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1. Illegal mining in Sariska

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has ordered the Rajasthan government to shutter 68 mines operating within a 1-kilometre periphery of the critical tiger habitat (CTH) of the Sariska reserve. The order, passed on May 15, is the latest of many attempts by the country's top court since the 1990s to halt the mining of marble, dolomite, and limestone in Sariska in violation of laws. Both the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Environment Protection Act, 1986 prohibit quarrying in and around a tiger reserve.

SC: NO MINING WITHIN 1 KM RADIUS OF SARISKA



In the 1990s

In May 2005, the SC ordered the CBI to investigate the disappearance of tigers from the reserve in the Aravalli roughly halfway between Delhi and Jaipur. That was almost a decade and a half after the court first took up the issue of illegal mining in Sariska.

In October 1991, in a PIL filed by a local NGO, the SC issued an interim order that "no mining operation of any nature shall be carried on in the protected area" of Sariska, and set up a fact-finding committee under the chairmanship of Justice M L Jain, a retired judge of the High Court.

The Jain Committee found in 1992 that the protected areas covered "about 800 sq km". In April 1993, the SC ordered the closure of 262 mines within that area.

In the 2000s

Ten years later, the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the SC submitted a damning report on mining in the Sariska tiger reserve. In September 2005, the SC laid down rules for issuing temporary mining permits in forest areas. In August 2006, it said, as an interim measure, one-kilometre safety zone shall be maintained.

But the mines were back in business in 2008 after the Rajasthan government claimed that the sanctuary boundary had been demarcated, and allowed quarries outside the 100-metre periphery of the sanctuary. The state stuck to the 100-metre regulation in its draft Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) notification for Sariska in 2011.

In 2023

The apex court finally ruled in April 2023. The order left the specifics of ESZs to the Centre and the state, and focussed on mining — prohibiting it within 1 km of national parks and sanctuaries.

On May 15, the SC criticised the Rajasthan government for misinterpreting this order as being not applicable to tiger reserves. The court clarified that the 2023 direction applied to tiger reserves which “stand on a higher pedestal”.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. What IMD's heatwave 'red alert' for Delhi, Punjab and other parts of North India means

Why in News?

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for heatwaves in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and most parts of Western Rajasthan recently. The agency also said that heatwaves and severe heatwave conditions will likely prevail here for five days beginning 19th May.

What exactly is a heatwave, which parts of India are most affected, what are severe and red heatwave alerts, and what precautions should be taken?

What is a heatwave alert and how is it issued?

According to the IMD's website, “Qualitatively, heat wave is a condition of air temperature which becomes fatal to human body when exposed. Quantitatively, it is defined based on the temperature thresholds over a region in terms of actual temperature or its departure from normal.”

Therefore, for every region, a heatwave is determined based on the degree of difference from its usual temperatures. “Heat wave is considered if maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40°C or more for Plains and at least 30°C or more for Hilly regions,” the IMD states. For coastal areas, it is when the maximum temperature departure is 37°C or more than normal.

Such temperatures must be recorded at least in two stations in a meteorological sub-division for at least two consecutive days. The heatwave is declared on the second day.

And what is a severe heatwave?

If the prevalent temperature is 4.5°C to 6.4°C more than normal, it is classified as a heatwave. A rise of more than 6.4°C is considered a severe heatwave. May is the peak month for heatwaves in India.

What is a heatwave red alert?

A red alert refers to an extreme heat warning. It means that a severe heatwave has persisted for more than two days or the total number of heat/severe heatwave days has been more than six days.

There is a "very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages," according to IMD. Extreme care needs to be exercised for vulnerable people, such as the elderly, infants and those with chronic diseases

According to the World Health Organization, more than 1,66,000 people died as a result of heatwaves between 1998 and 2017.

Here is what the full spectrum of heatwave alerts says:

Colour Code	Alert	Warning	Impact	Suggested Actions
Green (No action)	Normal Day	Maximum temperatures are near normal	Comfortable temperature. No cautionary action required.	Nil
Yellow Alert (Be updated)	Heat Alert	Heat wave conditions at isolated pockets persists on 2 days	Moderate temperature. Heat is tolerable for general public but moderate health concern for vulnerable people e.g. infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases	(a) Avoid heat exposure. (b) Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose, cotton clothes. (c) Cover your head: Use a cloth, hat or umbrella
Orange Alert (Be prepared)	Severe Heat Alert for the day	(i) Severe heat wave conditions persists for 2 days (ii) Through not severe, but heat wave persists for 4 days or more	High temperature. Increased likelihood of heat illness symptoms in people who are either exposed to sun for a prolonged period or doing heavy work. High health concern for vulnerable people e.g. infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases.	(b) Avoid heat exposure— keep cool. Avoid dehydration. (b) Drink sufficient water- even if not thirsty. (c) Use ORS, homemade drinks like lassi, torani (rice water), lemon water, buttermilk, etc. to keep yourself hydrated
Red Alert (Take Action)	Extreme Heat Alert for the day	(i) Severe heat wave persists for more than 2 days. (ii) Total number of heat/severe heat wave days exceeding 6 days.	Very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages.	Extreme care needed for vulnerable people.

Heatwave alerts based on colour

What are the precautions for heatwaves?

According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the following measures can be taken to minimise heatwave impact:

- *Avoid going out in the Sun, especially between noon and 3 pm.
- *If you work outside, use a hat or an umbrella and apply a damp cloth on your head, neck, face and limbs.
- *Drink sufficient water as often as possible, even if not thirsty.
- *Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose, and porous cotton clothes. Wear protective goggles, an umbrella/hat, shoes or chappals while going in the Sun.
- *Avoid alcohol, tea, coffee and carbonated soft drinks, which dehydrate the body. Drink ORS, homemade drinks like lassi, torani (rice water), lemon water, buttermilk, etc. instead.

How should a heatstroke be treated?

In case a person has been affected by sunstroke, this is what they should do:

- *Lay the person in a cool place, under shade. Wipe them with a wet cloth/wash the body frequently. Pour normal-temperature water on the head. The main aim is to bring down the body temperature.
- *Give the person ORS/lemon sharbat/torani or other liquids useful for hydrating the body.
- *Take the person to the nearest health centre immediately. Medical attention is needed as heat strokes can be fatal.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. European investigating Facebook and Instagram on failing to protect Children

Why in News?

The European Union has opened fresh investigation into Meta's Facebook and Instagram over suspicions that they are failing to protect children on their platform, a violation that could result in fines of up to 6% of their annual worldwide revenue.

What led to the investigation?

The 27-nation bloc has said it is concerned that Facebook and Instagram's recommendation engine could "exploit the weaknesses and inexperience" of children and stimulate "addictive behaviour". The bloc's executive arm further said that these systems could reinforce the so-called "rabbit hole" effect that leads users to watch increasingly disturbing content. As part of the probe, the commission will look into Meta's use of age verification tools to prevent children under the age of 13 from accessing Facebook and Instagram. And also find out whether the company is complying with the bloc's Digital Service Act (DSA) and enforcing a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors.

What does the DSA mandate?

The bloc's DSA came into effect in February. It stipulates very large online platforms, which have over 45 million users in the EU, to provide an option in their recommender systems that

is not based on user profiling and share their data with the Commission and national authorities to assess compliance under the law.

The platforms are also required to take measures to protect minors from content that may impair their physical, mental or moral development. Additionally, platforms must take targeted measures to protect the rights of minors, including age verification and parental control tools that are aimed at helping minors signal abuse or obtain support.

What are the general practices of protecting minors online?

With children growing up in an increasingly digital world, it has become increasingly difficult for parents and caregivers to ensure their online safety.

Parents are advised to ensure they are up to date with online risks and have set up safeguards to protect their child's digital experience.

These could include setting up of kid's profiles, choosing age-appropriate apps and games and setting up child-friendly sites and search engines, and ensuring age restricted content is inaccessible on the devices and platforms they are using. Parents are also advised to supervise and spend time with their children online to ensure they do not engage in harmful activities or fall prey to online predators.

And minors using social media platforms must ensure they know how to report and "block" accounts with offensive material and foster open conversations to ensure an adult is available if something doesn't feel right.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express