billion of US imports from China**.
- **Growth projections** have also been **marked down** for the **euro area and the United Kingdom**.

- **China and Emerging Market Economies**

- Among emerging market and developing economies, the growth prospects of many oil exporters have been lifted by higher oil prices, but growth was revised down for Argentina, Brazil, Iran, and Turkey, among others, due to country-specific factors, tighter financial conditions, geopolitical tensions, and higher oil import bills.
- **China and a number of Asian economies** are also projected to **experience somewhat weaker growth in 2019** in the aftermath of the recently announced trade measures.

- **For India**

- **India will be the fastest growing major economy of the world, crossing China in 2019**.
- India has rebounded from transitory shocks (the demonetization and implementation of the national Goods and Services Tax), with strengthening investment and robust private consumption.
- In India, important reforms have been implemented in recent years, including the Goods and Services Tax, the inflation-targeting framework, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, and steps to liberalize foreign investment and make it easier to do business.
- It also said inflation in India will rise amid accelerating demand and rising fuel prices.

- **Recommendations for India**

- The report said that India's reform priorities should include resolving Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) crisis of Indian banks and reviving bank credit by accelerating the clean-up of the bank and corporate balance sheets and improving the governance of public sector banks.
- These efforts should be supported by further reductions in subsidies and enhanced compliance with the Goods and Services Tax.

- **Recommendation For Increasing Global Growth**

- Countries need to work together to tackle challenges that extend beyond their own borders.
- To preserve and broaden the gains from decades of rules-based global trade integration, countries should cooperate to reduce trade costs further and resolve disagreements without raising trade distortionary barriers.
- Cooperative efforts are also essential for strengthening international taxation, enhancing cybersecurity, tackling corruption, and mitigating and coping with climate change.
- To target inflation Monetary policy accommodation should be done where inflation is weak or strong, but cautious normalization should be done where inflation is close to target.
- Fiscal policy should aim to build buffers and prepare economies for any crisis in the future.
- The composition of public spending and revenues should be designed to bolster potential output and inclusiveness.
- All countries should adopt structural reforms and policies that raise productivity and encourage technological innovation and diffusion, increasing labor force participation (especially by women and youth), and investing in education and training to enhance job opportunities.

- **Recommendation for advanced economies**

- In countries at or close to full employment, with an excess current account deficit and an unsustainable fiscal position (like the United States), public debt needs to be stabilized and eventually reduced.
- Countries with both excess current account surpluses and fiscal space (like Germany) should increase public investment to boost potential growth and reduce external imbalances.

- **Recommendation for Emerging Market Economies/Low-Income Developing Countries**

- EME should make their economy more resilient to adverse external shocks by improving the tradeoff between inflation and output by using credible monetary policy frameworks.
- For low-income developing countries, continued progress toward the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is imperative to foster greater economic security and better living standards.
- Given their generally high levels of public indebtedness, low-income developing countries need to make decisive progress to strengthen their fiscal positions while prioritizing well-targeted measures to reduce poverty.
- They must also boost the resilience of their financial systems. Investing in human capital, improving access to credit, and reducing infrastructure gaps can promote economic diversification and improve the capacity to cope with climate shocks.

Twin Cyclones, Luban and Titli Keep Indian Seas Active

The cyclonic storms 'TITLI' over the Bay of Bengal and another cyclonic storm 'LUBAN' over the Arabian sea have developed in the Indian Ocean Region.

- The severe cyclone Luban is active in the Arabian Sea and will not affect any coast of India, while severe cyclone 'Titli' is forecast to hit the coasts in Odisha and adjoining North Andhra Pradesh coasts.
- It is very rare that the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal host cyclonic storms of this strength.
- Cyclone Titli has been named by Pakistan, while Luban has been named by Oman.
- The active Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) has started shifting southwards towards the coast. This is the main generator behind the disturbances in the open waters. Both cyclones have been offshoot of this ITCZ only.
- Besides this, MJO (Madden-Julian Oscillation) is also presiding in the close proximity of Indian Ocean and is likely to visit the Indian waters soon. This has also been providing favourable weather conditions.

Inter Tropical Convergence Zone

- The Intertropical Convergence Zone, or ITCZ, is the region that circles the Earth, near the equator, where the trade winds of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, i.e. the northeast trade winds and southeast trade winds come together.

- The intense sun and warm water of the equator heat the air in the ITCZ, raising its humidity and making it buoyant. Aided by the convergence of the trade winds, the buoyant air rises.
- As the air rises it expands and cools, releasing the accumulated moisture in an almost perpetual series of thunderstorms and heavy rainfall.
- The ITCZ shifts north and south seasonally with the Sun. Over the Indian Ocean, it undergoes especially large seasonal shifts of 40°–45° of latitude.
- Seasonal shifts in the location of the ITCZ drastically affects rainfall in many equatorial nations, resulting in the wet and dry seasons of the tropics rather than the cold and warm seasons of higher latitudes.

Madden-Julian Oscillation

- The Madden-Julian Oscillation is a major fluctuation in tropical circulation and rainfall that moves eastward along the equator, and circles the entire globe in a span of 30–60 days on an average.
- The MJO, therefore is not static and is a moving system of wind, cloud and pressure that brings rain as it circles around the equator.
- The phenomenon takes its name from the two scientists who identified it in 1971 — Roland Madden and Paul Julian.
- In the active phase, MJO results in more than average rainfall for that time of the year, while in the suppressed phase, the area receives less than average rainfall.
- The effect of the MJO is witnessed mainly in the tropical region, in the band between 30 degrees North and 30 degrees South of the equator, even though the mid-latitude regions in both hemispheres also feel its impact.

[Read more about Cyclone...](#)

Important Facts for Prelims (10th October 2018)

Sir Chotu Ram

Prime Minister unveiled a 64-foot-tall statue of Sir Chhotu Ram in his native village Sampla in Haryana.

Introduction

- Sir Chhotu Ram (Born: Ram Richpal) was born in Rohtak, Punjab (Currently: Haryana) in 1881.
- Sir Chhotu Ram was knighted in 1937.
- He was the Alumni of St. Stephens College, Delhi.

- He was the founder of National Unionist Party. Sir Chhotu Ram rose to become Revenue Minister of undivided Punjab. was instrumental in empowering farmers in pre-Independence era and getting pro-farmers law enacted. Modern concepts like debt settlement boards, caps on interest, the basic fairness to the tiller were included in these 1930s laws.
- He is called as The father of Bhakra. He conceived of the Bhakra Dam way back in 1923.
- He was also the originator of the concept of compensating the farmer for the expenses incurred by him on farming, the concept has now evolved into 'Minimum Support Price'.
- Sir Chhotu Ram emerged as country's first big agrarian reformer who stood up and fought for the rights of agriculturists.

MedWatch App

- On the occasion of 86th anniversary, the Indian Air Force has launched an innovative mobile health App named 'MedWatch' in keeping with the vision of 'Digital India, Ayushman Bharat and Mission Indradhanush'.
- The app is conceived by the doctors of IAF and developed in house by Directorate of Information Technology (DIT).
- 'MedWatch' will provide correct, Scientific and authentic health information to all citizens of India.
- The app comprises of host of features like information on basic First Aid, Health topics and Nutritional Facts; reminders for timely Medical Review, Vaccination and utility tools like Health Record Card, BMI calculator, helpline numbers and web links.
- The MedWatch mobile health app is an Indian Air Force initiative and a small contribution to our citizen.

National Environment Survey

- India's first ever National Environment Survey (NES) will be done in 55 districts across 24 states and three Union Territories in January, 2019 by Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change.(MoEFCC).
- National Environment Survey is proposed under the Environmental Information System (ENVIS) Scheme of the ministry.
- The survey will be done through a grid-based approach, using grids measuring 9x9 km.
- Comprehensive data on various environmental parameters such as air, water, soil quality; emission inventory; solid, hazardous and ewaste; forest & wildlife; flora & fauna; wetlands, lakes, rivers and other water bodies will be collected.
- It will also assess carbon sequestration potential of all the districts across the country.

- The NES will rank all the districts on their environmental performance and document their best green practices.

World Post Day

- World Post Day is celebrated each year on 9 October.
- It marks the anniversary of the establishment of the Universal Postal Union in 1874 in the Swiss Capital, Bern.
- It was declared World Post Day by the UPU Congress held in Tokyo, Japan in 1969.
- The purpose of World Post Day is to bring awareness to the Post's role in the everyday lives of people and businesses, as well as its contribution to global social and economic development.
- In 2015 countries all over the world committed themselves to working together towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the Post today has a more relevant role than ever by providing infrastructure for development.



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<https://youtu.be/52MEPW6WtVY>
