

Current Affairs of the Day

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Parliamentary panel to discuss draft EIA

- After a flurry of letters between Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar on the implications of the Draft Environment Impact Assessment 2020 (EIA 2020), the Parliamentary Committee of Science and Technology headed by Mr. Ramesh will deliberate on the subject at its meeting scheduled for August 7.

Five main objections to the draft:

- Mr. Ramesh shot back a four-page letter to Mr. Javadekar on Monday detailing his five main objections to the draft that he had sent in his July 25 letter.
- He says the draft allowed post-facto approvals which go against the very principle of assessment and public participation prior to environmental clearance, and has provisions that will routinely legitimise illegality.
- Second, the notification reduces public participation in all steps of the environment clearance process, lessening the notice period for public hearing and doing away with them for a large category of projects.
- Third, it does away with the environmental impact assessment altogether in many cases of expansion.
- Fourth, it increases the validity of environment clearances allowing projects to “secure” land for long durations even when they are not constructed.
- And finally it gives the Union government full powers to appoint State environmental impact assessment authorities.

Value Added Information

Background:

- Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986 which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process.
- The draft notification is issued under the powers vested in the central government under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to take all such measures for “protecting and improving the quality of the environment.



The key points of dispute with the proposed draft are that:

- It shortens the period of public consultation hearings to a maximum of 40 days.
- It reduces from 30 to 20 days the time provided for the public to submit their responses during a public hearing for any application seeking environmental clearance.
- It also allows the declaration of some areas as “economically sensitive areas” without a public hearing or environmental clearance, and several “red” and “orange”-classified toxic industries could now operate as close as 0-5 km from a Protected Area in “callous disregard” for forests.
- The increased validity of the environment clearances for mining projects (50 years versus 30 years currently) and river valley projects (15 years versus 10 years currently) raises the risk of irreversible environmental, social and health consequences on account of the project remaining unnoticed for long.

What is EIA?

- EIA is an important process for evaluating the likely environmental impact of a proposed project. It is a process whereby people’s views are taken into consideration for granting final approval to any developmental project or activity. It is basically, a decision-making tool to decide whether the project should be approved or not.

The EIA process involves:

- **Screening:** this stage decides which projects need a full or partial assessment study.
- **Scoping:** this stage decides which impacts are necessary to be assessed. This is done based on legal requirements, international conventions, expert knowledge and public engagement. This stage also finds out alternate solutions.
- **Assessment & evaluation of impacts and development of alternatives:** this stage predicts and identifies the environmental impacts of the proposed project and also elaborates on the alternatives.



- **EIA Report:** in this reporting stage, an environmental management plan (EMP) and also a non-technical summary of the project's impact is prepared for the general public. This report is also called the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- **Decision making:** the decision on whether the project is to be given approval or not and if it is to be given, under what conditions.
- **Monitoring, compliance, enforcement and environmental auditing:** monitoring whether the predicted impacts and the mitigation efforts happen as per the EMP.

'Tougher lockdown curbs spurred domestic violence'

- Domestic violence and online sexual abuse cases were higher in red-zone COVID-19 districts as compared to those in orange and green zones, according to a new study which argues that gender-based violence shifted from streets to domestic spaces due to restrictions on mobility.
- The Working Paper titled, "Unintended Consequences of Lockdowns: COVID-19 and the Shadow Pandemic" was published in the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) on July 20, and is authored by Manisha Shah and Saravana Ravindran from the University of California at Los Angeles.
- The paper "compares districts over time, while also comparing across districts.

Highlights:

- The study highlights that domestic violence complaints rose by 131% and those on online abuse increased by 184% in red zone districts as compared to green zones districts. Correspondingly, there was a significant decrease in harassment, rape, and sexual assault complaints in red and orange zone districts relative to green zone districts in the months during and after the lockdown.
- Effective May 1, all districts in the country were demarcated as red, orange and green on the basis of cumulative number of COVID-19 cases. Districts with the highest number of cases were identified as red zones and saw strictest curbs on public movement, while those with no positive cases in the past 21



days were identified as green zones and saw least restrictions. An orange zone was one where new cases were emerging but at a decreasing rate.

- The authors compare the complaints received by the National Commission for Women between October 2019 and May 2020 with district-wise data on lockdown categories issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- They also studied the affect of lockdown measures on mobility of individuals using data from Google Community Mobility Reports, which show percentage change in the number of visitors to places of interest in a particular week relative to the five-week period from January 3–February 6, 2020.
- Working on the premise that domestic violence is not just a consequence of restricted mobility, but of patriarchal mindsets. the study uses data from National Family Healthy Survey 4 (2015-2016) and finds that districts “in which a greater proportion of husbands report that beating wives is justified see greater increases in domestic violence complaints received by the NCW in May 2020 in red zone districts relative to green zone districts.
- On the other hand, districts in which a greater proportion of wives report that a husband beating his wife is justified see fewer domestic violence complaints received by the NCW in May 2020 in red zone districts relative to green zone districts.

Gandhi-King initiative passes U.S. House committee

- A Bill authored by American civil rights leader and lawmaker John Lewis, which seeks to establish an exchange programme between India and the U.S. to study the work and legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., passed an important committee in the U.S. House of Representatives on Wednesday, days after Mr. Lewis’s death.
- The Bill, co-sponsored by Indian American Congressman from California Ami Bera will establish annual scholar and student exchange programmes for Indians and Americans to study the leaders’ legacies and visit historic sites in India and the U.S., relevant to the India’s freedom struggle and the U.S.’s civil rights movement.
- The Bill also seeks to establish the Gandhi-King Global Academy, a conflict resolution initiative based on the principles of non-violence. It proposes the



establishment of the U.S.-India Gandhi-King Development Foundation set up by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the government of India, organised under Indian law. The Foundation, which has a proposed budget authorised of up to \$30 million per year for five years through 2025, is tasked with administering grants to NGOs that work in health, pollution and climate change, education and empowerment of women.

- The Bill was inspired by Mr. Lewis's visit to India in 2009 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's visit to India, according to an email from Mr. Bera's office.
- The Bill will need to be voted through the House and Senate before it becomes law.

China conducts drills in South China Sea

- Beijing recently conducted "high-intensity" naval exercises in the South China Sea, China's Defence Ministry said on Thursday, as tensions grow over the Asian power's manoeuvres in the contested waters.
- China's expanding military presence in the region has worried several of its neighbours, while the U.S. has vowed to stand up against Beijing's territorial claims to much of the South China Sea, including the contested Paracel Islands.
- Chinese H-6G and H-6J jet bombers carried out high-intensity training, and completed day-and-night training exercises in taking off and landing, long-range assault, and attacks on sea targets.
- China — which is locked in disputes with neighbours including India, Japan and Vietnam over islands in the South China Sea — has infuriated other nations by building artificial islands with military installations in parts of the sea.
- Washington declared earlier this month that Beijing's claims to most of the sea are illegal, ramping up support for Southeast Asian nations with claims to parts of it.
- The region is believed to have valuable oil and gas deposits.
- Australia has also rejected Beijing's territorial and maritime claims in the sea, saying there was "no legal basis" to several of China's claims.



- The U.S. regularly conducts so-called “freedom of navigation operations” in the South China Sea in order to stand up to Beijing.

Value Added Information

South China Sea: Why is it strategically important?

The South China Sea is a marginal sea that is part of the Pacific Ocean that extends from the Strait of Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the northeast. The littoral countries of the South China Sea are China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

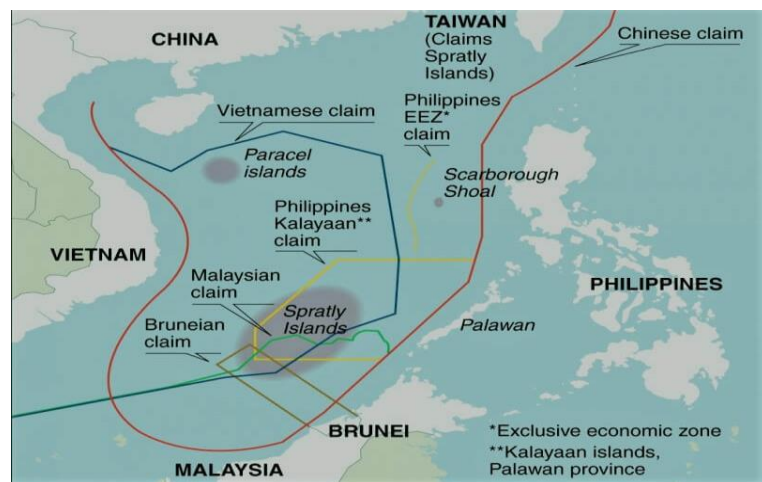
Importance of South China Sea

- The South China Sea is a busy international waterway, one of the main arteries of global trade worth more than \$5 trillion and is growing year on year.
- It is a rich source of hydrocarbons and natural resources.

Islands in the South China Sea

The islands of the South China Sea can be grouped into two island chains.

- The Paracels Islands: These are clustered in the northwest corner of the Sea.
- The Spratly Islands: These are located in the southeast corner.



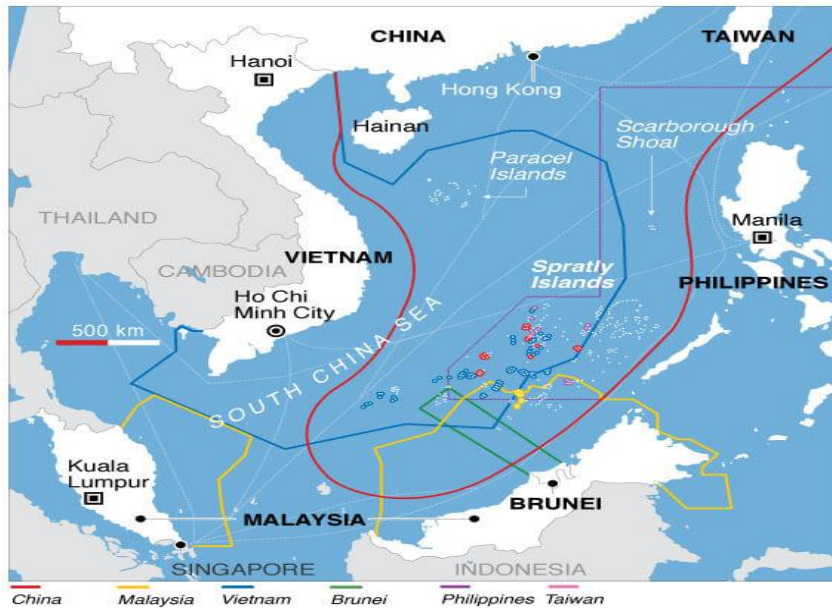
South China Sea Dispute

The South China Sea is an area of growing conflicts due to territorial claims by different countries. With respect to the Spratly Islands, different geographic features are reportedly occupied by claimants such as Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, and Malaysia. The Paracels Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.



History of South China Sea Dispute

- In the first half of the 20th century, the Sea remained almost quiet. In fact, at the end of World War II, no claimant occupied a single island in the entire South China Sea.
- China laid claim to the South China Sea in 1947. It demarcated its claims with a U-shaped line made up of eleven dashes on a map, covering most of the area.
- But two “dashes” were removed in the early 1950s to bypass the Gulf of Tonkin as a gesture to communist comrades in North Vietnam.
- The remaining ‘nine-dash line’ stretches hundreds of kilometers south and east of its southerly Hainan Island, covering almost 90% of South China Sea.
- After 1960’s when the huge reserve of oil and natural gas were discovered in the region, the territorial claims started growing in an unprecedented manner.
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, established a legal framework intended to balance the economic and security interests of coastal states with those of seafaring nations.
- While UNCLOS has been signed and ratified by nearly all the coastal countries in the South China Sea, based on their own interpretation of the UNCLOS, claimant countries started to legitimize their claims.
- In 2002, ASEAN and China came together to sign the Declaration on the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to keep disputes away. However, it didn’t achieve the desired outcomes.





- In 2009, Malaysia and Vietnam sent a joint submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for setting out some of their claims. In response to this China submitted a map containing the infamous “nine-dash” line and due to which, there was no headway in the dispute resolution.

PCA-Ruling and implications

- Both the Philippines and China laid their claims the Scarborough Shoal which is a little more than 100 miles from the Philippines and 500 miles from China. The Philippines and China are both dependent upon fishing in the South China Sea, specifically in the Scarborough Shoal, for the economic development and livelihood of their people. A tense but bloodless stand-off between China and the Philippines over Scarborough Shoal in 2012, led to China gaining de facto control over the region.
- But in 2013, the Philippines raised the dispute with China to the PCA(Permanent Court Of Arbitration), saying China’s claims violated Philippines’ sovereignty under the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea(UNCLOS).
- The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that Chinese claims over 90 percent of the South China Sea area are illegitimate and under UNCLOS, China is intruding into the Philippines’ sovereign waters as the 9-dash line which includes the Scarborough shoal and crosses into the Philippines EEZ.
- China out rightly rejected the ruling. China prefers bilateral negotiations with the other parties. But many of its neighbors argue that China’s relative size and clout give it an unfair advantage.

ASEAN and South China Sea

- One of the fundamental principles of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been to resolve regional disputes by peaceful means. But over the years, the position of ASEAN on the South China Sea disputes has weakened its image internationally and failing to resolve this issue would lead to questions being raised about its credibility as an effective regional organization.



The US and the South China Sea

- The U.S. has no claim in the South China Sea, but has been highly critical of China's assertiveness and insisted on free navigation of commercial vessels in the South China Sea is vital for regional and international trade.
- It conducted joint military patrols with the Philippines and Japan, Australia, and Indonesia.
- US also increased the financial support for enhancing the military capabilities of ASEAN and East Asian countries as well strengthened bilateral defense collaboration with these countries.

India and the South China Sea

- India remained acutely conscious of its official position of neither being party to the disputes nor taking sides for many years. But with increasing ties with East Asian countries (Act East Policy), India indirectly started raising concerns about Chinese illegitimate claims in the South China Sea. India believes that the disputes in the Southeast Asian littorals are a litmus test for the international maritime law.
- In the aftermath of the Hague Tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea, India obligated to take a principled stand on the issue of freedom of navigation and commercial access enshrined in the UNCLOS.
- Despite China's protests, India continues its oil exploration in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea from where ONGC Videsh Limited supplies oil to Vietnam.
- India also supports a negotiated settlement of Brunei's maritime dispute with China and has inked defense cooperation agreement that would provide an institutional foundation for more collaborative work on maritime security and secure India's energy lanes to Brunei.

