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1. 56th Tiger Reserve in India: Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

Overview

The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh has been notified as the 56th Tiger Reserve of India, as announced by Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav. The reserve spans an area of 2,829 sq. km, making it the third-largest tiger reserve in the country.



Key Details

• Location: Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur, Korea, Surajpur, and Balrampur districts of Chhattisgarh.

• Area Breakdown:

O Core/critical habitat: 2,049.2 sq. km (includes Guru Ghasidas National Park and Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary).

O Buffer zone: 780.15 sq. km.

• National Ranking:

O 3rd largest after Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam (Andhra Pradesh) and Manas (Assam) Tiger Reserves.

• Landscape Connectivity:

O Contiguous with Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh).

O Connected to Bandhavgarh (Madhya Pradesh) and Palamau (Jharkhand) Tiger Reserves.

• Geographical Features:

O Situated in the Chota Nagpur and Baghelkhand Plateaus.

O Characterized by diverse terrains, dense forests, and rivers conducive to wildlife habitation.

• State Contribution: Chhattisgarh now has four tiger reserves, bolstering tiger conservation efforts under the NTCA's Project Tiger.

This notification marks a significant milestone in India's ongoing efforts to protect and conserve its tiger population and biodiversity.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment Source: PIB

2. The \$3.6 billion Chinese-funded Chancay port project in Peru, US concerns around it

Introduction

Chinese President Xi Jinping inaugurated Peru's Chancay Port recently, describing it as the starting point for a "new land-sea corridor between China and Latin America".

Funded under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the massive \$3.6 billion project has also raised concerns in US policymaking circles over Chinese influence in a region traditionally seen as its backyard.

Apart from its geopolitical implications, the deep-sea port has been billed as a game-changer for South America. A 2023 article in The Diplomat said, "One of the most outstanding features of the Chancay New Multipurpose Port Terminal is its capacity to receive vessels of up to 18,000 TEUs (Twenty Foot Equivalent Units), the largest shipping vessels in the world. To date, no vessel of this size has not arrived in Latin America. This capacity will position Chancay as a strategic port on a global scale."

What is the Chancay Port project?

Located about 78 km north of the Peruvian capital of Lima, Chancay is a small fishing town with a population of around 60,000. It is a natural deep-water port, however, previous feasibility studies on building up infrastructure pointed out heavy construction costs. China





An article in China's state media outlet Global Times noted its significance: "Currently, most of Peru's cargo to Asia and Oceania needs to transit through Central America or North America, and the throughput cannot meet the needs of foreign trade upgrades." In order to reach South America, bigger cargo ships first go to ports in the United States or Mexico and their goods are offloaded onto smaller ships.

Chinese media also reported that the port will reduce the transportation time of goods exported from Latin America to the Asian market from 35 days to 25 days, greatly reducing logistics costs and generating jobs. "The port is expected to generate \$4.5 billion in annual economic benefit for Peru, equivalent to 1.8 percent of the country's GDP," a Global Times editorial said.

Key trade items here include copper, blueberries and soybeans. Crucially, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina also form the "lithium triangle" together. The element is in great demand over the lithium-ion batteries used to power the growing numbers of Electric Vehicles worldwide. A report from the International Energy Agency noted that more than one in three new car registrations in China was electric in 2023, compared to over one in five in Europe and one in 10 in the United States.

What are the US concerns over Chancay?

Media reports have quoted several US officials flagging the project recently. In June, The Wall Street Journal quoted Army General Laura Richardson, former head of the U.S. Southern Command, saying, "This will further make it easier for the Chinese to extract all of these resources from the region, so that should be concerning."

Brazil, the largest economy in the continent, has announced plans to enhance its road connectivity to Chancay. The South China Morning Post also quoted Erik Bethel, a former US representative at the World Bank during Donald Trump's previous presidency, speaking at a conference this May. He said, "Wait until the port of Chancay in Peru gets connected to Brazil. That's going to be a wake-up call for all of us."

For long, the US has remained the major player in the region, delivering aid and loans but also interfering with the continent's governments. In line with its "containment" policy during the Cold War, it sought to prevent the expansion of Communist ideology. The continent's resources, such as oil and precious metals, were also an incentive for extending its influence.

While the US remains South America's biggest trade partner, China has increasingly made inroads in the continent as its own economy has grown. "China is Peru's largest trade partner, largest export market, and largest source of imported goods, while Peru is China's fourth largest trade partner in Latin America," Global Times noted.

Some experts also believe China has taken advantage of the US shifting its foreign policy focus on other regions of the world, such as the Middle East and Europe. But in South America, this is not seen as a necessarily bad thing.

According to WSJ, Peru's Foreign Minister Javier González-Olaechea said that if the US was concerned about China's growing presence in Peru, then it should step up its investments. "The United States is present almost everywhere in the world with a lot of initiatives, but not so much in Latin America," González-Olaechea said in an interview. "It's like a very important friend who spends little time with us."

With the incoming Trump presidency, given his recent mentions of the region largely for curbing illegal immigration to the US, there is again concern about US focus shifting away, paving the way for Chinese presence.

Larger BRI concerns

Critics have questioned the ambitious economic benefits projected from BRI works undertaken across the global south. For instance, China-funded several train connectivity projects in Southeast Asia have seen revisions made to their original high costs and have been delayed. Then there is the case of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka. Its 99-year lease was given to a Chinese company after Sri Lanka failed to pay back Chinese loans for the project. It led further credence to accusations of "debt-trap diplomacy" by China. With the Chinese economy also slowing down in recent years, there are further questions about the viability of BRI projects.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: The Hindu

3. The China emissions paradox

Introduction

Despite being the world's second largest economy, China is considered a "developing" country by the United Nations, and is not mandated by the international climate change architecture to cut its greenhouse gas emissions in the short term.

However, China has been the world's biggest emitter for more than 15 years, and now accounts for well over 30% of annual global emissions. If China does not reduce its emissions, the world is unlikely to meet its emission reduction targets.

As things stand, the world is nowhere close to the minimum emission cuts required for 2030 – at least 43% over 2019 levels. Estimates suggest that annual global emissions in 2030 would be barely 2% below 2019 levels.

Why China is crucial

The need for Chinese emission cuts is almost never discussed. Now, a first-of-its-kind analysis has suggested that China needs to reduce its emissions by 66% from current levels by 2030, and by 78% by 2035 to become 1.5-degree compliant.



The modelling has been done by Climate Action Tracker (CAT), an independent scientific project that measures progress towards the 1.5-degree and 2-degree Celsius temperature targets mentioned in the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015.

The overarching goal of the agreement, which entered into force in 2016, is to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels", and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels".

The international climate framework applies a differentiated approach, demanding higher climate actions, including emission cuts, from the rich and developed world, while allowing developing countries greater flexibility to plan their energy transitions.

So, China is not expected to make the required deep emission cuts in the 2030 or 2035 timeframes. In fact, China's emissions are still increasing, and are expected to be about 0.2% higher this year than in 2023, according to the latest estimate of the Global Carbon Project, which seeks to quantify GHG emissions and their causes.

Double-edged weapon

But paradoxically, the hypothetical situation in which China does manage to make these very deep emission cuts in the short term, may not be in the best interests of the world.

This is because, ironically enough, it can have the effect of slowing down the deployment of renewable energy — not just within China, but in the rest of the world as well.

Despite very rapid deployment of renewable energy like wind or solar — it added more than 300 GW of renewables just last year — China remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels. The share of renewable energy in its primary energy supply is still in single digits, and coal continues to generate more than half the country's electricity.

As of now, renewables are only adding new capacities in the country — they are not replacing fossil fuels. Emissions reductions would require the rapid phasing out of coal and other fossil fuels. This can have a negative impact on industrial production.

Importantly, the manufacture of solar panels and wind turbines that are used to harness renewables like solar or wind, involves the liberal use of fossil fuels. And the global production of solar panels and wind turbines, as well as their supply chains, are heavily concentrated in China.

China controls more than 80% of the global manufacturing of solar panels, dominating every step of the process, and about 60% of the global wind turbine production.

Supplies of other clean energy technologies such as batteries, hydrogen electrolysers, and critical minerals — all of which are crucial to effect the global energy transition — are also concentrated in China.

Deep emission cuts in the short term could thus constrain the global supplies of renewable energy equipment, and slow down energy transitions everywhere. It would surely jeopardise the global renewable energy tripling target for 2030.

For world, it's Catch-22

If China does not reduce its emissions quickly, the global emission targets for achieving the 1.5-degree threshold are likely to be missed. But if it does so, that might disrupt supplies of renewable energy across the world, making it difficult for countries to phase out fossil fuels, and thus reduce emissions.

Several countries are now realising this danger of over-dependence on China for critical technologies and resources related to clean energy. The disruption of supply chains during the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of over-concentrated production processes. At least a part of United States President-elect Donald Trump's anxieties related to China seem to stem from these concerns.

The diversification of renewable energy supply chains, particularly solar photovoltaic manufacturing, is now a central theme of most discussions on energy transitions. It is not that other countries cannot manufacture these products — but competing against the Chinese on costs could be difficult. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), China is the most cost-competitive location for manufacture of all components of the solar PV supply chain.

"Costs in China are 10 per cent lower than in India, 20 per cent lower than in the United States, and 35 per cent lower than in Europe," the IEA said in an assessment published in 2022. (Special Report on Solar PV Global Supply Chains)

Beijing's unique advantage

No country has benefited from the international climate framework as much as China has. China happened to be at the right place at the right time — but it also made full use of the opportunities that came its way.

Even at the time the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was finalised in the 1990s, China's emissions were not insignificant. It accounted for more than 10% of global emissions at the time — much more than India's share currently.

But because China did not have historical emissions, it was not mandated to control or reduce its emissions.

China's emissions have grown almost four times since then, even as its economic indicators have become comparable to or better than many developed countries. Its share in historical emissions has also grown to about 11.5%, equivalent to the contribution of the European Union.

China's meteoric rise to become the second largest economy and one of the two superpowers in the world can at least partly be attributed to the fact that it has not had to worry about imposing tough emissions standards, which its competitors like the US, Japan, or Germany had to.

It is not as though China is not contributing to the global fight against climate change. Indeed, it is at the centre of the renewable energy transition.

By the end of this year, it will have almost certainly achieved its target of reaching 1,200 GW of renewable energy capacity, six years ahead of deadline. Possibly its most important contribution has been to ensure cheap manufacturing of renewable energy, which has made solar and wind energy affordable. In most countries, solar is now the cheapest source of power when the Sun is available.

But China's emissions are now almost three times that of the US — and it continues to remain largely unconstrained by climate change regulations. That is why any emission reduction targets in the near term, whether 2030 or 2035, remain extremely unrealistic, and unlikely to be achieved.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment Source: Indian Express