

1. Green Credit Programme: What the scheme entails, criticisms against it**What is the Green Credit Programme?**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, officially unveiled the GCP on December 1, 2023, during the annual United Nations climate conference in Dubai. It was dubbed as a mechanism to incentivise “pro-planet” actions in response to climate change, and one which would promote the Centre’s Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment).

The Union Environment Ministry notified the Green Credit Rules, which spelt out the programme’s objectives and implementation, in October 2023.

Trading green

The programme will cover 8 types of activities, including tree plantation, water management and sustainable agriculture



■ Applicant shall register activity via web site

■ Activity will then be verified by a designated agency

■ Based on its report, administrator shall grant credit certificate

What do rules say?

At its core, the GCP seeks voluntary participation of individuals, companies, industries, and other entities across seven different activities — such as tree plantation, waste management, and water conservation — that will lead to improvements in the environment. This participation will be incentivised by generating “green credits”, which can then be traded on a domestic market platform to potential buyers looking to meet sustainability targets, or existing legal obligations.

For instance, could be exchanged for meeting compliance of compensatory afforestation, in cases where forest land has been used for development projects.

The credits can also be used by listed companies as part of their environmental, social and governance disclosures under SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability framework, indicating efforts taken by these companies on environmental sustainability.

How will green credits be calculated?

To begin with, the Centre has rolled out the scheme through the pilot on tree plantation, which was later expanded to eco-restoration activities such as plantation of shrubs, herbs and grasses, soil moisture conservation, rain water harvesting, and other similar measures as per site suitability.

Under GCP pilot on tree plantation and eco-restoration, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun, will act as the nodal administrator. Plantations will be carried out in degraded land parcels including open forest, scrubland, wasteland and catchment areas, and they must be five hectares in size or above.

Forest departments of states and Union Territories would have to identify these land parcels, which are under their control. Any party interested in participating would have to apply and register with ICFRE. After processing the applications and charging a fee, the land parcels identified by forest departments would be allotted to the parties. It would be the forest department's responsibility to carry out and maintain the tree plantations, and the plantation would have to be completed within a period of two years after the money is paid.

One grown tree raised on the identified land parcels would be accounted as one green credit. This would be subject to a minimum density of 1,100 trees per hectare based on local silvicultural conditions and after certification of completion provided by the forest department.

As on March 4, 2364 land parcels spread over 54,669.46 hectares were registered by forest departments across 17 states, as per GCP progress status data shared by the union environment ministry in Parliament. So far, a total of 384 entities have registered for participation in the GCP, including 41 public-sector undertakings and central public sector undertakings.

What have some people criticised the scheme?

GCP has been criticised for incentivising forest diversion for industries, by generating tradable credits which could also be used to meet legal obligations such as compensatory afforestation. It has also been criticised for promoting plantations on degraded lands, open forests and scrub lands, which experts have argued offer unique and important ecological services.

Earlier this month, the Supreme Court also heard an intervention application on the GCP, in an on-going case challenging the amendments to the Forest Conservation Act. The plea questioned the survival issues of plantations raised under the scheme, and the SC Bench has sought the Environment Ministry's views on the matter.

Under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023, India's forest conservation law, non-forest land equivalent to forest land used for industries and development projects is mandated for compensatory afforestation. Only if non-forest land is unavailable, twice the size

of degraded or unclassed forest land is used for compensatory afforestation. This is to ensure land-for-land compensation.

However, GCP mandates use of degraded forest land for plantations. It also has complementary provisions which allow exchange of credits, generated by paying money, for meeting the compensatory afforestation compliance. This translates into compensating for older forests with existing forest land, rather than adding non-forest land into the forest cover, as laid down in the Van Adhiniyam.

In April 2024, over 100 environmental organisations and 400 citizens demanded the government to rollback the scheme. The representation to the government stated that arbitrary tree plantation cannot be used as credit to compensate for old-growth forests.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. The decades old dispute over who controls Mahabodhi temple in Gaya

Why in News?

Over the past two months, large-scale demonstrations have erupted across India demanding that the control over the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, be handed over to Buddhists.

These protests are the latest chapter in a decades-old dispute over who controls one of the holiest sites in Buddhism. Buddhists want the repeal of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949 (BGTA), under which the temple is currently governed.



The temple in Bodh Gaya

It is in Bodh Gaya, while meditating under the Bo tree, that Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment to become the Buddha (literally, "the Enlightened One") in 589 BCE.

A simple shrine was constructed to mark the site by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, of which only the Vajrasana (Diamond Throne), a stone slab under the Bodhi tree next to the temple, remains. Additional

structures were built during the Shunga period (2nd to 1st century BCE).

Fifth-century Chinese traveller Faxian (also known as Fa Hien) wrote that there were three Buddhist monasteries around the temple in Gaya. But the current pyramidal structure can be dated to the reign of the Guptas in the 6th century CE.

The Palas (8th-12th century CE) were the last major royal patrons of the Mahabodhi temple. By the 11th-12th centuries, Buddhism was gradually declining in the subcontinent, and so were its many centres, including in Gaya.

Lengthy struggle for control

The shrine was in a state of disrepair when Alexander Cunningham, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India, began restoration in the 1880s. According to the website of UNESCO, which granted the Mahabodhi temple the World Heritage Site tag in 2002, the shrine was largely abandoned between the 13th and 19th centuries.

But according to popular legend, which also finds mention in the shrine's official website, a wandering Shaivite monk named Mahant Ghamandi Giri arrived in Gaya around 1590, and established what would become the Bodh Gaya Math, a Hindu monastery. Giri's descendants continue to control the Mahabodhi temple, which they say is a Hindu site. They argue that Lord Buddha was the ninth reincarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Why BGTA is controversial

As mentioned above, Bodh Gaya Temple Act, 1949 (BGTA) currently governs the Bodhi Gaya temple. The BGTA provided for the creation of a Committee to run the Mahabodhi temple. The Committee shall consist of a Chairman and eight members nominated by the [State] Government of whom four shall be Buddhists and four shall be Hindus including the Mahanth.

The Act says the District Magistrate of Gaya shall be the ex officio Chairman of the Committee, but adds that "the State Government shall nominate a Hindu as Chairman of the Committee for the period during which the district Magistrate of Gaya is non-Hindu".

So while the BGTA gave Buddhists a stake in the management of the shrine, control effectively remained with Hindus. This is at the heart of the tensions today, with the Buddhist side claiming that Hindu rituals have gained predominance in the temple over the years.

Case complicated by Places of Worship Act, 1991

Legally speaking, the Buddhists' case is complicated by the Places of Worship Act, 1991. Introduced in the wake of the Ayodhya movement, the Act provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.

Thus, The Places of Worship Act blocked any legal attempts by the Buddhists to regain control of the temple.

In 2012, two monks filed a petition before the Supreme Court seeking a repeal of the BGTA, but 13 years on, the case is yet to be listed before the court.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

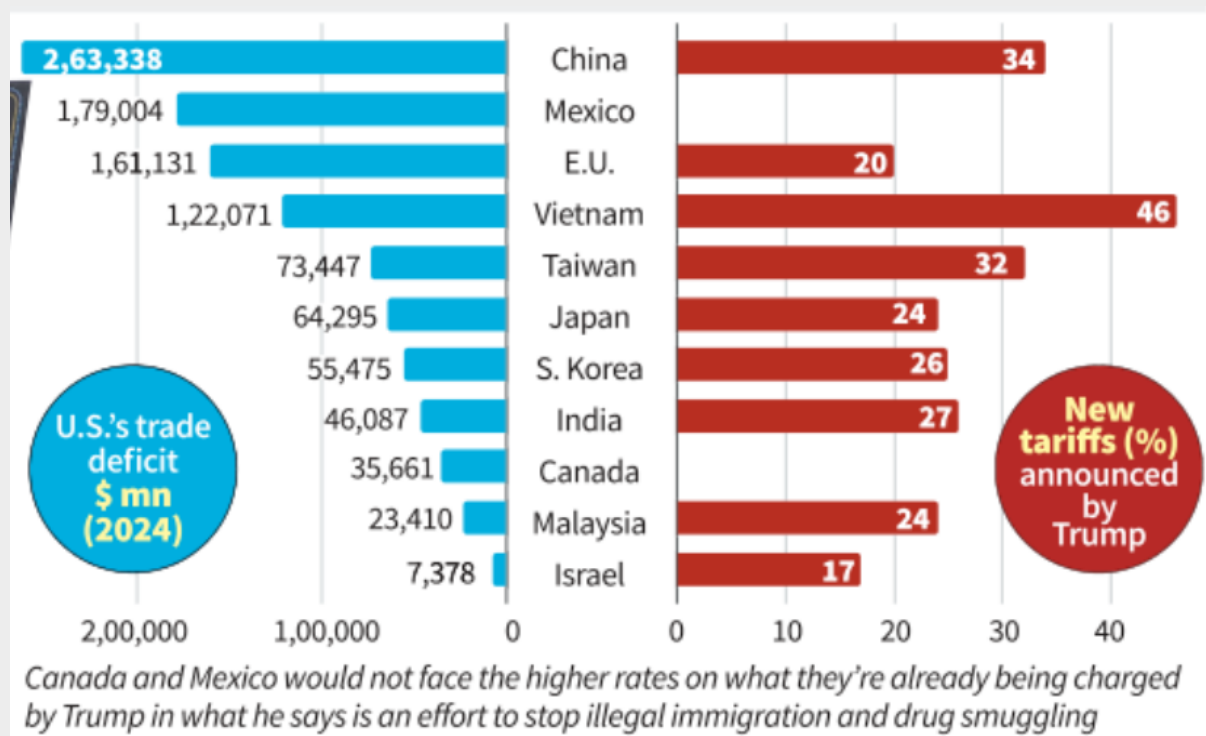
Source: Indian Express

3. Trump announces tariffs

Why in News?

U.S. President Donald Trump launched a full-scale trade war recently, announcing massive “reciprocal tariffs”, ranging from 10% to 49%, on U.S. imports from its trading partners around the world. India was not spared and was hit with a 27% tariff on its exports to the U.S. despite ongoing talks for a trade agreement.

He announced a 10% baseline tariff on all countries, which will take effect from April 5. An individualised reciprocal higher tariff on the countries with which the U.S. has the largest trade deficits will also be imposed from April 9. Donald Trump has considered April 2, the date of announcement of tariffs, as the liberation day of American industry and businesses.



Response of Markets

Global markets plunged in response, from Japan's Nikkei which lost 4% and European markets that dropped more than 2% each, to India's Sensex, that shaved more than 300 points, while the Nifty dropped as well. In the U.S., the Dow Jones fell over 3% in the first hour of trading, while the Nasdaq crashed 4%.

Law behind

The U.S. President invoked his authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 to address large and persistent U.S. goods trade deficits, which he called a “national emergency”.

Mixed impact on India depending upon sector

India's diamond and jewellery sector could be hit hard. The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said that, given the tariffs, it will be a challenge to sustain India's current export volume of \$10 billion to the U.S market. The United States accounts for more than 30% of India's annual gems and jewellery exports of \$32 billion.

The auto industry, however, does not expect to face any significant impact from the reciprocal tariff as automobiles and auto parts were not covered by it.

The developments could exacerbate supply chain challenges for aerospace manufacturer Boeing, resulting in aircraft delivery delays.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

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