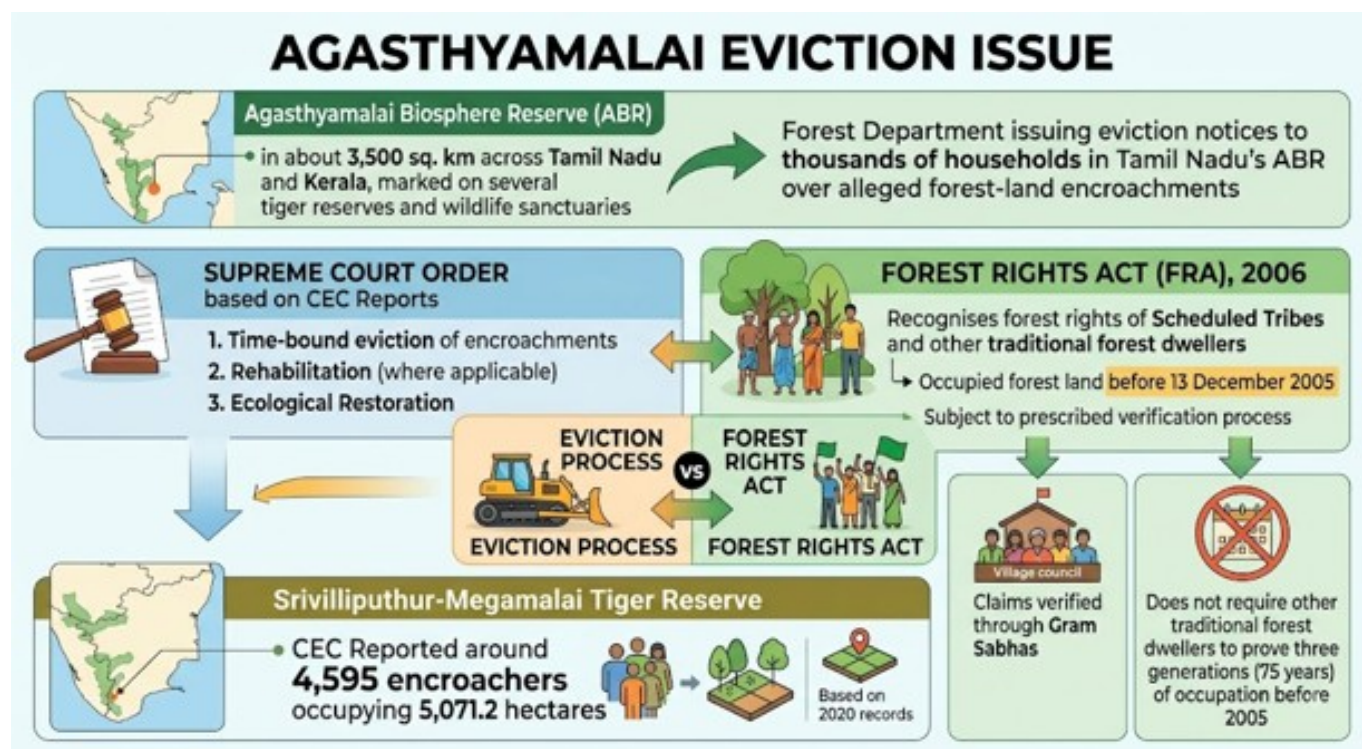


Supreme Court on Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve

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Why in News?

- Supreme Court ordered time-bound eviction of forest encroachments in the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve (ABR).
- The Supreme Court also ordered the removal of non-forestry activities within critical protected areas like the Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve.
- The Forest Department has issued eviction notices to thousands of households on the Tamil Nadu side alleging they had encroached on forest land.
- Finally, the Bench prohibited the diversion of forest land or the start of new non-forest activities within the ABR until all encroachments had been removed.



About FRA

- Parliament enacted the Forest Rights Act in 2006 (FRA) to undo the historical injustice suffered by forest dwellers.
- It recognised and vested forest rights in forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who had occupied forest land before December 13, 2005.
- The FRA provided for a transparent process for these individuals to claim their individual and community rights, to be verified and approved by gram sabhas.

- Six-member subdivision- and district-level committees — with representatives from the Revenue, Tribal, and Forest Departments and the elected members of panchayats — have to examine the claims and issue titles.
- The FRA does not require that traditional forest-dwellers have to have occupied the land they are claiming for three generations before 2005 (75 years), nor does it prohibit commercial activities on all forest lands.
- In fact, the FRA defines “bonafide livelihood needs” to include the “sale of surplus produce arising out of exercise of such rights”.
- The FRA also prohibits authorities from evicting people who have allegedly encroached on forest land “till the recognition and verification procedure is complete”.
- Violating these forest rights has been described as an atrocity under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 since 2016.

About ABR

- The ABR spans across Kerala (including parts of Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Idukki, and Thiruvananthapuram) and Tamil Nadu (Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Tenkasi, Theni, and Dindigul).
- It also covers protected areas as Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, the Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve, the Nellai Wildlife Sanctuary, and the Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu.
- In Kerala, it includes the Periyar Tiger Reserve and the Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It was added into UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 2016.
- Kanikkarans are the Original tribal Settlers in Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve.
- Kanikaran is one of the oldest surviving ancient tribes in the world.

Reference

[The Hindu | Agasthyamalai ecological landscape](#)

