



## News Analysis (12 Nov, 2021)

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### Climate Change & Locust Infestations

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#### Why in News

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Infestation of **desert locusts**, which has plagued a vast swathe from eastern Africa to India in recent years, has been **closely linked to climate change**.

- In this context, the **Global Landscapes Forum Climate Hybrid Conference** has proposed that plans to mitigate climate change must include action against pests and diseases.
- The conference was recently held alongside the **26<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (CoP26)** to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**.

#### Global Landscapes Forum

- The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led platform on integrated land use, dedicated to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** and **Paris Climate Agreement**.
- It is led by the **Center for International Forestry Research** (CIFOR), in collaboration with its co-founders **UNEP** and the **World Bank** and Charter Members.

#### Key Points

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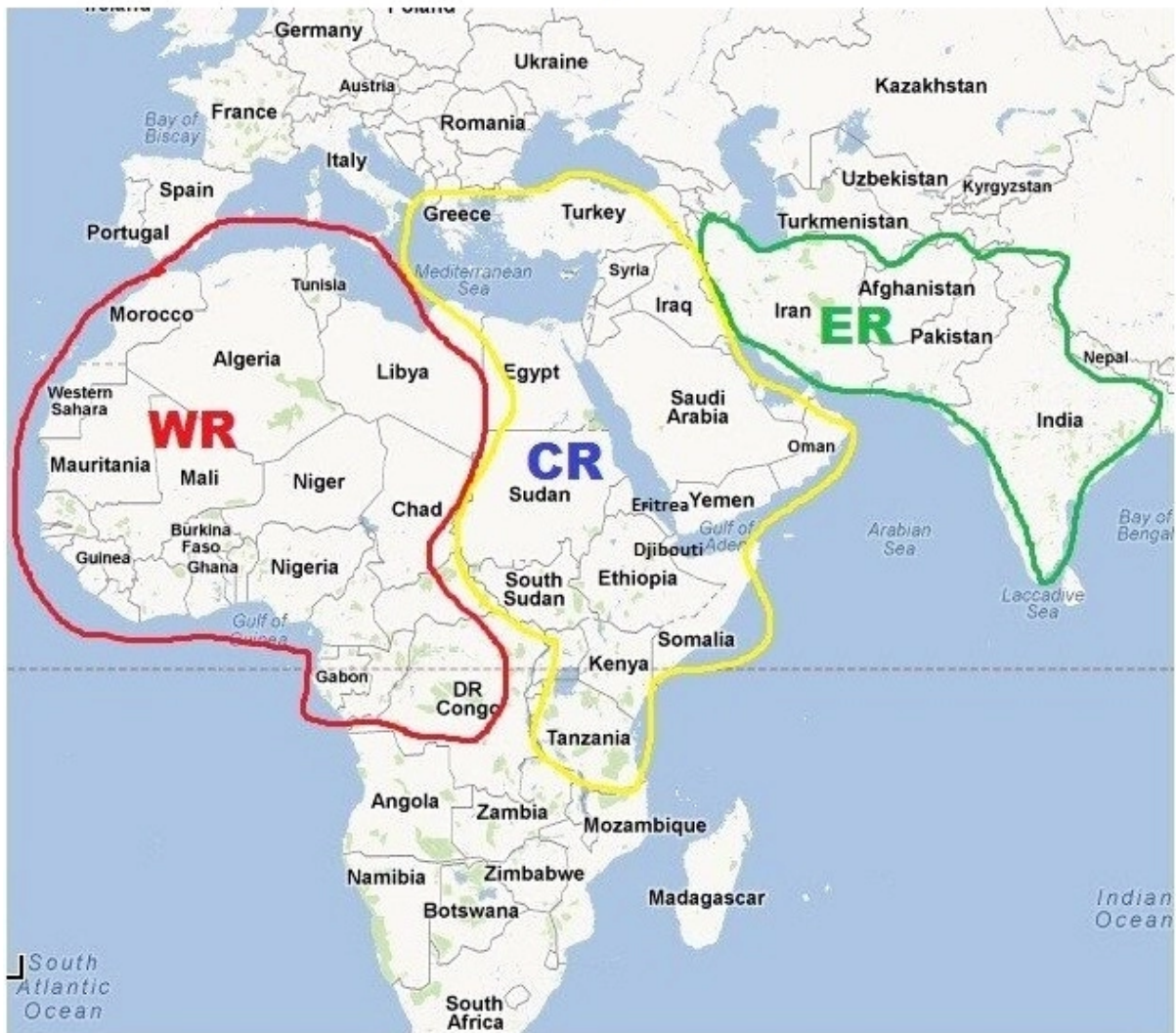
- **Locust Attack and its Impact:**

- **About:** The **desert locust** (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a short-horned grasshopper.
  - Harmless when solitary, locusts undergo a **behavioural change** when their population builds up rapidly.
  - They enter the '**gregarious phase**' by forming huge swarms that can travel up to 150 km per day, eating up every bit of greenery on their way.
- **Impact:** Locust infestations can harm livelihoods and be a threat to regional investments in ensuring food security.
  - **According to the World Bank:** In East Africa and Yemen alone, damages and losses in 2020 due to locusts could amount to as much as \$8.5 billion.
  - **According to the World Food Program:** The long-term response and recovery costs could top \$1billion if swarm growth is not controlled.

- **Locust Breeding and Linkage With Climate Change:**

- **Affected Area:** Locusts have been a bane especially to farmers in several countries, including **India, Pakistan and Iran**.
- **Effect of Climate Change:** Change in cyclonic patterns over the Arabian Sea is behind the locust invasions in east Africa, west and south Asia, in 2020.
  - Unusual rainfall in Iran helped in their breeding.
  - Locusts are known to be passive flyers and generally follow the wind.
  - Their movement has been aided by westerly winds, which were further strengthened by the low-pressure area created by **Cyclone Amphan** (2019) in the Bay of Bengal.

## Areas Affected By Desert Locust



### Pesticide is Not the Appropriate Solution:

- It said that heavy use of a **broad-spectrum pesticide** may slow down the **desert locust invasion** but they also exert **significant external costs on the environment and human health**.
  - They are a threat to pollinators and wildlife.
  - A broad-spectrum pesticide is a powerful pesticide that targets entire groups or species of organisms that are commonly harmful to plants.
- According to the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, by March 2021, 1.8 million litres of pesticides were used to control locusts in East Africa. This may increase to over two million litres by the end of 2021.
  - Organophosphate pesticides such as Malathion and Chlorpyrifos, for instance, are highly toxic to humans and animals.

### Way Forward

- **Early Warning System:** Satellite and weather data, along with field observations, can be used for building powerful predictive models on breeding sites.

- **True Cost Accounting:** Counting the environmental and human costs through **True Cost Accounting**.

True Cost Accounting is a new type of bookkeeping that does not just look at the usual financial values within a company, but also calculates the impacts on natural and social capital.

- **Developing an Efficient Governance Model:** Governing the locusts crisis may also provide useful lessons for the agri-food system.

There is a need to raise awareness amongst farmers and local communities as well as involve them in decision making.

- **Mobilising Funds for Research:** It is important to fund research on the biopesticide sector which remains extremely underfunded.
  - The organisations responsible for preventing locust attacks face tremendous financial hurdles.
  - In February 2020, \$138 million was required by FAO to combat locusts outbreaks in East Africa. The organisation received only \$33 million from donors.

**Source: DTE**

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## **Destination Northeast India**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, a seven-day cultural festival of the northeast as part of the celebrations of **75 years of Independence** under the **Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav programme** cocncluded at the **National Museum, Delhi**.

It is celebrating the rich heritage of North East India, under the **Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region & North Eastern Council (NEC)**'s initiative titled "**Destination NorthEast India**".

### **Key Points**

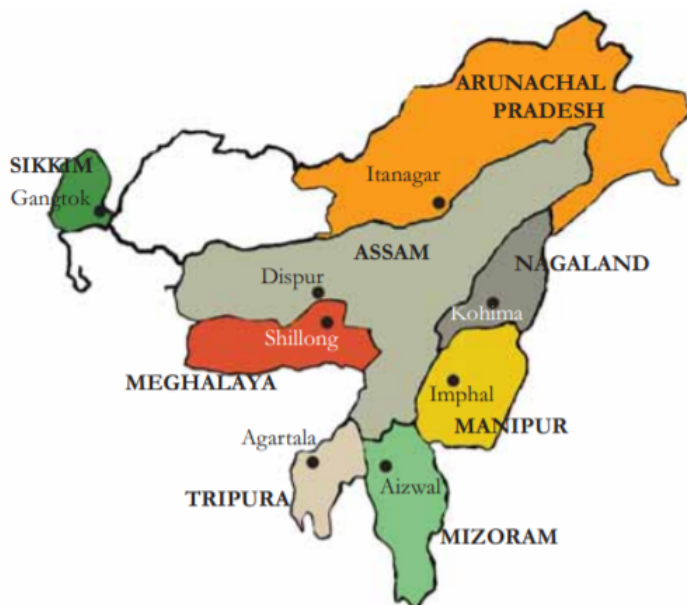
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- **Aim:** To bring the rest of India closer to **North East (NE)** India.  
It holds a special presentation of art and craft, textiles, ethnic products, tourism promotion etc. of the eight northeastern states.

- **Organisations Involved:**
  - **Ministry of Development of North-East Region.**
  - **North Eastern Council (NEC):** It is the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the NE Region which consists of the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. It was **constituted in 1971 by an Act of Parliament.**
  - **National Museum:** The **blueprint** for establishing the National Museum in Delhi was prepared by the **Maurice Gwyer Committee in May 1946.**
    - It was **initially looked after by the Director General of Archaeology** until 1957, when the **Ministry of Education declared it a separate institution** and placed it under its own direct control.
    - At present, the National Museum is **under the administrative control of the Ministry of Culture.**

## Importance of NE Region

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- **Strategic Location:** The NER is strategically located with access to the traditional domestic market of eastern India, along with proximity to the major states in the east and adjacent countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- **Links with Southeast Asia:** With **ASEAN** engagement becoming a central pillar of India's foreign policy direction, NE states play an important role as the physical bridge between India and Southeast Asia.
  - The India's **Act East Policy** places the northeastern states on the territorial frontier of India's eastward engagement.
- **Economic Significance:** The NER has immense natural resources, accounting for around 34% of the country's water resources and almost 40% of India's hydropower potential.

Sikkim is India's first **organic state**.

- **Tourism Potential:** Northeast of India is home to many wildlife sanctuaries like **Kaziranga National Park** famous for the one horned rhinoceros, Manas National Park, Nameri, Orang, Dibru Saikhowa in Assam, Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh, Balpakram in Meghalaya, Keibul Lamjao in Manipur, Intanki in Nagaland, Khangchendzonga in Sikkim.
- **Cultural Significance:** Tribes in NER have their own culture. Popular festivals include Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, Pang Lhabsol of Sikkim, etc.

## Government Initiatives for NE Region

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- **Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER):** A Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) was established in 2001. It was elevated to a full ministry in 2004.
- **Infrastructure Related Initiatives:**
  - Under Bharatmala Pariyojana (BMP), road stretches aggregating to about 5,301 km in NER have been approved for improvement.
  - The North East has been kept as a **priority area under RCS-UDAN** (to make flying more affordable).
- **Connectivity Projects:** Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project (Myanmar) and **Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor**.
- **For Promoting Tourism:** Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, projects worth Rs.1400.03 crore have been sanctioned for the NER in the last five years.
- **Mission Purvodaya:** Purvodaya in the steel sector is aimed at driving accelerated development of Eastern India through the establishment of an integrated steel hub. The Integrated Steel Hub, encompassing Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Northern Andhra Pradesh, would serve as a torchbearer for socio-economic growth of Eastern India.
- **North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS):** In order to promote employment in the North East States, the Government is incentivizing primarily the MSME Sector through this scheme.
- **The National Bamboo Mission** has a special significance for the Northeast.
- **North Eastern Region Vision 2020:** The document provides an overarching framework for the development of the NE Region to bring it at par with other developed regions under which different Ministries, including the Ministry of DoNER have undertaken various initiatives.
- **Digital North East Vision 2022:** It emphasises leveraging digital technologies to transform lives of people of the north east and enhance the ease of living.

**Source: PIB**

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## Privilege Motion

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## Why in News

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Congress' chief whip in the **Rajya Sabha** sought to move a **privilege motion against the Union Culture Minister over the appointment of chairperson of the National Monuments Authority (NMA)**.

The educational and professional background of the current chairperson of NMA does not meet the requirements of law passed by Parliament in March 2010.

### National Monuments Authority (NMA)

- **Established:** NMA is set up under the **Ministry of Culture** as per the provisions of the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act (AMASR)** which was enacted in March, 2010.
- **Functions:** Several functions have been assigned to the NMA for the protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated areas around the centrally protected monuments.  
NMA also considers grant of permissions to applicants for construction related activity in the prohibited and regulated areas.
- **Qualifications for the Appointment of the Chairman:** AMASR Act says that the **chairperson of the NMA** should have “proven experience and expertise in the field of archaeology, country and town planning, architecture, heritage, conservation architecture or law”.

### Key Points

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- **About:** It is concerned with the **breach of parliamentary privileges by a minister**.
- **Breach of Parliamentary Privileges:** Parliamentary Privileges are **certain rights and immunities enjoyed by members of Parliament**, individually and collectively, so that they can “effectively discharge their functions”.
  - When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a breach of privilege and is punishable under law of Parliament.
  - **A notice is moved in the form of a motion by any member of either House against** those being held guilty of breach of privilege.
  - Its purpose is **to censure the concerned minister**.
- **Role of the Speaker/Rajya Sabha (RS) Chairperson:**
  - The Speaker/RS chairperson is the **first level of scrutiny** of a privilege motion.
  - The Speaker/Chairperson can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or **refer it to the privileges committee of the Parliament**.  
If the Speaker/Chairperson gives consent under relevant rules, the member concerned is given an opportunity to make a short statement.

- **Rules Governing Privilege:**
  - **Rule No 222** in Chapter 20 of the **Lok Sabha Rule Book** and correspondingly **Rule 187** in Chapter 16 of the **Rajya Sabha rulebook** governs privilege.
  - Rules say that a member may, with the consent of the Speaker or the Chairperson, raise a question involving a breach of privilege either of a member or of the House or a committee thereof.

## Parliamentary Privileges

- Parliamentary privileges are **special rights, immunities and exemptions enjoyed by the two Houses of Parliament, their committees and their members.**
- The Constitution also extends the parliamentary privileges to those persons who are entitled to speak and take part in the proceedings of a House of Parliament or any of its committees. **These include the Attorney General of India and Union ministers.**
- The parliamentary privileges **do not extend to the President** who is also an integral part of the Parliament. **Article 361** of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.
- **Article 105** of the Constitution expressly mentions **two privileges**, that is, freedom of speech in Parliament and right of publication of its proceedings.
- Apart from the privileges as specified in the Constitution, **the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**, provides for freedom from arrest and detention of members under civil process during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee thereof and forty days before its commencement and forty days after its conclusion.
- It needs to be noted that the **Parliament, till now, has not made any special law** to exhaustively codify all the privileges.

## Privilege Committee

- It is a **Standing Committee**. It examines the cases of breach of the privileges of the House and its members and recommends appropriate action.
- The **Lok Sabha** committee has **15** members, while the **Rajya Sabha** committee has **10** members.

Source: TH

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## CBIC Guidelines on Blocking Input Tax Credit

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs)** issued guidelines on **blocking of tax credit by GST (Goods and Services Tax) field officers**, saying that such blocking should be on the basis of 'material evidence' and not just out of 'suspicion'.

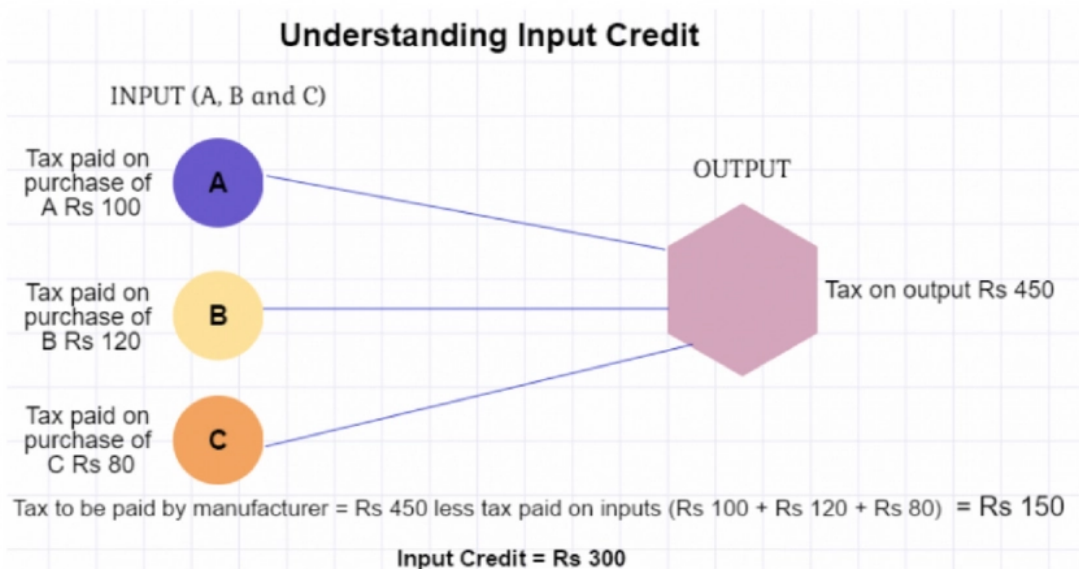


## Key Points

### Input Tax Credit:

- It is the tax that a business pays on a purchase and that it can use to reduce its tax liability when it makes a sale.
- It means **at the time of paying tax on output, one can reduce the tax that has already been paid on inputs** and pay the balance amount.
- **Exceptions:** A business under composition scheme cannot avail of input tax credit. ITC cannot be claimed for personal use or for goods that are exempt.

**Composition Scheme** is a scheme under GST which can be opted to get rid of tedious GST formalities. It can be opted by any taxpayer whose turnover is **less than Rs. 1.5 crore**.



- **Provisions for Claiming ITC:**

The amended **Rule 36 (4) of the CGST (Central GST) Rules, 2017**, provides that the input tax credit can be availed only when a supplier of goods updates and uploads online the details of supplies through each of the bills.

- **New Guidelines:**

- It laid down **some specific circumstances** in which such ITC could be blocked by a senior tax officer.
- These **include availment of credit without any invoice** or any valid document, or availing of credit by purchasers on invoices on which GST has not been paid by sellers.
- The **commissioner, or an officer authorised by him, not below the rank of assistant commissioner**, must form an opinion for blocking of ITC **only after "proper application of mind"** considering all the facts of the case.

The government **had introduced Rule 86A in GST rules in December 2019** giving powers to taxmen to block the ITC available in the electronic credit ledger of a taxpayer if the officer has "reasons to believe" that the ITC was availed fraudulently.

- The **reasons are to be on the basis of material evidence** available or gathered in relation to fraudulent availment of input tax credit or ineligible input tax credit availed as per the conditions/grounds under sub-rule (1) of Rule 86A.
- These guidelines **have recommended monetary limits** for the division of powers between commissions, joint commissioners, and assistant commissioners on blocking of the tax credit.

A deputy or assistant commissioner can block ITC up to Rs 1 crore, additional or joint commission above Rs 1 crore but not exceeding Rs 5 crore and principal commissioner or commissioner above Rs 5 crore.

- In case an officer blocks the ITC under due procedure, the **taxpayer will be informed about the action on the GST portal** along with details of the officer who has blocked it.

## **Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs**

- It is a **part of the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance.**
- The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) was **renamed as the CBIC in 2018 after the roll out of the GST.**
- It deals with the tasks of formulation of policy concerning levy and collection of customs, central excise duties, Central GST (CGST) and Integrated GST (IGST).  
**GST Law** comprising (i) Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 (ii) State Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 (iii) Union Territory Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, (iv) Integrated Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 (v) Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Act, 2017.

**Source: TH**

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