The Trap of Green-Washing

What is the issue?

A headline increase in the forest and tree cover in India between 2019 and 2021, to 7,13,789 sq km seem like a welcome news but in reality the moderately dense forests are degrading fast.

What is attributed to increase in growing stock?

- The latest Indian State of Forests Report (ISFR) records continuing gains from ISFR 2019 findings, which in turn had reported gains over ISFR 2017.
- Targeting largely those that are classified as very dense forests, have yielded some results.
- Most of the increase in growing stock is attributable to trees outside forests that primarily have importance as sources of timber and firewood.
- The definition of forests in the ISFR as per canopy-based classification includes monoculture and plantation as forests.
- The loss of forest cover in the northeastern states which account for nearly a fourth of the country's overall forest cover while making up just 8% of its geographical area is worrying.

Why is there decline in forests in Northeastern region?

> *Against the target of forests making up 33% of the geographical area of the country, the current cover is just under 21.71%.*

- Human activity
- Natural calamities, such as landslides linked to heavy rainfall
- Unprecedented shifts in vegetation type in the Himalayan forests

What are the concerns in India's forest conservation?

- **Discrepancies in data**- The data on green cover from the Forest Survey of India (which brings out the ISFR), showing increase in forest cover in the country, weren't even proximate on the lower side, to that from the National Remote Sensing Centre.
- **Unaddressing the current needs-** India lacks a national forest policy that is responsive to current needs and adequately outlines a long-term vision in keeping with climate change.
- Current forest governance is rooted in the forest policy from 1988.
- **Voice of locals-** The local and community say over forest management hasn't been given its due.

- **Legal provisions-** The changes proposed to the **Forest Conservation Act** could undermine the states' say over forest governance and runs the risk of becoming a free pass for over-exploitation of green cover.

What has to be done?

- The government needs to bring in a new National Forest Policy to accomodate the current challenges.
- Several experts argue that the ISFR data needs an independent verification.
- India has to recalibrate its approach towards conservation and bolstering cover, until then we might just be green-washing reality.

References

1. https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/dont-fall-into-the-trap-of-green-washing/2408996/

