

## UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelimbits 15-07-2025

### Centre plans revision of Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) guidelines

**Prelims:** Current events of national and international importance -Environment

#### Why in News?

Recently, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has called for a review of the guidelines governing Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs).

#### Eco sensitive zones (ESZ)

- **Definition** - They are buffer areas created around protected forests, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.
- **Objectives** - To protect wildlife and biodiversity from harmful human activities.
- **Prohibited Activities** - Commercial mining, sawmills, and industries causing pollution.
- The establishment of major hydroelectric projects (HEP),
- Commercial use of wood.
- **Regulated Activities** - Felling of trees, the establishment of hotels and resorts, commercial use of natural water, erection of electrical cables, drastic change of agricultural system.
- **Permitted Activities** - Ongoing agricultural or horticultural practices, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, use of renewable energy sources, and adoption of green technology for all activities.

- **Need for revision** - To develop a more "flexible" and "site-specific" approach that balances conservation goals with local socio-economic "realities".
- **Existing structure** - Current ESZ guidelines are designed primarily with terrestrial sanctuaries in mind and often do not apply well to marine ecosystems.

*In states like Himachal Pradesh, where approximately 65% of the land is already under forest or protected status, a rigid imposition of ESZ norms could hinder local development without proportional ecological gains.*

#### Recent recommendations

- **Flexible approach** - A more flexible and site-specific ESZ framework is essential to encourage conservation, without creating unintended hardships.
- Several members and state officials flagged concerns over the negative impact of blanket ESZ provisions.
- **Stakeholder involvement** - The proposal involves stakeholder consultations, including inputs from state governments, relevant ministries, environmental experts, and the ESZ division.
- **Complete prohibition** - The notification mentioned a complete ban on mining activities within a notified ESZ.

- **Developmental hindrance** - The committee noted that the sectors most impacted by ESZ guidelines include mining, highways, railways, housing, and tourism.
- Unlike in protected areas, where compensation is provided during the settlement of rights, no such relief exists for ESZs.
- **Inter-ministerial coordination** - A formal inter-ministerial consultation has been suggested to solicit views from all the departments concerned, before finalising any changes in the guidelines.
- **Preparation of notice** - Following the discussion, the SC-NBWL directed the environment ministry to prepare a note on the issue.
- **Submission of proposals** - The final recommendations will be submitted to the committee for further deliberations.

## Reference

[Business Standard | Revision of eco-sensitive zone guidelines](#)

## Gingee Fort

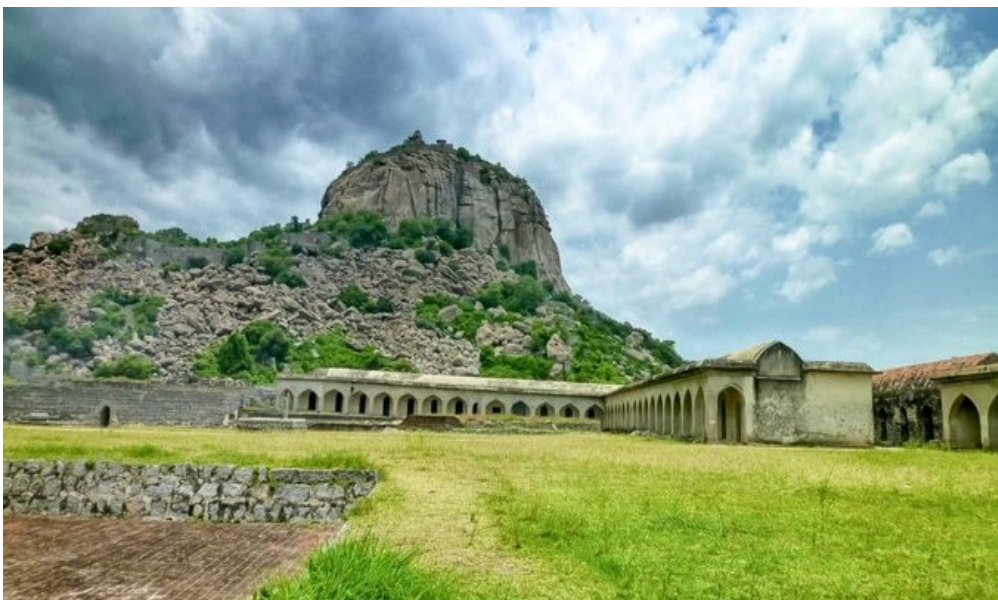
**Prelims:** *Current events of National & International importance | Art and culture*

## Why in News?

*Recently, Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu was recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Site.*

## Gingee fort

- **Located in** - Villupuram district, ***Tamil Nadu.***
- **Located atop three hillocks** - Rajagiri, Krishnagiri and Chandragiri
- **Built by** - Ananta Kon of the ***Konar Dynasty.***
- **Built in** - 1200 CE.
- **Known as** -The 'Troy of the East.'
- **Part of** -The Maratha Military Landscapes.



- **Historic legacy** - It was under the possession of several empires, such as the Vijayanagar Nayaks, Marathas, Mughals, Nawabs, the French and British.
- **Features**- Stepped well, a Kalyana Mahal, a durbar hall, a cannon, a clock tower, an armoury, an elephant tank, a stable, a granary, a gymnasium, the Venkataramana temple, and the Sadathtulla mosque.
- **Water supply system** -It consists of two elaborate systems for water supply, which ensured that even the *top of the structure had continuous supply of water.*

## Maratha Military Landscapes of India

- The *network of 12 forts* demonstrates the strategic military vision and architectural ingenuity of the Maratha Empire.
- **Located in** - Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.
- **Constructed during** - 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.
- **Selected sites** - Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra.
- Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.
- **Classifications** -Based on the location
  - **Hill forts** - Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad, and Gingee.
  - **Hill forest forts** - Pratapgad.
  - **Hill-plateau fort** - Panhala.
  - **Coastal fort** - Vijaydurg.
  - **Island forts** -Khanderi, Suvarnadurg, and Sindhudurg.

## Reference

[PIB| UNESCO World Heritage Site- Maratha Military Landscapes](#)

## NITI Aayog's Report on Reforming S&T Councils

*Prelims: Current Events of National and International importance*

### Why in News?

Recently, Niti Aayog has proposed a roadmap to strengthen State Science and Technology (S&T).

- **Aim** - To decentralize scientific governance and boost region-specific innovation for economic growth.
- **Focus** - It is focusing on structural reforms, funding strategies, and stronger industry linkages to make these councils drivers of technological self-reliance and sustainable development.
- **Transforming Councils into Innovation Hubs** - State S&T Councils must evolve from passive bodies into dynamic enablers of regional innovation.
- **Funding Imbalances** - The report recommends performance-linked funding and encouraging councils to secure project grants and private sector support.

- States like Kerala and Karnataka, have leveraged their councils to drive initiatives whereas other states remain hindered by irregular meetings, limited autonomy, and over-reliance on core grants from central agencies.
- **Leadership** - Niti Aayog suggests full-time executive directors with industry expertise and including industry bodies (CII, FICCI), scientists in council governance for better accountability and impact.
- **Boosting Industry Partnerships** - Strengthening Industry engagement ties is crucial for converting research into market-ready solutions and fostering local entrepreneurship.
- **Successful State Initiatives**
  - Punjab's anti-stubble burning briquetting plants,
  - Mizoram's grassroots innovation centre, and
  - Kerala's fellowship for women scientists returning to research.
- **Towards a Knowledge Economy** - State S&T Councils are vital for addressing local challenges in agriculture, renewable energy, disaster management, and healthcare.
  - Empowering them is key to building a resilient, innovation-driven India ready to compete globally.
- **Need for Reform** - India faces rising global competition in innovation and seeks to improve its R&D rankings.
  - Empowering state institutions is seen as essential for bridging gaps in the decentralised R&D landscape and achieving technological ambitions.

## Reference

[BW| Niti Ayog's Report on Reforming S&T Councils](#)

## Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024

*Prelims: Current Events of National and International Importance*

### Why in the News?

*Recently the Maharashtra Assembly passed the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024, aimed at preventing "unlawful activities of Left-Wing Extremist organisations or similar groups".*

### Key features of the bill

- The Bill defines certain activities by an ***individual or an organisation as unlawful.***
- **Unlawful Activities mentioned in the bill** - Any action or speech that constitutes
  - Danger to public order,
  - Incites violence,
  - Disrupts communication, or
  - Encourages disobedience to established law and its institutions.
- **Advisory Board** - The Bill constitutes an Advisory Board to examine the decision to designate an organisation as unlawful.
- The designation comes into effect only after approval from the Board.

- **Offences under the Bill** - Being a member of an unlawful organisation, attending its activities, promoting its meetings, managing its affairs, or planning or committing unlawful activities.
- Contributing or soliciting contributions as a non-member will also be punishable.
- **Penalties and Enforcement** - Offences are ***cognisable and non-bailable***, with jail terms of 2–7 years and fines up to Rs.5 lakh.
- **Forfeiting properties** - Authorities can seize and forfeit properties and funds linked to unlawful groups, sometimes before trial, with limited judicial oversight.
- **Administrative Powers** - District magistrates and police commissioners can notify, evict, and seize assets tied to banned organisations.
- The Bill allows for expedited prosecution, bypassing higher-level approval for certain actions.

### Similar Laws in Other States

- **Chhattisgarh Vishesh Jan Suraksha Adhiniyam, 2005** - Empowers the state to ban extremist organisations, seize assets, and prosecute members, upheld by the High Court in 2014.
- **Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act, 1992** - Provides for banning Naxal organisations and criminalising support structures.
- **Telangana and Odisha Public Security Laws** - Telangana inherited Andhra Pradesh's framework; Odisha uses the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, to ban extremist groups.
- **Common Features** - All these laws enable swift action against extremist networks, asset forfeiture, and criminalise association—Maharashtra's Bill closely mirrors these provisions.

- **Concerns - Broad and Stringent Provisions** - The bill's wide definitions could target legitimate dissent, student groups, and protest movements.
- Civil society and opposition parties argue it risks misuse, bypasses judicial safeguards, and duplicates existing laws like UAPA and MCOCA.
- **Ambiguity and Potential for Misuse** - Ambiguous definitions of "unlawful activity" and "extremist organisation" may lead to arbitrary enforcement.
- Concerns persist over civil liberties, freedom of association, and the potential chilling effect on democratic expression.
- **Balancing Security and Rights** - The Bill aims to address urban extremism but must ensure safeguards to prevent overreach and protect democratic freedoms, reflecting ongoing debates seen in other states.

### Reference

[The Hindu| Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024](#)