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Dongria Kondhs (26 April) (GS Paper I: Society, Geography)

Dongria Kondhs

- The Dongria Kondhs reside primarily within the Niyamgiri Hills of southwestern Odisha, India.
- They are a designated Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by the government of India, recognizing their distinct culture and need for special protection of their rights.
- The Dongria consider the Niyamgiri hills sacred, calling their primary deity Niyam Raja. Their culture, identity, and livelihood are deeply intertwined with the hills and forests.

Socio-Cultural Life:

- **Livelihood:** The Dongria Kondh practice shifting cultivation as well as the collection of forest produce. Horticulture is central to their economic and cultural life.
- **Social Structure:** Dongria Kondh society emphasizes community living and a strong kinship structure. They are organized into geographically demarcated clans, often identified by animal names.
- **Religious Beliefs:** The Dongria Kondh follow their own traditional beliefs centering on nature worship and reverence for their ancestors.

- **Festivals:** Numerous festivals are celebrated by the Dongrias throughout the year, many of which are related to their agricultural cycles and religious practices.

Development and Conservation Challenges

- **Mining Threat:** The Dongria Kondh have famously resisted mining proposals by corporations like Vedanta Resources, which sought to extract bauxite from the Niyamgiri Hills. Their successful campaign has been a landmark case for tribal rights and environmental protection in India.



- **Development Initiatives:** The Odisha government has initiated several development programs specifically for the Dongria Kondh, with focus on education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Balancing Development & Conservation:** There's an ongoing need to create a framework for sustainable development that prioritizes the Dongria Kondh's rights, well-being, and their connection to their ancestral lands.

- Minjali Sikaka, from the Dongria Kondh tribe in Odisha's Niyamgiri hill range, was persuaded into surrendering as an alleged cadre of the banned CPI (Maoist).
- She was promised ₹2 lakh under the government's surrender-cum-rehabilitation scheme for Naxalites, in the presence of Rayagada Superintendent of Police and fellow Dongria Kondh members.
- However, she refused to surrender as it would label her as a Maoist and tarnish her family name.
- Several other villagers in Lakhpadar, including seven others from Minjali's tribe, have also faced similar allegations of ties with the outlawed CPI (Maoist) over the past 15 to 20 years.
- Many Dongria Kondh tribals have been detained and sent to jail by authorities on suspicion of Maoist affiliations.
- Last year, nine Dongria Kondh tribals and an activist from Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti were charged with sedition, but the charges were later dropped by the police.
- Frustrated by the continued branding of their community members as Naxalites, they announced a boycott of the upcoming elections.

- Minjali denied any association with the CPI (Maoist) and expressed shock at the police's claims.
- She emphasized that she has been living with her family in Lakhpadar and has visited various cities, indicating no involvement with the Maoists.
- Despite financial struggles, Minjali asserted that she would never accept ₹2 lakh to surrender to the police.
- Nilakantha Behera, inspector in-charge of Kalyansinghpur police station, acknowledged Minjali's case but clarified it was an "old matter."
- Major political parties rarely visit scattered settlements within Niyamgiri hill range due to the dispersed population, deeming it a waste of time.
- Ladda Sikaka, a community leader, expressed that boycotting elections allows them to assert their existence, despite their small numbers.
- Dongria tribes faced legal cases, many related to alleged Maoist connections, particularly after opposing bauxite mining in Niyamgiri hills.
- Odisha Mining Corporation proposed mining in Niyamgiri to supply Vedanta group's alumina refinery at Lanjigarh. The Supreme Court's 2013 ruling mandated mining clearance required consent from gram sabhas, leading to Dongria representatives rejecting the proposal.
- Dongria Kondhs face criminal cases due to alleged connections with CPI (Maoist), causing discontent within the community.
- Villages of Dongria Kondhs fall under Bissamkatak Assembly constituency, represented by Jagannath Saraka, the State's Tribal Development Minister. The region goes to poll on May 13.

Modi thanks Italian PM for invitation to G-7 meeting in June (26 April) (GS Paper II: IR)

G7

- **The Group of Seven:** An intergovernmental forum of the world's seven largest advanced economies. These are **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States**.
- **The European Union** also participates as a "non-enumerated member".
- **Purpose:** The G7 nations meet annually to discuss major economic, political, security, and global development challenges and to coordinate policies where appropriate.
- **Origins:** The G7 was formed in the 1970s in response to the economic turmoil of the time, including the oil crisis and the collapse of fixed exchange rates.

Key Areas of Focus

- **Economic Cooperation:** Promoting global economic growth, trade, financial stability, and working on common challenges.
- **Global Health:** Addressing public health crises and strengthening health systems worldwide.
- **Climate and Environment:** Tackling climate change, protecting biodiversity, transitioning to green energy, and promoting sustainable policies.
- **Foreign Policy & Security:** Collaborating on peace, security, and addressing threats like terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

- **Democracy & Human Rights:** Upholding democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law globally.

G7 Logo:



- Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, thanking her for an invitation to the G-7 meeting in June if he is reelected.
- India received an invitation to be a special invitee at the G-7 summit's outreach sessions, scheduled for June 13-15.
- New Delhi also received invitations for the Prime Minister or External Affairs Minister to attend the Ukraine peace conference in Lucerne, Switzerland, on June 15-16, and for the External Affairs Minister to attend the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on June 10-11.
- The Ministry of External Affairs and diplomatic sources mentioned that a final response to these invitations would be provided after the election results are announced.
- PM Modi extended his greetings to PM Meloni and the people of Italy on the occasion of the 79th anniversary of Liberation Day.
- He thanked PM Meloni for the invite to the G-7 summit outreach sessions in June 2024 in Puglia, Italy.
- Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership and exchanged views on regional and global developments of mutual interest.

Centre allows 'immediate' export of 2,000 tonnes of white onions (26 April) (GS Paper III: External Sector)

- The Union government has partially relaxed the indefinite ban on onion exports.

- This move allows for the immediate export of 2,000 tonnes of white onions from three designated ports.
- The relaxation comes with conditions: exports of white onions will be permitted only after certification by Gujarat's Horticulture Commissioner.
- Previous relaxations specified the countries for shipments and required exports to go through the National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL). However, the latest notification removes these conditions.
- The new notification mandates that exports must go through designated ports in Gujarat: Mundra, Pipavav, or Nhava Sheva in Mumbai.

Gujarat crop

- On April 13, horticulture exporters reached out to the Commerce Ministry and the DGFT to inquire about any potential relaxation for white onion exports.
- This inquiry was prompted by reports of ongoing procurement of export-quality white onions at a Gujarat Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC).
- Gujarat is the primary producer and exporter of white onions in India, with districts like Bhavnagar and Amreli being significant contributors.
- The relaxation in export regulations has raised concerns among onion farmers from neighboring states like Maharashtra, where red onions are predominantly grown.
- Farmers from Nashik, Maharashtra, question why farmers outside Gujarat are not being given export opportunities, especially since domestic wholesale prices for red onions have decreased.

'A step forward'

- Ajit Shah, president of the Horticulture Produce Exporters' Association (HPEA), views the partial relaxation of white onion exports positively.
- He believes that not specifying the destination country or requiring export through a specific agency is a progressive step.
- Shah emphasizes the need for similar relaxations for red onions and smaller-sized onions (40 mm or less) that are typically not consumed in local markets.
- While wholesale prices for red onions have dropped to about ₹11 to ₹12 per kg, white onion prices remain higher at around ₹16 to ₹17 per kg.
- Shah suggests that since onion stocks are sufficient and prices are lower, the government should open up additional export opportunities to all traders and farmers whenever it permits exports again.

Diplomatic exceptions

- The Union government banned onion exports in December 2023 due to concerns about a potential shortage of the politically sensitive crop.

- Last month, the export restrictions were extended indefinitely.
- However, the government allowed exports to countries that made requests through diplomatic channels.
- On March 1, 14,400 metric tonnes (MT) of onion exports were permitted for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a quarterly cap of 3,600 MT.
- In two additional notifications this month, an extra 20,000 MT of onions were approved for export to the UAE, exceeding the quarterly quota. Additionally, 10,000 MT were permitted for export to Sri Lanka.

Questioning the polls ‘rain washes out play’ moments (26 April) (GS Paper II: Elections)

The Surat and Arunachal Pradesh results are issues that call for debate where an election is made to seem ‘free and fair’ despite people not having cast a single vote

- Being elected unopposed is legal under existing electoral laws.
- It can be exciting because you win without competition.
- **Rule 11 of the Conduct of Election Rules 1961** outlines the procedure:
 - The **returning officer** displays the list of candidates.
 - If the number of candidates matches or is less than the seats available, the winner is declared immediately.
 - Results are declared using Forms 21 to 21B.

Democratic rights, the process

- Being elected unopposed means there's a winner without any opposing candidates.
- Recent examples, like the **Surat Lok Sabha seat and 10 Assembly seats in Arunachal Pradesh, highlight this scenario.**
- According to **Section 53 of The Representation of the People Act, 1951**, if the number of candidates equals the seats available, they are declared elected without a poll.
- The issue raised is that **this process doesn't allow for the None of the Above (NOTA) option**, which was introduced to provide voters with a choice to reject all candidates.
- NOTA doesn't impact the election process significantly, raising questions about its effectiveness.
- The real question arises when no one contests or if all electors boycott the election, leaving the seat vacant.

- The Election Commission of India's obligation in such cases and whether a re-election is necessary is a matter of discussion.

The financial rules parallel

- The **General Financial Rules (GFRs)** govern public procurement procedures in India, emphasizing fairness, transparency, and reasonableness.
- Rule 166 allows for a 'Single Tender Enquiry' under specific circumstances, ensuring adequate competition.
- Rule 173(xx) states that lack of competition doesn't solely depend on the number of bidders but also considers factors like advertising, qualification criteria, and pricing.
- Despite being unrelated, the electoral process under the Representation of the People Act (RPA) meets similar requirements.
- **The electoral process can sometimes result in a single candidate being elected unopposed, excluding voters from making a choice.**
- **This creates a dichotomy where representatives are chosen without voter input, potentially undermining the spirit of democracy.**
- There's a possibility that candidates could manipulate the system, denying voters their statutory right.
- To address this, measures should ensure that candidates actively seek votes and encourage voter participation to uphold the democratic process.

The candidate is at the fore

- The Representation of the People Act (RPA) treats a complete boycott as everyone receiving zero votes, as stated in Section 65 on 'Equality of votes'.
- **If an equality of votes occurs, the returning officer decides between candidates by lot, replacing the will of the people with the expediency of the system.**
- This paradox conflicts with the democratic principle of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."
- **The RPA allows for issuing another notification if no candidates file nominations initially but is silent on subsequent occurrences.**
- Abstaining voters are excluded from the electoral process, depriving them of the NOTA option, which lacks significance.
- Candidates can nullify the process, but voters collectively cannot, raising questions about the fairness of the system.
- **Considerations for amending the first-past-the-post system include introducing a minimum percentage of votes for winning candidates.**
- **Another consideration is transferring seats to the nominated category if no candidates offer themselves for elections repeatedly, allowing the President of India to nominate a candidate.**

- These issues warrant a wide-ranging debate to ensure elections provide genuine opportunities for voters to cast their votes without fear or favor.

Courting action: On FMCG marketing, advertising (26 April) (GS Paper II: Regulatory Authority)

Courts should deal firmly with violators of existing food safety regulations

- Justice Hima Kohli, leading a Supreme Court bench, criticized the government's inaction against Patanjali Ayurved for advertising untested COVID-19 cures and other pseudoscientific remedies.
- The court expanded its inquiry to include all fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies publishing misleading advertisements.
- India is experiencing a rise in non-communicable diseases due to the availability of ultra-processed foods and sedentary lifestyles.

Communicable Diseases

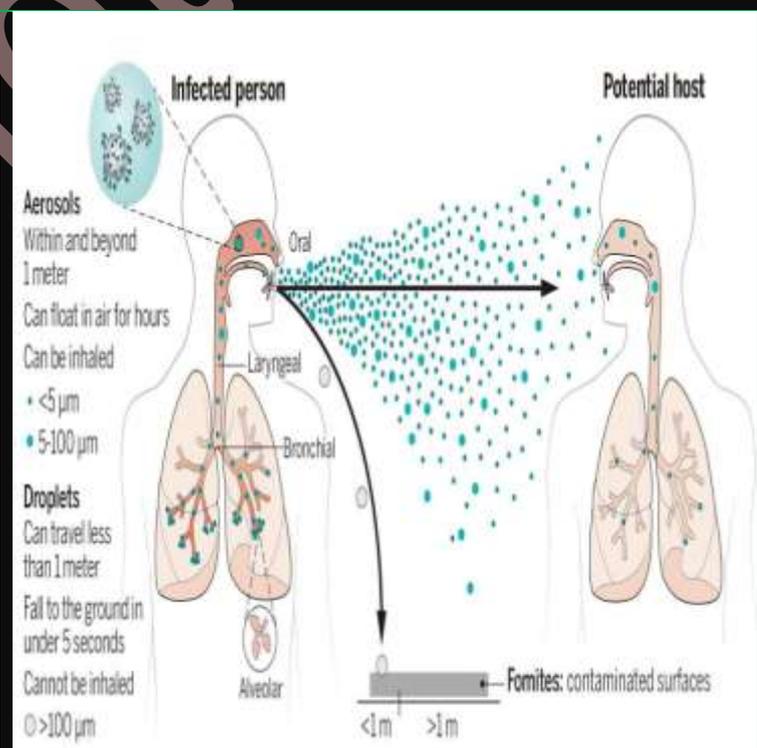
- It is illnesses caused by infectious agents known as pathogens. These pathogens include bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites.

Transmission: Spread from one person to another through various means:

- Direct contact (touching, kissing)
- Airborne droplets (coughs, sneezes)
- Contaminated food or water
- Insect bites (mosquitoes, ticks)
- Contact with infected surfaces

Examples:

- Influenza (flu)
- COVID-19
- Measles



- Tuberculosis (TB)
- Malaria

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

They are the chronic diseases not directly transmitted from person to person. They often develop slowly over time.

Causes: A mix of factors, including:

- Lifestyle choices (unhealthy diet, inactivity, smoking)
- Genetics
- Environmental factors (pollution, exposure to toxins)
- Age



Examples:

- Cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, stroke)
- Cancer
- Chronic respiratory diseases (asthma, COPD)
- Diabetes
- Alzheimer's disease

Key Differences

Feature	Communicable Diseases	Non-Communicable Diseases
Cause	Pathogens	Lifestyle, genetics, environment, age
Transmission	Person to person	Not directly transmitted
Duration	Often acute	Develop over time (chronic)
Prevention	Vaccines, hygiene, isolation of cases	Healthy lifestyle, early detection, managing risk factors
Treatment	Antibiotics (for bacterial infections), antivirals, etc.	Medications, lifestyle changes, surgery, therapies

Important Notes

- **Global Impact:** NCDs are the leading cause of death worldwide. Early prevention and management are crucial.
- **Overlap:** Some conditions can have both communicable and non-communicable elements. For example, certain viruses can increase the risk of cancer.
- **Manufacturers sometimes add vitamins to their products to evade scrutiny**, despite their products still being considered unhealthy.
- The **apex court** has previously sought public apologies from **Patanjali Ayurved** for misleading advertisements, with uncertainty surrounding the acceptance of the latest apology.
- The court's expectation that it must intervene due to ineffective regulation mechanisms, including the complaints-led system and dysfunctional regulatory bodies, raises concerns.

- The **Advertising Standards Council of India** lacks authority to enforce compliance, and the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India** is hesitant to penalize errant manufacturers due to understaffing and lack of resources.

Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

- **Purpose:** ASCI is a self-regulatory, non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring responsible and ethical advertising practices within India.
- **Founded:** 1985
- **Headquarters:** Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
- **Chairman:** Subhash Kamath (as of 2023)



ASCI's Mission

- ASCI aims to protect consumer interests by maintaining and enhancing public confidence in advertising.
- It does this by enforcing the ASCI Code, guidelines, and regulations.

ASCI Code

The foundation of **ASCI's work** is its code for self-regulation, ensuring advertisements are:

- **No misleading claims or deceptive practices.**
- Adhering to Indian laws and regulations.
- Not offensive or harmful to public sentiment.
- Especially focused on protecting children.
- **Fair in Competition:** Respectful of other businesses.

ASCI's Process

1. Consumers, competitors, or other parties can file complaints about advertisements they believe violate the ASCI Code.
2. The CCC, composed of members from diverse backgrounds, assesses the validity of complaints.
3. If an ad is found in violation, ASCI can request the advertiser to modify or withdraw it. They may also use public advisories to make consumers aware.

- **Civil society members**, including influencers and medical practitioners, often call out unscientific claims, but they face legal risks without adequate protection.
- Prompt enforcement and timely action against FMCG marketing violations are necessary to address the proliferation of misleading claims and disconnect between India's concerns about **non-communicable diseases** and available food options.
- The judiciary's role should focus on reviewing legislation rather than leading it, emphasizing quick and exemplary action against violators rather than overreaching into legislative and executive domains.

Stability in Maldives: On the election results and India ties (26 April) (GS Paper II: IR)

India should not allow Muizzu's win to affect ties between the two countries

- The **People's National Congress (PNC)**, led by Maldives President Mohammad Muizzu, secured a "super-majority" in the parliamentary elections, easing the path for passing laws and making constitutional amendments.
- The opposition, led by the former ruling **Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)**, won only 12 seats, while parties associated with former Presidents **Abdullah Yameen and Mohammad Nasheed** failed to win any seats.
- President Muizzu's leadership will be scrutinized as he holds near-absolute power in a country with a history of authoritarian rule.
- The election results reflect widespread approval of President Muizzu's decisions since taking office in November 2023, **including strengthening ties with China and distancing from India.**
- Concerns have been raised in India over derogatory comments about Prime Minister Narendra Modi by Maldivian Ministers, along with a drop in Indian tourist figures.
- The results provide an opportunity for New Delhi and Male to improve their strained ties, which have oscillated with changes in each government over the past decade.
- President Muizzu has stated his intention to pursue a "pro-Maldives" policy, which should be tested against actions that do not jeopardize India's security or regional peace.
- Maldives faces economic challenges, climate change issues, and strategic interest from the U.S. and China, making stronger ties with India and its sustainable financing policies increasingly important.
- A successful "Neighbourhood first" policy requires voluntary cooperation based on mutual trust and interests between India and Maldives.

Can green credits benefit India's forests?

(26 April)

- The Green Credit Programme was introduced by the Environment Ministry in October 2023.
- It's a market-based system allowing individuals and companies to earn incentives called 'green credits' for contributing to environmental and ecological restoration.
- Critics argue that these initiatives might be exploited to bypass existing laws, especially those related to forest conservation.
- The effectiveness of green credits in benefiting India's forests is debated by Vaibhav Chaturvedi and Debadityo Sinha in a conversation moderated by Jacob Koshy.

Vaibhav, how do you understand the green credit programme as it stands today?

- Vaibhav Chaturvedi highlights the importance of incentivizing green and sustainable actions.
- He suggests that creating a system where various actors undertake green actions is crucial.
- Chaturvedi mentions the option of implementing a 'command and control' policy, which mandates actions with penalties for non-compliance.
- However, he emphasizes the role of incentives in policymaking.
- Green credits are seen as part of an incentive structure to encourage actions like water conservation and afforestation involving individuals and corporations.
- Debadityo Sinha discusses the Green Credit Programme as a market-based incentive mechanism.
- He mentions that the programme covers several sectors, including forest and waste management.
- Sinha raises concerns about the execution of the programme on the ground.
- He questions whether those implementing the programme are aware of the challenges at the grassroots level and their expertise.
- While acknowledging that the scheme isn't inherently flawed, Sinha suggests that it could have been improved, especially in terms of its narrow focus on tree planting for earning credits.
- He highlights that the programme overlooks other crucial aspects of the ecosystem besides tree planting.

The guidelines aim to incentivise the restoration of degraded forest land. A forest can degrade for a variety of reasons, natural and man-made.

Afforestation may seem like a positive end in itself, but couldn't there be negative consequences too? Such as monocultures or promoting vegetation that is not suitable for the place?

- Vaibhav Chaturvedi responds to Debadityo Sinha's concerns about monoculture plantations in the Green Credit Programme.
- He acknowledges the historical promotion of monocultures in India's plantation efforts.
- Chaturvedi emphasizes the need to avoid incentivizing monoculture plantations under the green credits programme.
- He compares the green credits programme to other incentive schemes, such as subsidies for solar plants.
- Chaturvedi explains that the green credits programme operates as a market-based incentive approach, with demand and supply dynamics.

- He highlights that in carbon markets, the commodity is carbon credits, while in the green credits programme, it is green credits.

But plantations and monocultures were also driven by incentives. Can you regenerate a forest ecosystem in a market mechanism without compromising on biodiversity?

- **Debadityo Sinha** addresses the importance of considering both the land and the plantation methods in the Green Credit Programme.
- He highlights that forests consist of more than just trees and vary across different regions.
- Sinha expresses concerns about the impact of plantations in diverse forest landscapes, such as the Central Indian landscape and Leh-Ladakh, which may not be dominated by trees.
- He criticizes previous afforestation schemes for promoting plantations at the expense of local biodiversity and soil health.
- Sinha advocates for minimal intervention in forest regeneration, emphasizing the need to protect areas from disturbances rather than conducting major interventions.
- He suggests that with protection from disturbances, natural forests can regenerate over time, supporting biodiversity and benefiting local communities.

Let's say a 1,000 trees are planted. After two years, an independent body will do a verification. And let's say growing 1,000 trees in a particular patch earns you one green credit per tree. Now, the interesting thing is, this could be connected to voluntary carbon markets. In your experience in market-based mechanisms, we are familiar with carbon offsets as they are measurable quantities. Can you actually devise a logical trading system around such a philosophy of green credit and carbon?

- **Vaibhav Chaturvedi** emphasizes the importance of considering the broader goals of incentivizing biodiversity conservation and promoting local species in the Green Credit Programme.
- He acknowledges that there may be challenges in measuring the biodiversity impact of certain actions, such as trees being distant from each other, and suggests that science in this area is evolving.
- Chaturvedi argues that while achieving a perfect scientific measure may be difficult, having a reasonable measurement that is acceptable to stakeholders, civil society, and the media is crucial.
- He cautions against striving for perfection in measurement and instead advocates for accepting imperfect but reasonable measures.

- Chaturvedi acknowledges the fiscal constraints in a developing economy like India and suggests that leveraging funds from the private sector through market mechanisms can be beneficial for such programmes.

Let's say you're growing some forests for sequestering carbon. I can understand that. But let's say in a desert or some other ecosystem trees don't work and you need shrubs, for instance. Now, you can set a goal of reviving the ecosystem of this place. Can you say how many units of ecosystem revival is equal to the units of carbon that are captured? And extend that to groundwater recharge and air pollution? Do you think all these criteria are commensurable?

- Vaibhav Chaturvedi highlights a significant challenge in the Green Credit Programme, which is fungibility.
- In markets like the carbon market, various projects can save one unit of carbon, which can be measured and traded interchangeably.
- However, in the green credits system, different types of credits, such as biodiversity and water conservation, cannot be equated on the same platform.
- Fungibility refers to the ability to exchange one unit of a commodity for another of equal value, but in this case, different types of credits are not interchangeable.
- Chaturvedi explains that while the market may still function with different projects and demand for specific types of credits, they are not fungible commodities like in a perfect market
- Debadityo Sinha raises a crucial concern regarding how green credits will impact mandatory compliances, particularly in the context of forest clearances.
- Guidelines suggest that green credits earned can be utilized when applying for forest clearances, potentially influencing decision-making processes.
- However, Sinha questions the feasibility of separating various aspects such as forest, water, biodiversity, and livelihood, and standardizing them across different locations.
- He highlights the uniqueness of each place and suggests that this approach may prioritize industrial and economic growth over environmental concerns.
- Sinha implies that the implementation of green credits may prioritize ease of doing business over environmental protection.

Just to build on that, the way this is structured, do you think it clashes with any of our other environmental laws?

- Debadityo Sinha identifies clashes between the Green Credit Programme guidelines and the Forest Conservation Act.
- He points out the absence of clear definitions for terms like "forest" and "degraded forest," leading to potential misclassification of natural ecosystems.

- Sinha expresses concern that the programme may expedite forest clearance processes for industries by leveraging green credits, bypassing the standard step-by-step clearance process.
- He advocates for a nuanced approach that adheres to environmental law principles to address complexities and strengthen environmental protections in the country.

The challenges of reporting on climate change

(26 April)

Climate change is a complex collection of phenomena with many moving parts

- Some people doubt if climate change is influencing voters' choices in Indian elections.
- Journalists aim to raise awareness about climate change and advocate for policy and behavioral changes.
- Climate change is complex and involves various interconnected phenomena.
- Journalists track climate change impacts incrementally, which can be challenging.
- Climate change affects access to water, clean air, land, and nutrients, and intersects with issues like gender, caste, and class.
- Instances like child trafficking in the Sundarbans delta have been linked to climate change and inadequate state intervention.
- Cyclones like Amphan and Yaas have worsened destitution in affected areas, exacerbated by inadequate government response.
- State focus on large infrastructure projects over sustainable income sources has worsened the situation for affected communities after cyclones.
- Voters' consideration of climate change may influence their choices in elections.
- Lived experiences shaped by climate change may impact voters' priorities.
- Examples include preferring low-paying but stable jobs over infrastructure projects like embankments, or prioritizing indoor toilets for safety and comfort.
- Climate change can manifest in unpredictable ways over new areas and prolonged periods.
- It's challenging to directly attribute specific weather events to climate change, but its effects are becoming increasingly evident.
- Understanding voters' choices requires accounting for the influence of climate change.
- Keeping climate change in mind is crucial when analyzing voters' decisions.