# Sipajhar Drive and Assam's Conflict Over Land

## What is the issue?

An eviction drive in Sipajhar in Assam took a violent turn leaving two dead and several injured after clashes broke out between the police and protesters.

## What was the Sipajhar drive about?

- The eviction drive was aimed at removing illegal encroachers to free up government land for landless indigenous communities.
- The drive evicted 1,200-1,300 families who had "illegally" occupied roughly 10,000 bighas of government land.
- The eviction drive was done without a proper rehabilitation plan leading to violence between the police and protesters.
- Most families said they moved there at least 40 years ago, however, most transactions happened without documents and hold little legal validity.
- The state Budget earmarked Rs 9.6 crore for an 'agriculture project', called the **Garukhuti project** on the cleared land to promote afforestation and agriculture activities, involving indigenous youth.
- The Assam Chief Minister said that the landless among those evicted will be given 2 acres.

## What is the extent of encroachment of land in Assam?

- Land has long been at the centre of ethnic contestations in Assam with the common belief that the indigenous Assamese were losing its land to migrants from Bangladesh.
- The **Brahma Committee on land rights** said in its interim report in 2017 that 63 lakh bighas of government land was under illegal occupation.
- In 2019, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said 22% of forest land was under encroachment.
- However such figures are ambiguous and keep varying.
- Some government land is often occupied by people considered indigenous to the state as they do not own land documents.
- But the eviction drives aimed at minority communities see dehumanisation of those who are being evicted and has political and communal intentions.

**Source: The Hindu**

