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# AT LEAST 8 OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES WASH ASHORE DEAD ALONG CHENNAI'S SOUTHERN COAST

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

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January 02, 2024 08:31 pm | Updated 11:44 pm IST - CHENNAI

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Olive Ridley turtle carcasses seen on the beach in Palavakkam along East Coast Road. | Photo Credit: M. Karunakaran

At least eight Olive Ridley turtles have washed ashore dead along the southern coast of Chennai over the last three days.

As the annual season of turtle nesting begins, so have the deaths. On Tuesday, carcasses of two Olive Ridleys were seen on Thiruvanmiyur beach and at least four near Injambakkam. Residents promptly buried the carcasses in Injambakkam after notifying the Forest Department. They said a few more were found dead over the weekend. When *The Hindu* visited Palavakkam, two more dead Olive Ridleys were seen.

While the oil spill in early December 2023 in Ennore raised concern on the possible perils to Olive Ridley turtles that visit the beaches of the city to nest, Wildlife Warden E. Prasanth ruled out the spillage as the reason for the deaths.

"It is not [due to] oil spill. From January to March, the beaching of 150 to 200 turtles is normal. In the recent cases, it was confirmed by the vet that there were injury marks, so they may have been hit by trawlers. The ocean current also brings turtles that die in the waters to the shore," he said. However, Mr. Prasanth added that a clear picture of the effects of the oil spill on Olive Ridley nesting would emerge only as the season progresses.

Forest Department guards and volunteers from organisations, such as the Students' Sea Turtle Conservation Network and TREE Foundation, patrol the beaches to transport turtle eggs to hatcheries as the stray dog menace is high. "Hatcheries in Besant Nagar, Pulicat, Injambakkam, and Kovalam are ready," Mr. Prasanth said.

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# RHINOS RETURN TO ASSAM WILDLIFE SANCTUARY AFTER 40 YEARS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

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January 07, 2024 01:36 am | Updated 07:46 am IST - GUWAHATI

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Representational file image of a one horned Rhino. | Photo Credit: RITU RAJ KONWAR

## GUWAHATI

The greater one-horned rhinoceros has returned to central Assam's Laokhowa-Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuary after 40 years, officials said.

A part of the Greater Kaziranga landscape, the 309.2 sq. km wildlife sanctuary (WLS) in the Nagaon district had at least 45 rhinos until 1983. Large-scale encroachment and poaching wiped them out although stray rhinos from Orang National Park across the Brahmaputra River and the Kaziranga National Park to the east were known to enter the WLS very briefly.

**Also read:** [Explained | Are rhino and elephant conservation efforts a success?](#)

"Happy to share that after 40 years our iconic rhinos have returned to Laokhowa and Burachapori. They have returned within 1 year of our successful anti-encroachment operation in the region," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote on X, formerly Twitter, Friday evening, adding that 51.7 sq. km of forest cover was retrieved after the eviction drive in 2023.

Wildlife officials said the two rhinos are believed to have entered through Arimari, where 1,282 hectares of forest land and 817 hectares of unsurveyed government land were cleared of encroachers from February 13-15, 2023.

"Rhinos have been sighted in Laokhowa-Burachapori, an excellent habitat of freshwater mangroves, since November 2023. The WLS also has a record of 10 tigers indicating a good prey base of herbivores," Sonali Ghosh, Kaziranga's field director, said.

Greater protection of the sanctuary has been attributed to recruits and 75 frontline positions that were filled up recently.

## School campaign

A biodiversity conservation group organised a series of campaigns titled 'Rhino goes to school' for the students of schools in the vicinity of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. A total

of 900 students participated in the programmes entailing quizzes and audio-visual presentations.

The programme was organised at the Luhitmukh Higher Secondary School located on the fringes of the Biswanath Wildlife Division of the tiger reserve.

“As part of the awareness campaign, students were educated on diverse aspects of rhinos, their habits and habitats, and the role they play in ecosystems and for our well-being,” Arif Hussain of Aaranyak said.

The other events were organised at the Luhitmukh Girls’ High School, Namoni Mishing Middle English School, and No. 2 Bortamuli Lower Primary School.

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# NAVIGATING THE CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM FRAMEWORK

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

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January 09, 2024 12:39 am | Updated 09:28 am IST

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The EU argues that the higher standard of environmental compliance in its domestic industries will reduce their competitiveness and it intends to impose an import duty on carbon-intensive industries from non-EU countries. File | Photo Credit: Reuters

A concerning development for India is the European Union (EU)'s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The policy, which intends to tax carbon-intensive products coming into the EU from 2026, is divided into two phases, with the first phase (transitional phase) kicking in from October 1, 2023. There has been constant exchange between the EU and India on the implications of the CBAM. The Commerce and Industry Minister said recently that the proposed carbon tax on imports is an "ill-conceived" move that would become the "death knell" for India's manufacturing sector.

The EU contended, while providing context for the CBAM, that it intends to achieve the target of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, under the European Green Deal. The CBAM is part of the package planned to achieve this. Second, there is a threat to EU products being replaced by carbon-intensive imports from other countries such as India or China. The EU argues that the higher standard of environmental compliance in its domestic industries will reduce their competitiveness. Thus, it intends to impose an import duty on carbon-intensive industries from non-EU countries to meet both these objectives.

The CBAM is intended to work like the EU's Emission Trading System (ETS), which sets a cap on the amount of GHG emissions permitted. Under the EU-ETS, companies covered by the scheme have to 'buy' allowances corresponding to their GHG emissions. Financial incentives are provided to them to cut emissions. But energy-intensive industries receive free allowances to ensure their competitiveness. This is also a way of preventing carbon leakage, wherein carbon-intensive production by EU-based producers could move to non-EU countries with lax environmental regulations. The CBAM has been pitched to replace this allocation of EU-ETS allowances.

The CBAM's transitional phase will last until December 2025. In this stage, all EU manufacturers and importers of energy-intensive industries will need to report the GHG emissions embedded in their imports without any financial obligations. From January 1, 2026, the CBAM will enter the definitive phase wherein, upon declaration of the emissions embedded in imports, the importers will be required to surrender annually the corresponding number of CBAM certificates.

The CBAM will be applied to the actual declared carbon content embedded in the goods imported to the EU. The formulae devised to calculate this content will be based on the EU-ETS mechanism, barring for the first year. In the first reporting year, to allow some flexibility, use of default values for the embedded emission or using the monitoring, reporting, or verification rules of the country of production is permitted. However, there is a fundamental difference between how the actual carbon content embedded is calculated and valued in other jurisdictions.

India has just started working on its own carbon trading mechanism. In December 2022, it amended the Energy Conservation Act, 2001, to introduce the Carbon Credit Trading System (CCTS). This is proposed to combat climate change by incentivising actions for emission reductions leading to increased investments in clean energy by the private sector. The Ministry of Power is still working on the specifics to operationalise the CCTS, including carbon valuation.

In India, the obligatory CCTS model is also coupled with the voluntary market-based mechanism called the Green Credit Programme Rules, notified by the Ministry of Environment in 2023. The scheme is aimed to encourage more environmentally proactive actions going beyond the carbon reduction mandate.

India is reportedly among the top eight countries that will be adversely affected by the CBAM. As per the Global Trade Research Initiative report, in 2022, 27% of India's exports of iron, steel, and aluminum products worth \$8.2 billion went to the EU. It is estimated that a few of its core sectors such as steel will be greatly affected by the CBAM.

India seems to have limited options to navigate the CBAM framework. The first would be to challenge the practice as being violative of the common but differentiated responsibilities principle agreed upon under the Paris Agreement. Second, the EU could collect the tax and return the funds to such countries to invest in their green technologies. This appears pragmatic, especially as the CBAM will enter the definitive phase in 2026. Thus the ongoing negotiations with the EU must be closely observed for this purpose. India has already challenged the CBAM before the World Trade Organization under the special and differential treatment provisions.

The EU has failed to take cognisance of the other factors that might dictate the shift of production by EU industries outside the EU. These include the availability of cheap labour and other modes of production, and the opportunity to expand in other geographies.

Recently, the U.K. declared the enforcement of its own CBAM by 2027. This is expected to cause a significant upheaval for India's exports in the forthcoming years. As a consequence, there arises a pressing need for India to formulate its own carbon taxation measures that align with the principles of the Paris Agreement while simultaneously safeguarding its industries' interests. However, given the limited time available, it is imperative for India to act swiftly in this regard.

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# MAJORITY OF CITIES FAR FROM CLEAN AIR TARGET, SAYS STUDY

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

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January 10, 2024 04:24 am | Updated 07:33 am IST - NEW DELHI:

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A man walking under a thick layer of smog, as the air quality in Delhi has again fallen into the 'very poor' category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). File | Photo Credit: Sushil Kumar Verma

The Centre's ambitious attempt to improve air quality in some of India's most polluted cities suggests that a majority of Indian cities are far from making significant progress. In 49 cities whose particulate matter numbers were consistently available for five years, 27 cities showed a decline in PM 2.5 — considered the most dangerous grade of pollutant — while only four had met or exceeded the targeted decline, according to an analysis by Respirer Living Sciences and Climate Trends, released early on Wednesday.

The stated goal of the 9,631-crore National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is to reduce average particulate matter concentrations 40% by 2026 (compared to 2017) in 131 cities. When the programme was initiated, the aim was to cut pollution 20-40% by 2024 in these cities but this goalpost was later shifted to 2026.

**Also Read | [No more hot air about air pollution](#)**

While the deadline is still three years away, some of India's biggest cities are reporting marginal declines or even increasing pollution loads. Delhi, for instance, has seen average, annual PM 2.5 levels decline only 5.9%. Navi Mumbai, a suburb of Mumbai, has — instead of a decline — seen a 46% rise in PM 2.5 levels; Mumbai — a 38.1% rise and Ujjain, a 46% rise. Jaipur and Visakhapatnam saw PM 2.5 increase 13% and 12% rise respectively and Pune 10%.

Among the cities that showed a sharp decline in PM 2.5 from 2019-2023 were Varanasi, with a 72% average reduction in PM 2.5 levels and 69% reduction in PM 10 levels. Agra too reported a 53% decline as did Jodhpur with a 50% decline. The study analysed data from 99 cities and while there were others that showed declines and rises, only 49 had data worth at least 60 months and for at least five years.

"Among other cities that registered a more than 40% reduction in the PM 2.5 levels (as compared to 2019) were Jodhpur (50%), Kanpur (50%), Meerut (42%), and Lucknow (41%). Except for Jodhpur, all cities that have already achieved the 2026 reduction targets are from Uttar Pradesh. With respect to PM 10 levels, apart from Varanasi and Talcher, no other cities

have met the 40% reduction target yet,” the study noted.

This study considered average, annual particulate matter concentrations, though pollution levels, it is known, can have significant variation within a year. Delhi and for that matter several cities in northern and eastern India peak during the winter, with adverse meteorological conditions preventing the natural flushing out of particulate matter. Nearly 18 of the top 20 cities with the highest PM 2.5 levels in 2023 are clustered in the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), underscoring the region’s vulnerability to heightened particulate matter concentrations. Only Guwahati and Rourkela, outside the IGP, were among the 20 most polluted cities for PM 2.5, the study added.

Another factor that significantly influences annual concentrations of pollutants in a city is the number and spread of continuous ambient air quality monitors — the devices that track fluctuations in chemical pollutants through the day. While cities such as Mumbai and Delhi have several such stations and spread across the breadth of the cities to account for pollution in areas as diverse as say, the industrial clusters or cleaner, greener parts of town, most Indian cities have only a handful.

Only four of the 92 cities part of the analysis, for instance have more than 10 such stations. Varanasi in 2019 had only one such station, which only worked 24% of the time whereas by 2024 had four stations that were operational all days. The vast majority of Indian cities have less than five stations.

“...The variations in PM 2.5 and PM 10 observed in the data can also be partly attributed to the geographical locations of the cities analysed, the diverse sources of emissions and meteorological influences, among other factors. The contribution of these factors, particularly the influence of emissions versus meteorology, requires further study,” the authors note. Whether cities’ actions have actually translated to improvement in air quality is as yet unclear.

“The National Clean Air Programme has made noteworthy progress in tackling air pollution, witnessing notable reductions in PM 2.5 and PM 10 levels in top polluted cities, showing there have been efforts under way. Despite these positive strides, persistent challenges exist, with some urban areas facing an uptick in pollution concentrations. The programme’s revised goal of a 40% reduction in particulate matter by 2026 reflects a commitment to ambitious environmental targets. As cities add new air quality monitoring stations, strengthened monitoring will give a better picture of the problem and allow for better mitigation measures,” said Aarti Khosla, Director, Climate Trends.

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## EU CARBON TAX: INDIA FLAGS RISK OF TRADE INFO GETTING COMPROMISED

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

INDIA HAS FLAGGED concerns relating to sensitive and confidential trade data of its exporters getting compromised while complying with the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) — the world's first system that imposes carbon emission tariffs on iron, steel, aluminium and cement, among other such items imported into the 27-nation bloc.

Indian manufacturing exports in sectors such as steel, oil refining and cement align extremely favourably with global cost competitiveness benchmarks and the concerns flagged by Indian exporters pertain to sensitive trade secrets in these segments getting compromised.

While the CBAM is set to come into effect from 2026, the transition period requiring exporters to submit data to EU authorities began October 1, 2023. The CBAM requires EU importers to submit nearly 1,000 data points and methods used in production by exporters. While the EU says the data collection is aimed at ascertaining carbon emission, Indian exporters fear losing competitive edge by revealing such crucial information.

This assumes significance as India exports over 15 per cent of its total goods exports to the EU. In 2022-23, India exported goods worth \$75 billion to the EU.

The move also comes at a time when India's exports to the EU are slowing this year due to weakening demand in the west. The recent crisis in the Red Sea area is also feared to have a bearing on exports of textile and agri products to the EU.

Trade experts have warned that data collection by the EU under the CBAM must be looked into by the government as Brussels largely aims to revive manufacturing in its territory and wipe out the trade deficit with developing countries such as India and China. The government has already questioned the CBAM in the WTO and is simultaneously looking for concessions.

"Negotiations with the EU are primarily happening under the Trade and Technology Council (TTC). There is a separate track where we have agreed to discuss the challenges with the CBAM. The whole gamut of discussion is happening there...whether it is related to documentation and challenges to filing that is being asked now or related to privacy concerns regarding the data that is being sought..." a senior government official told [The Indian Express](#).

India's discussions under TTC assume significance as the EU has such a bilateral forum only with the US. And the first ministerial meeting took place in May last year that saw India's commerce ministry, external affairs ministry and union minister of state for electronics and Information Technology engaging with the EU.

The government official said that while the EU has agreed to include solutions regarding CBAM in the FTA under negotiations, however, the final contours of the same have not yet been agreed upon. "FTA is a legal document. We are seeking various kinds of relief including a longer transition timeline, concessions for MSMEs..." the official further said.

India is not the only country to have flagged concerns in this regard. "The Argentinian industry and Brazilian industry associations have already flagged this to the EU. They have also asked why the EU industry is not subject to parting with such information. The relevant Ministry of

[Taiwan](#) and Thai businesses have also flagged the same concern. Thus, globally, data privacy concerns have been a source of worry.” Sangeeta Godbole, a former revenue service officer who was part of the Indian team negotiating the India-EU free trade deal said.

“Every company has process improvement engineers. Their job is to look for ways to make each process cost effective. That is how they become more competitive than rival companies. For instance, the blast furnace was invented 100 years ago but every company sells steel at competitive prices. It is a closely guarded trade secret how yield is improved. With CBAM's data requirement, this could come out,” former Indian Trade Service officer Ajay Srivastava said.

Srivastava who is heading the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), said that the process of data collection by the European Union via an auditor also poses significant risk of trade secrets being compromised. “Japan, for instance, never shares its data keeping this risk in mind. Another example of misuse is seen in inspections carried about by other countries to allow imports. China not only collects the information needed but goes beyond to gain a competitive edge,” he added.

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# TELANGANA TOPS THE COUNTRY IN DEFORESTATION BY PERMITTING AXING OF OVER 12 LAKH TREES BY 2020

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

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January 26, 2024 09:26 pm | Updated January 27, 2024 02:15 am IST - HYDERABAD

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Trees being cut for road widening in Khammam. File | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The Telangana State has permitted record deforestation by way of clearances for various government and non-government projects since the formation of the separate State.

Notwithstanding its afforestation claims under the Telangana Ku Haritha Haram programme, the State Forest department has earned the dubious distinction of allowing the felling of more than 12 lakh trees — which was the highest in the country — in just over five years into the State formation.

It was admitted by none other than the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) R. Sobha in an affidavit submitted to the High Court, in response to a Public Interest Litigation in 2020.

In the counter, the forest official, who was later re-appointed as the Advisor, Forestry, admitted that a total 12,12,753 trees were allowed to be cut during the previous five years, and that it was the highest in the whole country.

She, however, sought to justify the clearances, saying that the trees were sparsely spread over 11,717 hectares of forest land diverted for various non-forestry purposes. On an average, the trees felled numbered at 104 per hectare of land, which amounted to less than 0.4 (or 40%) canopy density. The trees were all grown up with trunk girth of over 30 centimetres.

By way of the permissions, the department had earned 2058 crore, which was deposited in the account of the Telangana State's Adhoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority. The amount was being used for taking up afforestation and wildlife habitat improvement, the counter said.

The PIL was filed against the government's decision to divert forest land in Damagundam near Pudur of Vikarabad district to the tune of 1174 hectares (2,900 acres) for the establishment of Very Low Frequency (VLF) communications station by the Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command. The project has received a go ahead recently, after the High Court has vacated the

stay.

The radar transmission system being set up for marine/submarine communication could result in more deforestation in the State which has already lost much of its forest extent, the petitioner representing the 'Damagunda Forest Protection JAC-Save Damagundam', a registered society contended.

Defending the diversion, Sobha said 1,500 acres of the forest will be maintained as green belt and trees would not be felled here. The canopy density is less than 0.4 in the region, she said. As per the inventory carried out by the State Forest department, she mentioned, 0.4 density amounted to an average 176 trees per hectare. Even by this estimation, tree felling in the non-green-belt area would amount to a lakh fully grown trees. These are apart from more than 5.5 lakh plants of more than half a metre height.

"In these days of modern technology, the Navy can explore other options. Is it worth losing so much greenery in these days of climate change? The station will have officers and staff, they need residential complexes, schools for their children, and other facilities. Eventually, the whole forest area will be gone," said Challa Ram Kalyan, an advocate who floated an online petition against the proposal.

Proposal to establish the communication centre was mooted in 2010, and permission was granted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in 2017. The proposal had been processed offline as it is of strategic importance, the affidavit mentioned.

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