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1. Tragic Incident and Retaliation by Maoists

Introduction



On January 6, 2025, suspected Maoists carried out a devastating attack in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh, killing nine individuals, including eight District Reserve Guards (DRG) and a driver. This comes as a significant blow to security forces, marking the first major Maoist retaliation in over 18 months. The attack occurred during the return journey from an operation in the Abujhmad region, where five Maoists were killed in an earlier encounter.

SOPs for Safety in Maoist Zones

Security forces operating in Maoist-dominated areas follow specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to minimize risks:

1. Avoiding Vehicle Use: Preference for cross-country foot or bike movements.
2. Unpredictable Movements: Avoid returning via the same route.
3. Road Safety Measures: Deployment of trackers and Road Opening Parties (ROP) ahead of convoys.
4. Secrecy and Alertness: Maintaining operational secrecy and vigilance.
5. Use of Civilian Vehicles: To reduce visibility and risk.
6. Intelligence Support: Reliance on local and technical intelligence, including UAVs.

Historical Errors and Their Consequences

Repeated lapses in SOP adherence have led to ambushes and high casualties:

- 2010 Chintalnar Massacre: A convoy returning via the same route faced a 300-strong Maoist ambush, resulting in 76 deaths.
- 2013 Jhiram Ghati Attack: Failure to conduct a road opening exercise led to 27 deaths, including top political leaders.
- 2017 Bheji Attack: An ROP team was ambushed, killing 13 personnel.
- 2018 Sukma Attack: Ignoring warnings of Maoist presence, a convoy was attacked with a powerful IED, killing nine CRPF personnel.
- 2023 Dantewada Ambush: Signs of an empty village and absent locals were overlooked, leading to a deadly IED attack.

Limitations of Mine-Protected Vehicles (MPVs)

MPVs, designed for urban warfare, offer limited protection against Maoists' powerful IEDs, often using 20-70 kg of explosives. High-energy blasts can still cause fatalities due to concussions or structural failures of MPVs.

Maoists' Preparation and Tactics

Maoists leverage:

- Local Networks: Utilizing villagers for intelligence and logistical support.
- IED Deployment: Rigging roads with IEDs buried months in advance or placed swiftly.
- Meticulous Planning: Effective use of intelligence to target security forces.

Abujhmad: The Unyielding Maoist Stronghold

Covering 4,000 sq km in Bastar, Abujhmad remains a core Maoist stronghold due to:

- Challenging Terrain: Dense forests and hills.
- Administrative Vacuum: Lack of roads and state presence in 90% of the area.
- Strategic Location: A transit corridor linking Maoist bases across states.

This region serves as both a safe haven and a base for Maoist operations, underscoring the complexities of addressing insurgency in Central India.

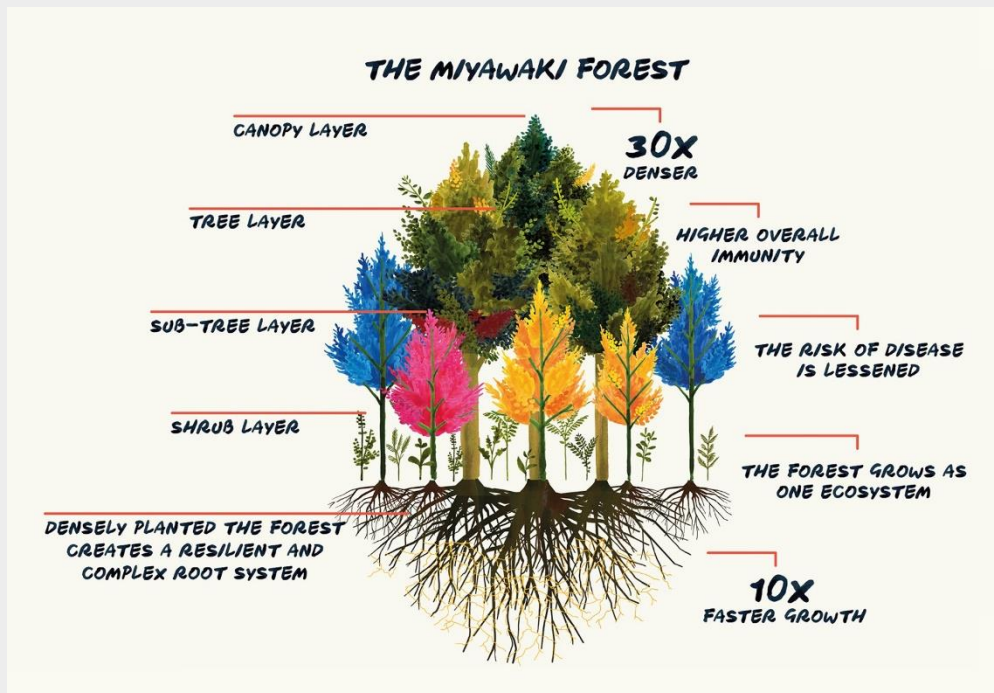
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: Indian Express

2. Around 56,000 sq. meters of Dense Forests created in Prayagraj in last two years using Miyawaki Technique

Introduction

In preparation for Mahakumbh 2025, dense forests have been developed at various locations across Prayagraj, to ensure pure air and a healthy atmosphere for the millions of devotees expected to visit the city. The Prayagraj Municipal Corporation has utilized the Japanese Miyawaki technique over the past two years to establish multiple oxygen banks, which have now transformed into lush green forests. These efforts have not only enhanced the greenery but also contributed to improving air quality, playing a crucial role in environmental conservation.



The project includes a wide variety of species, ranging from fruit-bearing trees to medicinal and ornamental plants. Key species planted under the project include mango, mahua, neem, peepal, tamarind, arjuna, teak, tulsi, amla, and ber. Additionally, ornamental and medicinal plants like hibiscus, kadamba, gulmohar, jungle jalebi, bougainvillea, and brahmi have been incorporated. Other species include sheesham, bamboo, kaner (red and yellow), tecoma, kachnar, mahogany, lemon, and drumstick (sahjan).

Understanding Miyawaki Technique

The Miyawaki technique, developed by renowned Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki in the 1970s, is a revolutionary method for creating dense forests in limited spaces. Often referred to as the 'pot plantation method', it involves planting trees and shrubs close to one another to accelerate their growth. Plants grow 10 times faster with this technique, making it a practical solution for urban areas.

This method mimics natural forests by using a mix of native species planted densely. It improves soil quality, enhances biodiversity, and accelerates forest development. Trees planted using the Miyawaki technique absorb more carbon, grow faster, and support richer biodiversity compared to traditional forests.

In urban settings, this technique has transformed polluted, barren lands into green ecosystems. It has successfully managed industrial waste, reduced dust and foul odours, and curbed air and water pollution. Additionally, it prevents soil erosion and promotes ecological balance, making it an effective tool for environmental restoration.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Environment

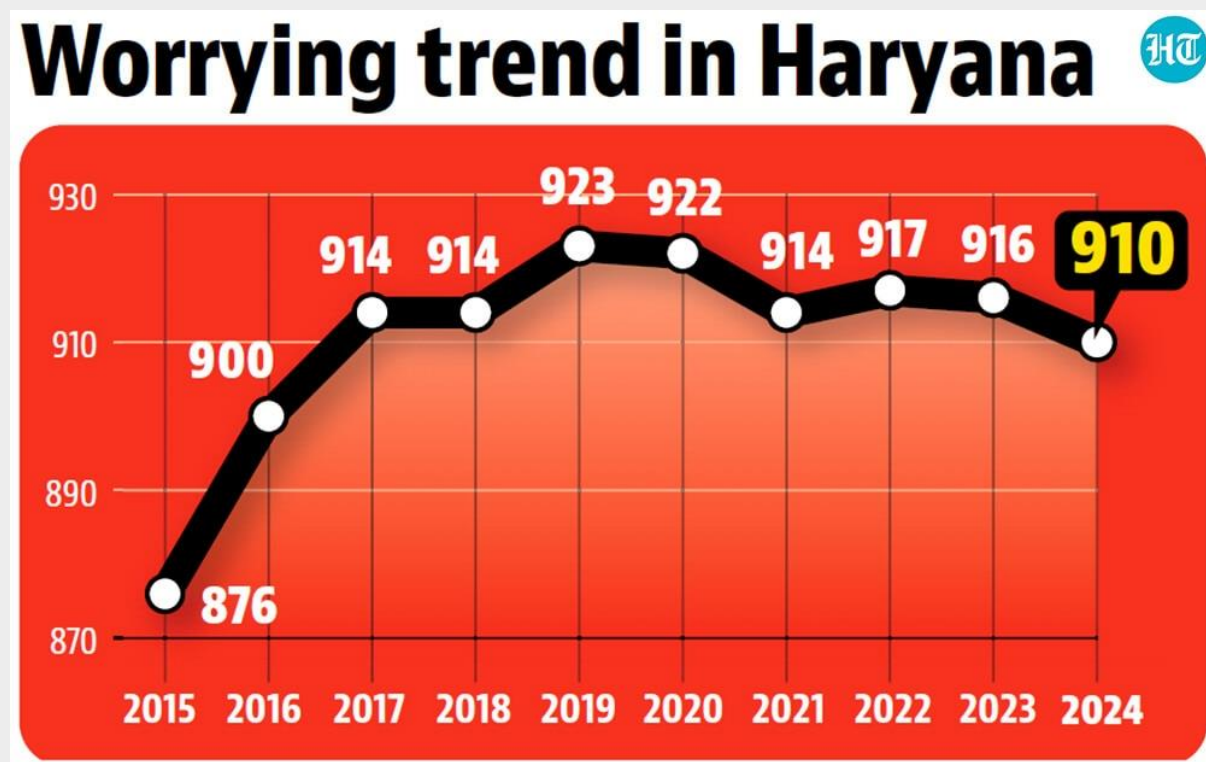
Source: PIB

3. Why the sex ratio in Haryana dropped to an eight-year low in 2024

Introduction

After peaking at 923 in 2019, the sex ratio at birth in Haryana dropped to 910 in 2024, an eight-year low. The numbers have worried activists and members of the civil society in Haryana, although authorities have termed the latest figures as a “slight fluctuation”.

The sex ratio is the measure of the number of females per 1,000 males in a given population. It serves as a crucial yardstick to measure gender equality, and directly mirrors the status and well-being of women in a society. According to the National Health and Family Survey-5 (NFHS-5), which was published in 2021, the overall sex ratio at birth in India was 929.



A setback for Haryana

Of the 516,402 children born in Haryana in 2024, 270,354 (52.35%) were boys, while 246,048 (47.64%) were girls, giving a sex ratio of 910 girls per 1,000 boys born. For a state which over the past decade has made significant improvements in this metric, this is a setback.

In 2014, the sex ratio in Haryana was just 871. This triggered a massive nationwide outcry, and set off a concerted effort by civil society organisations, the state government, and the Centre to improve the situation. In January 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched his signature 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign at Panipat.

The efforts of the government and the civil society bore fruit, with the sex ratio at birth in Haryana climbing steadily after 2014. It touched 900 in 2016, and peaked at 923 in 2019. Since then, however, the sex ratio has once again seen a downward trajectory overall, with the biggest dip coming in 2024 when it fell from 916 (in 2023) to 910.

The setback comes at a time when women from the state are excelling in sports, including at international platforms, as well as in academics.

Loosening enforcement

The gains made between 2014 and 2019 came due to the strict enforcement of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 (PNDT Act) coupled with an intense awareness campaign. This was aimed to curb pre-natal sex selection and female foeticide, which were rampant in Haryana, while simultaneously changing social attitudes which saw families prefer boys, and look at a girl child as a burden.

Activists say more needs to be done to change attitudes, and in recent years, enforcement of laws aimed towards curbing female foeticide has loosened.

According to social activist Sunil Jaglan, the founder of the 'Selfie With Daughter' campaign, the rich and influential continue to avail sex determination services, and sex selective abortions, which have gotten more expensive. This is especially the case in areas bordering the neighbouring states of UP, Delhi, Punjab, and Rajasthan. Haryana government figures reveal that nearly a third of the more than 1,200 FIRs lodged under the provisions of the PNDT Act in the last ten years were registered after the inter-state raids.

Jaglan also pointed to a new phenomenon in the state, of having "only [one] boy". "The concept of 'only boy' was not a popular phenomenon until now, but a section of the families have started opting for it due to the decreasing land holdings," Jaglan said.

Shakuntala Jakhar, the Haryana state president of the All India Democratic Women Association (AIDWA) said that many families are choosing to have only one boy due to increasing inflation, which makes nurturing multiple children expensive. She said that the focus has to be on working towards changing attitudes. She said that the government and the society at large must discourage expensive marriages, to curb the dowry system which makes families look at girl children as a burden.

Government's perspective

State authorities, however, term the latest dip as a "slight fluctuation", and point to the fact that the state's sex ratio has improved significantly over the last 10 years.

"The state's gender ratio improved from 871 in 2014 to 916 in 2023," Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini told the media. "Haryana is now recognised as a state that empowers daughters rather than one that suppresses them, marking a true tribute to Mata Savitribai Phule," he said. State officials emphasised that more than 4,000 people have been arrested, including doctors, quacks, and touts, in 1,200-plus cases filed under the PNDT Act. They said that the government has worked relentlessly to ensure that the girl child is not seen as a burden, including providing a one-time sum of Rs 21,000 at the birth of a baby girl, and opening bank accounts for girls through the Sukanya Samriddhi Scheme. They also spoke about work that has gone into reducing dropout rates of girls and increasing secondary education enrolment — all factors which are known to in the long term positively impact sex ratio, and the status of women in general.

The officials said that the skewed sex ratio in Haryana is linked to the mindset of people, and that the government is making efforts to change the same.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Indian Society

Source: Indian Express

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