State of the Environment in India, 2026 report

Mains: *GS-III – Ecology & Environment*

Why in News?

The 'State of India's Environment 2026' report was released recently.

What about the State of the Environment in India report?

- **Released by** – The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a Delhi-based non-profit engaged in research and advocacy, has consistently brought out annual reports since 1982.
- **Purpose** – It gives a bird's-eye view of the environmental challenges the country faces, ranging from floods, extreme weather events, changes in tiger behaviour, to air pollution, among others.
- It also gives a global perspective of climate change and connects it to the Indian context.

What about the increasing of extreme weather events?

- **2025 saw record-breaking extremes** – The year 2025 witnessed the highest increase in frequency and impact of extreme weather events in India, including heatwaves, cold waves, and heavy rain, flood, in the last four years.
- **Casualties & Agricultural impact**
  - **2025** - Extreme weather events happened on 99% of days in 2025, resulting 4,419 reported deaths and affecting at least 17. 41 million hectares of crop area.
  - **2024** - Marks a sharp rise from 2024, when extreme weather events occurred on 88% of days, causing 3393 deaths and impacting 3.61 million ha of crop area.
  - **2023** - About 89% of days experienced such events, with 3208 deaths and 2.09 million ha of crop damage.
- **Worst-hit states** – Himachal Pradesh was the worst hit by extreme weather events (267 days), followed by Kerala (173 days), and Madhya Pradesh (162 days).
- **Ecological Warning** – The trends signal a widening ecological backlash and underscore the urgency of meaningful climate action.
- **Future Risks** – Without decisive efforts to cut risks and emissions, the disasters we face today risk becoming the norm tomorrow.
- **Development & Climate** – Climate change should not stop development. Instead, it must push us toward smarter, resilient, fairer and equitable choices.
- **Warming climate effect** – The report warns that a warming climate will substantially increase the possibility of widespread floods by altering rainfall patterns and

intensifying storms.

Are tigers' behaviour changing?

- **Increasing Human-Tiger Conflict** – In Jan–Jun 2025, at least 43 people were killed near tiger reserves & in some cases, tigers consumed parts of their prey.
- In 2024, in the same period, 44 people were killed by tiger attacks.
- **Reasons attacks are increasing** – Tigers rarely turn into compulsive human-eaters, but tiger attacks and consumption of humans increase when
    - The wild cats *grow old or suffer from injuries* and are unable to hunt for food, or when their *natural prey base disappears*.
    - Tigers seem to be increasingly targeting humans is due to *proximity of humans to tiger territory*.
    - About 40% of tiger territory overlaps with 60 million people across 20 states.
    - The *overcrowding, habitat loss and human activities* near tiger habitats are the reasons behind behavioural changes in tigers.

Are we measuring air pollution properly?

- **Current Monitoring Coverage** – Only 15% of India's population – about 200 million people – live within 10 km of a continuous air quality monitor.
- The remaining 85%, more than 1.2 billion people, breathe outside any measurable range.
- **Where Monitoring Exists** – Air quality monitoring remains concentrated in a limited set of large cities, primarily state capitals and metropolitan regions.
- Entire districts, industrial belts and fast-growing peri-urban belts remain outside the monitoring grid.
- The result is a fragmented picture - a few zones with dense, overlapping data coverage and vast regions that appear blank.

What are the key policy recommendations to improve the environment?

- **Shift in approach needed** – India should move from post-disaster relief work to pre-disaster resilience.
- **Integration of climate science** – Climate change is not a distant possibility; it is already shaping our rivers, our cities, and our lives.
- Future resilience will depend on how quickly we can integrate climate science into everyday planning - from how we design culverts to how we allocate land along rivers.
- **Nature-based solutions** – The report emphasizes the need for nature-based solutions such as restoring wetlands, reconnecting rivers to their floodplains, groundwater recharge, rainwater harvesting, and restoration and construction of lakes.
- **Structural Inequality** – The absence of monitoring is not just a gap in information, but it is an example of structural inequality in India's environmental governance.
- Smaller towns and industrial regions, which often face equal or worse pollution levels, lack real-time data entirely.

Reference

The Hindu | What is the state of the environment in India?

