

Agasthyamalai Landscape

Prelims - General issues on Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change

Mains - GS IV - Biodiversity, Environment, Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in News?

The Supreme Court of India has directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to conduct a detailed survey of the tropical forest ecosystems in the Agasthyamalai landscape.

Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve

- **Location** - In the Southern Western Ghats including **Tamil Nadu and Kerala.**
- It is part of the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot.
- **Status** - It is recognised by the UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve.
- **Named After** - The Sage Agastya, with cultural and spiritual significance in Tamil tradition.
- **Fauna** - Lion-Tailed Macaques, Bengal Tiger, Nilgiri Marten, Nilgiri Tahr, Malabar Spiny Dormouse, Great Pied Hornbills, Gaur, and Sloth Bear.
- **Flora** - Abundant in rare herbs and medicinal plants, with around 2,000 medicinal plants used in Ayurvedic treatments found here.
- **Protected Areas**
 - Neyyar, Peppara, and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuaries,
 - Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve,
 - Periyar Tiger Reserve and
 - Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary (TN).
- **Tribes** - Kani Tribes inhabited in this area.

Supreme court judgment on Agasthyamalai Landscape

- The judgement came on 2 separate petitions,
- **Public Interest Litigation** - It was initiated by environmental activists who sought judicial intervention to protect this biodiversity hotspot.
- **Private litigation** - It was filed by tea estate worker, seeking rehabilitation and compensation following their displacement from the Singampatti tea estate (Tamil Nadu) as it was reclassified as a reserved forest and tiger habitat between 2007 and 2018.
- **Judgement** - The Supreme Court directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to conduct a detailed survey of the Agasthyamalai landscape to assess encroachments and non-forestry activities.

Role of Central Empowered Committee (CEC)

- It is a ***Supreme Court*** appointed body to ensure compliance with environmental norms and court orders.
- It is tasked with preparing a comprehensive report on the extent of encroachments and suggesting restorative measures.
- Will provide guidelines for the rehabilitation of affected communities, such as those evicted from forest lands.
- **Areas included in the CEC survey**
 - The Periyar Tiger Reserve
 - Kalakad and Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR)
 - Meghamalai and Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuaries
 - Sivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary

Reference

[The Hindu | Forest Survey for Agasthyamalai](#)

