

FAQs

Leuser Ecosystem of Indonesia

Why in News?

Recently, an investigation by the global watchdog Rainforest Action Network (RAN) has shown that various food, cosmetics and finance companies have links with companies implicated in the destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem, a forest area on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia,

What is Leuser Ecosystem?

Leuser Ecosystem is among the most ancient and life-rich ecosystems ever documented by science and is a world-class hotspot of biodiversity and is widely acknowledged to be among the most important areas of intact rainforest left in all of Southeast Asia.

The ecosystem has been designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

What about its Location and Topography?

- The ecosystem stretches across the province of Aceh and North Sumatra, Indonesia.
- It spans 2.6 million hectares, almost three times the size of Yellowstone National Park, USA.
- Its diverse landscape includes lowland and montane rainforests and over 185,000 hectares of carbon-rich peatlands.
- Montane rainforests, also called cloud forests, are vegetation of tropical mountainous regions in which the rainfall is often heavy and persistent condensation occurs because of cooling of moisture-laden air currents deflected upward by the mountains.

What is its significance?

Wildlife and Biodiversity:

- It is among the most important forests left in Southeast Asia, particularly because it is the last place of sufficient size and quality to support viable populations of rare species like Sumatran tigers, orangutans, rhinos, elephants, clouded leopards and sun bears.

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- 75% of the world's remaining population of the Sumatran orangutan is found in the ecosystem.

For Humans:

- The majority of Aceh's people, between 70-75%, live on the coastal plains of Sumatra, where many communities have established wet rice cultivation.
- The livelihoods and food supply for millions of people rely heavily on the natural services, particularly the water supplies, that the Leuser Ecosystem provides.

Climate Change:

- It plays an outsize role regulating the global climate by storing massive amounts of carbon in its peatlands and standing forests.
- Peatlands are wet, carbon-rich areas that have formed through thousands of years of undecomposed leaf litter and organic material accumulation.
- When these areas are drained and the peat is exposed to air, it begins to oxidize and releases large amounts of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere.

What are major issues here?

- Industrial development for palm oil, pulp and paper plantations and mining continues to threaten the entire ecosystem.
- The fires from this widespread destruction have caused major haze pollution from Singapore to Jakarta, resulting in huge economic losses and public health issues.
- Sumatra's unique species are dying out with their negligible populations left and few on the verge of extinction.