

## FOREST CONSERVATION ACT OF 1980 (FCA)

**Context:** The Supreme Court, while hearing challenges to the 2023 FCA Amendment, has ordered union & state govts to not take any steps that will lead to 'reduction of forests'.



### About FCA 1980:

- It **applies to all kinds of forests**, whether under control of Forest or Revenue Dept. & mandates **statutory clearance before forests can be used for any non-forest purpose**.
- Mandates that diversion of forests for non-forestry purposes can **only be approved by union govt**.
- Requires **payment of compensation for loss of forest cover** due to diversion of forestland. Amount of compensation is **based on net present value of diverted forestland** & funds collected are utilized for afforestation and reforestation activities.
- Mandates that state govts and tribal communities be consulted before approving diversion of forestland.

- Act requires that **equal area of non-forest land be afforested/reforested** as a compensatory measure for loss of forestland due to diversion.
- **Recognition to "deemed forests"** - areas not officially classified as forests but have forest-like characteristics and are ecologically sensitive.

### Forest Advisory Committee (FAC):

- Statutory body of the Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change formed under the FCA
- It considers questions on diversion of forest land for non-forest uses and **advises union govt on issue of granting forest clearances**.
- For forest land beyond 5 hectares, approval for diverting land must be given by union govt via the FAC.

### 2023 Amendment to FCA:

- It seeks to **limit applicability of FCA only to land recorded as 'forest'**.
  - This **nullifies the SC verdict in the Godavarman Thirumalpad case (1996)**, which stated that "forests" were to be read as per dictionary meaning and not just include areas which were officially recorded as forests.
- Now, only two types of land under purview of FCA: (i) land **notified as a forest under Indian Forest Act, 1927** or any other law, or (ii) land **notified as a forest after Oct. 25, 1980, in a govt record**.

- It exempts certain types of forest land from the provisions of FCA:
  - Along a **rail line or public road** maintained by govt, providing **access to a habitation** up to a maximum size of 0.10 hectare.
  - Within **100 km from borders** for constructing linear projects concerning national security.
  - Up to 10 hectares, for building **security-related infra.**
  - Constructing defense projects, **campus for paramilitary forces**, or public utility projects up to 5 hectares in **LWE affected areas.**
- States require approval of union govt to assign forest land to any entity not owned or controlled by the govt.
- Certain activities to be **excluded from definition of “non-forest purposes”**:
  - Conservation, management, & development of forest and wildlife such as establishing check posts, fire lines, fencing, and wireless communication.
  - Zoos and safaris
  - Ecotourism facilities
  - Silvicultural operations
  - Any other purpose specified by union government.

*Source: SC orders Centre, states to refrain from steps that lead to ‘reduction of forests’ (Down to Earth)*

## PRASHAD SCHEME

**Context:** A parliamentary committee has asked the Union Govt. to come up with a standard operating procedure (SOP) to ensure timely completion of projects under the PRASHAD Scheme.

**About PRASHAD Scheme:**



- The ‘**National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive**’ (PRASHAD) was launched by the **Ministry of Tourism** in the year 2014-15 with the objective of holistic development of identified pilgrimage destinations.
- After the discontinuation of the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) scheme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in 2019, the **development of heritage destinations** was included in the PRASHAD Scheme.
- The projects identified under this scheme shall be **implemented through the identified agencies by the respective State/UT Government.**

**Aims of PRASHAD Scheme:**

- Upgrading and maintaining the strength of the infrastructure of pilgrimage destinations that includes the roads, water supply, sanitation and waste management system.
- Improving the travel conditions for the travellers by improving the connectivity through road, rail and airways.
- Starting conservation projects that help in preserving and conserving the pilgrimage sites of cultural and spiritual significance.
- The scheme advocates the cultural, religious and spiritual significance of

pilgrimage sites attracting domestic and international tourists.

- Creating opportunities for the local communities through skill development and livelihood generation programmes that relate to pilgrimage tourism.
- Adopting sustainable development practices that promote eco-friendly tourism.

#### Funding for PRASHAD Scheme:

- The **Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance (CFA)** to State Governments for promoting tourism at identified destinations.
- For **components within public funding** under this scheme, the Union Govt will provide a 100% fund.
- For improved sustainability of the project, it also seeks to involve **Public Private Partnership (PPP)** as well as **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**.

*Source: House panel seeks SOP for timely completion of spiritual tourism projects (The Hindu)*

## CARBON MARKETS

**Context:** The Union Budget has been criticized for its alleged lack of focus on decarbonization and its silence on India's proposed carbon market.

#### About Carbon Markets:

- They are regulatory structures that allow oil and gas-intensive companies or heavy industry to **reduce their economic footprint through a series of incentives**.
- It is based on the idea that the most polluting countries/industries can **purchase the right to pollute more from ones that have not reached their emissions limits**.



- The **1997 Kyoto Protocol** turned polluting emissions into a commodity.
  - EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) is the largest in the world - in operation since 2015.
- These markets incentivise **emission reduction & better energy efficiency**.
- For e.g., an industrial unit that outperforms emission standards stands to gain credits. Another unit which did not attain prescribed standards can buy these credits and show compliance.

#### What are Carbon Credits?

- Carbon credits are **measurable and verifiable emission reductions** from certified climate action projects.
- A carbon credit works as a permit by **allowing a company or govt to emit a specific amount of CO2**.
- Companies/govts that emit less than their limit can sell their extra credits to those exceeding their limits, thus aiding reduction in overall emissions.
- This helps **balance carbon emissions** while aiding **investment in clean technologies**. These projects reduce, remove or avoid GHG emissions.
- Other positive benefits - empower communities, protect ecosystems, restore forests, or reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

- Projects must adhere to a rigorous set of criteria to pass **verification by 3rd-party agencies**. After an organization or individual buys a carbon credit, the **credit is permanently retired & can't be reused**.

#### Mechanism in India:

- **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** (Ministry of Power) - **Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) Scheme** - **Companies can earn efficiency certificates** if they outperform efficiency standards. **Companies that lag behind can buy these certificates** to continue operating.
- India launched PAT in 2012, under the **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency** (one of the eight missions comprising the National Action Plan on Climate Change).
- Union Govt. recently announced that appropriate regulations for **transition from the current PAT Scheme to the 'Indian Carbon Market' Scheme** will be put in place.

#### Draft Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (Ministry of Power)

- The **Energy Conservation Act of 2001 was amended in 2022** to empower the Union Govt. to specify a carbon credit trading scheme.
- **'Accredited carbon verifier'**: Agency accredited by BEE to carry out validation or verification activities regarding the CCTS.
- **Indian Carbon Market Governing Board (ICMGB)**: For oversight, making rules for sale of carbon certificates, and other regulatory functions
  - ICMGB shall meet at least once in a quarter of every year

- **Bureau of Energy Efficiency** shall be its administrator and shall also work as secretariat for ICMGB.
- The **Grid Controller of India Ltd.** shall be registry for Indian Carbon Market.
- **Central Electricity Regulatory Commission** shall act as regulator for trading activities under the market.

Source: Budget 2025-26: Decarbonization takes a back seat (Down to Earth)

## TERMS IN NEWS

### Gyan Bharatam Mission




### National Mission for Manuscripts

- The Union Budget has introduced the 'Gyan Bharatam Mission', aimed at **surveying, documenting & conserving India's vast manuscript heritage**.
- It seeks to **conserve over one crore manuscripts** housed in academic institutions, museums, libraries, and private collections.
- To accommodate this, the **allocation for the National Manuscripts Mission (NMM), has increased from Rs 3.5 crore to Rs 60 crore**.
- A significant aspect of the Gyan Bharatam Mission is the establishment of the **National Digital Repository of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**. This digital platform will serve as a comprehensive resource for archiving

and sharing traditional wisdom, making it accessible to researchers, students, and institutions worldwide.

- By integrating ancient knowledge in fields such as ayurveda, mathematics, astronomy, linguistics, & philosophy with modern education and technology, the mission **aims to encourage research, innovation & sustainable development.**
- The NMM was launched by the Ministry of Culture in 2003 under the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA).**

 The Ministry of Culture defines a manuscript as a handwritten composition created on materials such as paper, bark, cloth, metal, or palm leaf, and it must be at least 75 years old. India holds around 5 million manuscripts, the largest such collection in the world.

**GARBH-INI-DRISHTI**

- The Union Govt. has launched the GARBH-INI-DRISHTI Platform. It is a digital platform that **stores and shares health data collected from over 12,000 pregnant women, newborns, and postpartum mothers.**
- It is one of the largest maternal and child health databases in South Asia.
- It provides access to **clinical data, medical images, and biospecimens** for research. It will help scientists and doctors **study pregnancy, newborn health, and postpartum care.**
- It supports research on maternal and neonatal health, helping to **reduce birth complications and improve healthcare.**
- It encourages collaboration between hospitals and research institutions for better medical solutions.

**Tribhuvan Sahkari University**




- The Tribhuvan Sahkari University Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha to **establish a national cooperative university at IRMA, Gujarat.**
- It is aimed as **India's first national cooperative university**, focused on education, training, and research in the cooperative sector. The bill declares it as an **institution of national importance.**
- It is proposed to be built **at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA)** in Gujarat.
- The **IRMA will become a school within the new University** and serve as a Centre of Excellence for Rural Management. It will retain its autonomy under this new framework.

**Aims of the University:**

- **Develop skilled professionals** for managerial, technical & major administrative roles in cooperative societies.
- Promote **standardized cooperative education** across India.

**Features of the University:**

- **Sector-Specific Schools:** Dairy, sugar, fisheries, banking, cooperative finance, marketing, cooperative laws, and multi-state cooperatives.
- **Affiliated Colleges Nationwide:** 4-5 in states with high cooperative presence, 1-2 in others.
- **Digital Learning:** To integrate with SWAYAM e-learning platform.
- **Global Collaboration:** To partner with universities and colleges for research & development.

 The IRMA was established in 1979 by Dr. Verghese Kurien, the father of India's White Revolution. It aims to provide professional education in rural management and develop leaders for the cooperative sector.

**PLACES IN NEWS**

**Samos Island**



- The Samos Island in Greece has been witnessing numerous small earthquakes in its vicinity.

- The Island of Samos is in Greece, located on the **Eastern Aegean Sea** just 1,700 meters from the **Asian coast of Turkey**.
- Samos Island is home to the **fortified ancient city (Pythagoreion)** and ancient **Temple of Hera** (Heraion) of Samos, a UNESCO Heritage Site. It is also the birthplace of Pythagoras (a famous Greek mathematician).
- **Samos and nearby Aegean islands** are key transit points for migrants entering the European Union illegally from Turkey. Over 54,000 migrants have entered Greece illegally in 2024.

**PRACTICE QUESTIONS**

**Q1. Consider the following statements about the Forest Conservation Act, 1980:**

1. The Forest Advisory Committee is a statutory body established under the provisions of the Act.
2. As per the 2023 Amendment to the Act, all projects lying within 100 kms of international borders are exempt from the Act.
3. As per the 2023 Amendment to the Act, ecotourism facilities in forests are exempt from the Act.

**Which of the afore mentioned statements are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 1 and 3
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Q2. The recently launched “Gyan Bharatam Mission” is related to which of the following objectives?**

- (a) Documenting and conserving India's vast collection of manuscripts
- (b) Increasing academic research on India's ancient knowledge systems
- (c) Translating scientific works and textbooks into regional languages
- (d) Introducing indigenous teaching methods into the school curriculum

**Q3. Consider the following islands often seen in the news and the oceans/seas where they are located:**

- 1. Samos Island: Aegean Sea
- 2. Diego Garcia: Indian Ocean
- 3. St. Martin Island: Bay of Bengal
- 4. Azores Islands: Atlantic Ocean

**How many of these pairs are correctly matched?**

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

**Q4. Consider the following statements regarding Carbon Markets:**

- 1. Carbon markets can incentivize both emission reduction and investment in clean technologies.
- 2. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change will act as nodal agency for India's proposed carbon market.
- 3. The Kyoto Protocol was the first global agreement that provided for the creation of a carbon market.

**Which of the afore mentioned statements are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3

- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Q5. The "Tribhuvan Sahkari University", recently proposed to be established in Gujarat, is related to:**

- (a) Creating a workforce of skilled professionals to work with and improve the working of SHGs
- (b) Imparting education in the latest technological advances and novel methods in the agricultural sector
- (c) Developing skilled professionals and standardized education for the co-operative sector in India
- (d) Increasing skilling in banking and micro-finance in order to boost rural financial inclusion

**Answers:**

- 1. B
- 2. A
- 3. D
- 4. C
- 5. C