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Institute Of Civil Services

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The Hindu Analysis- 1st April 2025

- Summer set to be warmer, but El Nino unlikely during next monsoon: IMD
- NEP 2020 in the classroom, from policy to practice
- Why are tensions high in the Arctic?
- Ahead of SC hearing, rights bodies ask Centre to defend Forest Rights Act

Summer set to be warmer, but El Nino unlikely during next monsoon: IMD

Summer set to be warmer, but El Nino unlikely during next monsoon: IMD

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has “ruled out” the possibility of an El Nino in the coming southwest monsoon season this year.

An El Nino, characterised by a warming of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, is frequently associated with reduced monsoon rainfall in India.

“Based on the climate forecasts, including international ones, we can rule out El Nino for the monsoon. We will most likely see neutral El Nino conditions,” M. Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD, said in a briefing on Monday.

In 2023, which was an El Nino year, the monsoon season saw a 6% deficit.



Climate forecast: IMD Director-General M. Mohapatra says there will most likely be neutral El Nino conditions. THULASI KAKKAT

Last year witnessed an 8% surplus as “neutral conditions” prevailed.

An El Nino implies a temperature rise between 0.5 degree Celsius to 1 degree Celsius in the Central Pacific. “Neutral” suggests no such rise. However there have been instances

when neutral conditions have led to below-normal rain in India. The IMD gives its first forecast on monsoon rainfall in April.

‘Wait for April forecast’
“We will have to wait for the April forecast to get a sense of the monsoon rain-

fall this year,” said Mr. Mohapatra, adding, “Regional factors and conditions in oceans surrounding India [Indian Ocean particularly] also have to be considered during forecasts.”

Before the monsoon kicks in, however, India will be reeling under “above normal” temperatures during the summer months.

From April to June, India on average reports four to seven heatwave days, defined as temperatures exceeding 45 degrees Celsius or greater-than-five-degrees rise from what’s normal in a region.

“Parts of eastern India could potentially see 10 heatwave days this year,” said Mr. Mohapatra.

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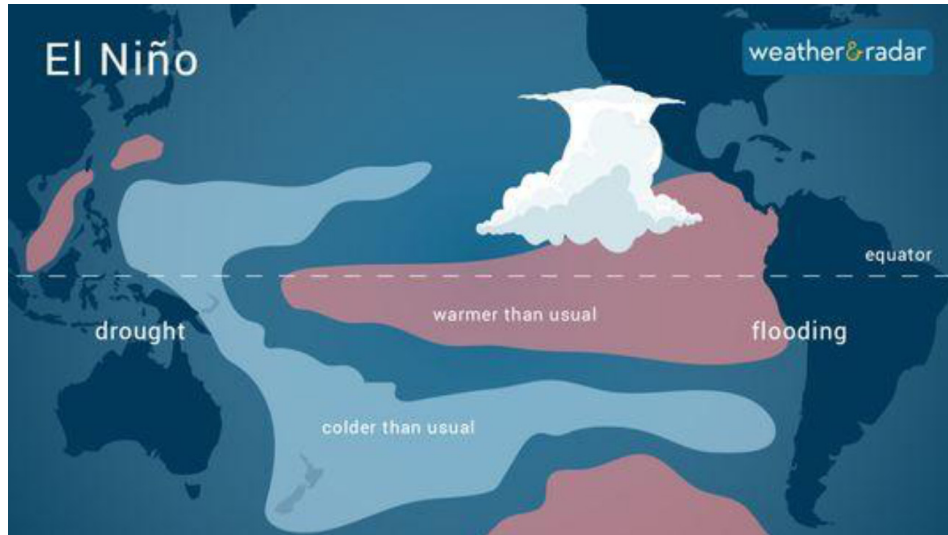
El Nino Unlikely This Year

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has ruled out the possibility of El Nino during this year’s monsoon season.





El Niño is a weather phenomenon where the **central Pacific Ocean warms up**, often leading to **less rainfall** in India.



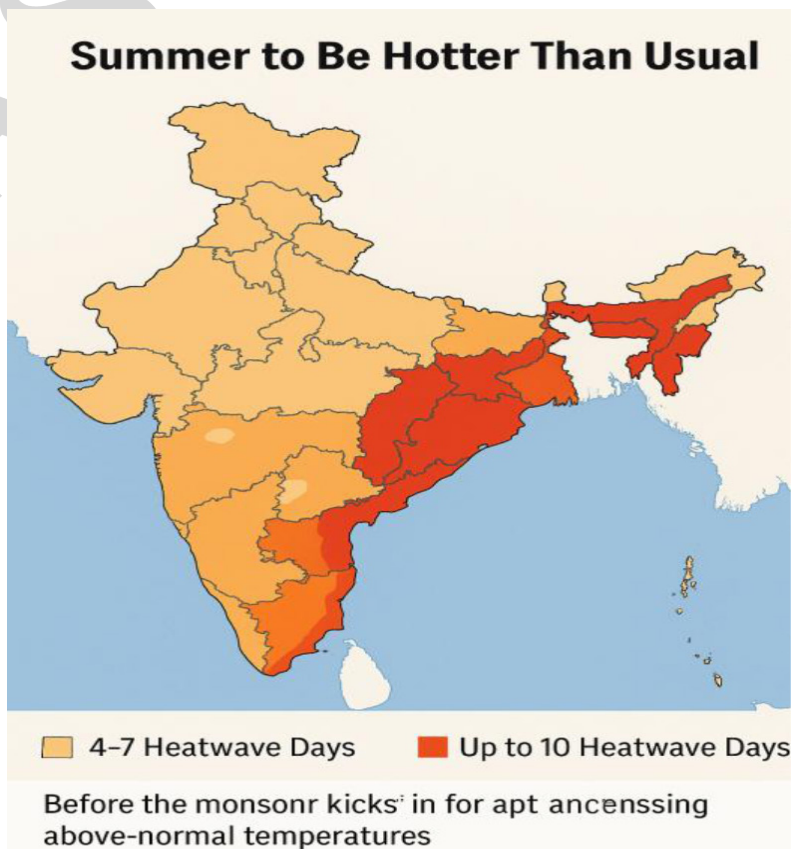
- **IMD's Director-General, M. Mohapatra**, said climate forecasts suggest we will have **“neutral” conditions**, meaning **no significant warming** in the Pacific Ocean.
- In **2023 (an El Niño year)**, India had **6% less rainfall** than usual.
- In **2022 (a neutral year)**, rainfall was **8% above normal**.

Though **neutral conditions** do not always guarantee good rainfall, IMD will give its **first official monsoon forecast in April**.

Summer to Be Hotter Than Usual

Before the monsoon arrives, India will experience a **hotter-than-normal summer**.

- **April to June** usually brings **4 to 7 heatwave days**, where temperatures exceed **45°C** or rise **5°C above normal**.
- This year, eastern India might see up to 10 heatwave days.
- Many parts of **central and southern India** have already recorded **above-normal temperatures in March**, which **global warming** may be contributing to.





NEP 2020 in the classroom, from policy to practice

NEP 2020 in the classroom, from policy to practice

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 frames the universal acquisition of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) as an urgent national mission. Since the release of the policy, the central and State governments have put in enormous efforts into programmes intended to meet the goal of ensuring that every child acquires FLN by Class two, the end of the newly designated 'foundational stage' of education for three to eight year olds.

Findings from the nationwide Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 survey that was released recently provide some indicators of the perception of these policy pushes to individual schools. For example, more than 80% of the 15,728 rural schools across the country that were visited as a part of the survey reported having received a directive from the government to implement FLN activities for Classes one to three. In over 75% of these schools, at least one teacher had received in-person training on FLN.

There is an awareness

A deep dive into 24 Class two classrooms in eight States earlier this year provided glimpses of how these changes are translating into practice on the ground. The first conclusion that was clear from observations of the teaching practice of these teachers, and subsequent conversations with them, is that the rationale for why FLN is important appears to have been communicated clearly and on scale.

In the eight States and in most of the schools that the writers of this article visited, teachers articulated this new focus and, for the most part, approved of it. Aspects of the new approach that required attitudinal shifts rather than new pedagogical practices were visible in their classrooms.

However, the challenges and opportunities

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Observations from 24 classrooms in eight States across India point to some change

facing teachers vary substantially, depending on the local context. For example, a classroom that comprises a large number of Class two students with limited space to move about requires a different approach than one with students from several different grades sitting outdoors. Several teachers said that they have limited opportunities to identify and discuss these challenges during training workshops. Creating spaces for practice, discussion and adaptation may be the key to increasing uptake.

Support for teachers

Consequently, post-training support systems to teachers are of vital importance. Here, States differ markedly in the amount and the type of support that they provide. In some States, the teachers we spoke to were unable to name any form of support available to them post training. In others, trainers were available to be consulted if teachers wished to do so. In still others, regular "monitoring" visits from officials ensured that the focus on FLN was not lost, but the focus was on compliance with data collection protocols rather than teaching-learning in the classroom. In just a couple of cases, teachers spoke about block- or district-level officials actually demonstrating how to do a particular activity in the classroom.

Without the space to practise and then adapt the new methods and materials as needed, teachers are often unable to make full use of the guidelines and materials provided to them. For example, even though the focus on using teaching-learning materials (TLM) in the classroom was clear to all the teachers, in every case where some form of TLM was observed, it was evident in 'demonstration' mode – meaning that in all but one case it was the teacher using the TLM, and not the students. Getting TLM into students' hands requires more thought and flexibility, very often about practical, rather than

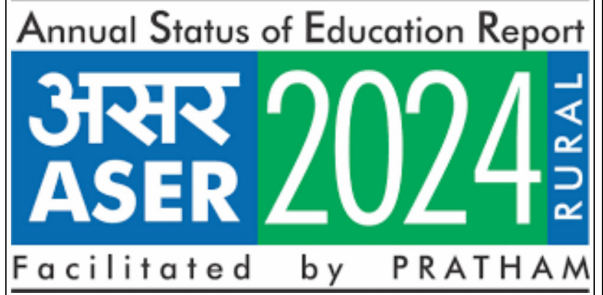
pedagogical, questions. For example, in States where teachers are given funds to make their own TLM rather than provided with ready-to-use kits, teachers were worried about the material getting damaged (torn or broken) as they would have to remake them. Others had no space to store TLM in the classroom, while the rest who had been provided with TLM kits were unclear about how and when to use them.

Issue of syllabus completion

Perhaps, most crucially, decisions on what and how to teach are still based primarily on syllabus completion. At the State level, continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) often takes the form of formative and summative assessments of curriculum content, conducted in traditional pen-and-paper format. Although teachers in several States talked about monthly FLN-specific assessments, almost none spoke about using FLN assessment results to inform their classroom practice. Resolving the inherent contradiction between ensuring universal FLN and syllabus completion is a question that the system has yet to reckon with in a systematic way.

There is little doubt that some things have changed for the better since the rollout of National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat – the mission that lays out detailed guidelines on how FLN goals should be met on the ground and adaptations across the country. The clear focus on FLN and its resultant visibility in schools and among teachers, is in itself a step forward. This is reflected in the fact that for the first time since the ASER survey began 20 years ago, learning levels at the foundational stage have improved across the country, a change mostly driven by government schools. This focus must be maintained in the years ahead to ensure that all children in India acquire these basic skills.

- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** made *Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN)* a top priority.
- The goal is for all children to achieve these skills by Class 2 (age 8).
- Governments have taken many steps to implement FLN programs.



Annual Status of Education Report- ASER 2024

- shows that over **80% of schools** received government orders to focus on FLN.
- More than **75% of teachers** have received training on FLN.
- Teachers understand why FLN is important and mostly support the initiative.





Challenges in Classrooms

- Different schools have **different needs** based on local conditions.
- **Lack of discussion spaces** in teacher training makes it harder to share and solve problems.
- Some States provide **good support** after training, while others offer **very little help**.
- Many teachers struggle with using **teaching-learning materials (TLM)** in class.
- Issues like **storage space and material damage** prevent effective use of TLM.

The Problem of Syllabus Completion

- Teachers still focus more on **completing the syllabus** than improving FLN skills.
- Tests mostly check syllabus knowledge rather than **real FLN progress**.

Way Ahead

- The **NIPUN Bharat** program has helped increase FLN awareness in schools.
- **For the first time in 20 years**, learning levels at the foundational stage have improved.
- This progress must continue to ensure every child develops strong reading and math skills.

Why are tensions high in the Arctic?

The story so far:

International observers have raised concerns about escalating tensions in the Arctic, warning that if left unchecked, they could eventually spark conflict in the region.

Why are tensions high in the Arctic?

Who are the members of the Arctic Council? Why has the Arctic region become an area of interest now? What is the conflict around the Northwest Passage? How has Russia made its presence known in the region?

EXPLAINER

Franschoek Smeets

The story so far: International observers have raised concerns about escalating tensions in the Arctic, warning that if left unchecked, they could eventually spark conflict in the region.

What is happening? The Arctic, the northernmost area of the planet, has remained largely isolated for centuries. However, as climate change accelerates the melting of ice, new strategic opportunities are emerging for global powers. Beneath the frozen landscape lie untapped reserves of natural resources such as fossil fuels, rare earth elements, phosphates, and copper as well as lucrative fishing grounds.

Most of these resources are currently inaccessible due to the year-round ice barrier, but as climate change alters the Arctic environment, these resources and nearby trade routes will become increasingly viable. Unlike the Antarctic, which is demarcated and environmentally protected by a dedicated international treaty, the Arctic lacks similar legal safeguards and is primarily governed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This allows nations to claim territories in the region and deploy military infrastructure. In recent years, overlapping maritime claims and military posturing have exacerbated tensions.

Who is in control? The various islands and coastal areas in the Arctic are controlled by eight countries - Canada, Denmark through Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S. Together, these nations form the Arctic Council, an international body tasked with protecting the environment, conducting scientific research, and safeguarding the interests of indigenous peoples in the region. These nations exercise sovereignty over the Arctic land and can also exploit resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). The waters between these territories fall under international jurisdiction, ensuring freedom of navigation.

According to UNCLOS, nations can extend their claims to the seabed beyond the 200-nautical-mile EEZ if they can prove that the area is a natural prolongation of their continental shelf. Canada, Denmark, and Russia have all submitted overlapping claims to the Arctic seabed to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Despite these territorial declarations, infrastructure in the Arctic remains underdeveloped, with only a few operational ports along the coast. Among the Arctic Council members, Russia is the only country with a significant fleet of icebreakers, including one which is nuclear-powered, capable of navigating through the region's treacherous sea ice.

Where do the tensions arise? For months, news headlines have reported on U.S. President Donald Trump's renewed interest in acquiring Greenland from Denmark. He has described the world's largest island as a matter of "national security" and has questioned the legitimacy of Denmark's sovereignty over the territory. Greenland, which has been under Danish control for over 400 years, also hosts the U.S. Pituffik military base. In January, following Mr. Trump's renewed interest, Denmark's prime minister Mette Frederiksen has pledged to bolster Greenland's security and enshrined on a tour of European capitals to seek support from allies.



Jan 2025: Russian spy vessel Yantar in U.K. waters

NORDIC WARDEN NATO Joint Expeditionary Force

1 Denmark	6 Sweden
2 Iceland	7 Finland
3 U.K.	8 Estonia
4 Netherlands	9 Latvia
5 Norway	10 Lithuania

Sea compliance: A polar bear is seen on ice floes in the Franz Josef Land archipelago in 2023, after a prime minister Mette Frederiksen has pledged to bolster Greenland's security and enshrined on a tour of European capitals to seek support from allies.

Additionally, tensions between the U.S. and Canada have risen following Mr. Trump's controversial comments about annexing Canada. Both nations have long disputed the status of the Northwest Passage, a potential Arctic shipping route that winds through Canada's Arctic Archipelago. China considers the passage part of its internal waters, granting it control over navigation, while Washington insists it falls under international jurisdiction, which means that any nation has freedom of navigation in the Passage.

Concerns over potential conflict also extend to Russia and the remaining Arctic Council members. These members, apart from Russia, all belong to NATO. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, relations within the Council have become increasingly strained. Russian officials, including Defence Committee of State Duma member Andrey Kartalov, have suggested that Norway's Arctic island of Svalbard should fall under Russian control. Meanwhile, observer states of the Arctic Council, including India, are closely monitoring developments. The U.S., for instance, has repeatedly emphasised the strategic importance of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. (GIUK) gap, a critical choke point for NATO's naval defences. This passage is the only feasible route for Russian submarines attempting to access the Atlantic or potentially disrupt NATO shipping in case of conflict, making it a focal point of Western military planning.

THE GIST

The Arctic, the northernmost area of the planet, has remained largely isolated for centuries. However, as climate change accelerates the melting of ice, new strategic opportunities are emerging for global powers.

Why does the Arctic matter so much? Aside from ongoing resource extraction, interest in the Arctic surged following a 2009 U.S. Geological Survey report estimating that the region holds 13% of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and 30% of its undiscovered natural gas reserves. Most of these reserves lie beneath the seabed, making maritime claims highly significant. Greenland also harbours some of the world's richest deposits of rare earth elements, which drew significant investment interest from Chinese companies in the early 2020s. However, many of these projects were later suspended due to environmental concerns or U.S. political pressure.

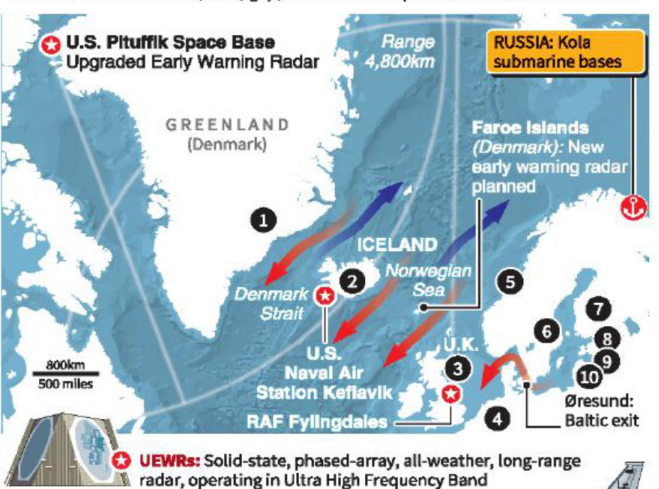
The melting of Arctic sea ice has also prompted interest in the opening of new commercial trade routes. The Northwest Passage, which runs along Russia's Arctic coast, is particularly critical for Chinese trade. This route, stretching from the Bering Strait to Norway, could reduce the maritime distance between East Asia and Europe by approximately 4,000 kilometres compared to the traditional route through the Suez Canal. Navigating commercial shipping through this passage could save Beijing billions in transportation costs. However, the so-called Polar Silk Road would require Russia to grant Chinese ships access to its Arctic ports, a prospect Moscow has so far approached with caution.

What lies ahead? Aside from political declarations and territorial claims, some nations have taken concrete steps to assert their Arctic ambitions. In 2007, Russia sent the MIR submersible to the North Pole to plant a Russian flag on the seabed beneath the ice - a symbolic demonstration of its presence and capabilities. Moscow has also maintained a number of military bases in the Arctic, most of them dating back to the Soviet era. In 2022, Russia conducted joint anti-air exercises with Beijing in the East China Sea, which indicated strategic implications for Arctic security.

China has also steadily become more vocal about its Arctic interests, declaring itself a "near-Arctic" state in 2018 and planning the construction of its first nuclear-powered icebreaker. Since Sweden and Finland joined NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the alliance has intensified its military presence in the region, including large-scale exercises near the Russian border in Finland in 2024. Analysts have pointed out NATO's limited operational capabilities in the Arctic, raising concerns about strategic readiness. As temperatures continue to rise, tensions in the melting Arctic may soon reach a boiling point.

Ice cold war

The melting of Arctic sea ice has prompted renewed interest in the region. The U.K. has repeatedly emphasised the strategic importance of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. (GIUK) gap, a critical choke point for NATO's naval defences



UWRs: Solid-state, phased-array, all-weather, long-range radar, operating in Ultra High Frequency Band

Boeing P-8A Poseidon: Maritime patrol and reconnaissance for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), based out of Keflavik

Jan 2025: Russian spy vessel Yantar in U.K. waters

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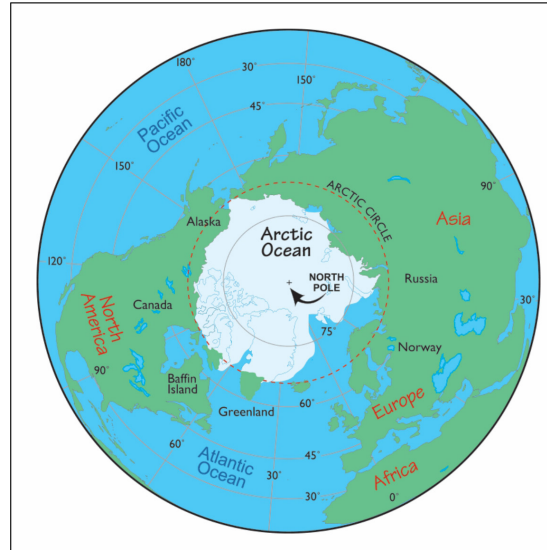
Sources: IISS, Geopolitical Monitor Picture: army-news.ru © GRAPHIC NEWS





What is happening?

- The Arctic has been isolated for **centuries**, but **climate change is melting ice caps**, revealing **natural resources** like oil, gas, and rare minerals.
- Melting ice also opens **new trade routes**, making the region strategically important.
- Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic **has no strong legal protections**, leading to territorial claims and military activity.



Who is in control?

- **Eight countries control Arctic land: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S.**
- These nations form the **Arctic Council**, which oversees environmental protection and indigenous rights.
- Countries can **expand their seabed claims** under the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, leading to overlapping claims.
- **Russia** is the most prepared, with a large fleet of **icebreakers** and military presence.

Where do the tensions arise?

- The U.S. and Canada **disagree over the Northwest Passage**—Canada sees it as internal waters, while the U.S. claims it as an international route.
- **Greenland's status** is also disputed, with the U.S. expressing interest in acquiring it.
- **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** has worsened tensions, as **all Arctic Council nations except Russia are in NATO**.
- **Russia claims Norwegian territory (Svalbard)** and has increased military activity.
- **NATO is strengthening its Arctic presence**, especially after **Sweden and Finland joined the alliance**.



Why does the Arctic matter so much?

- The Arctic holds **13% of the world's undiscovered oil** and **30% of its untapped natural gas**.
- **China sees the Arctic as a vital trade route**, particularly the **Northeast Passage** along Russia's coast, which could cut **shipping distances** significantly.



What lies ahead?

- Russia has **militarized the Arctic** and even planted a **flag at the North Pole**.
- China is expanding its **Arctic influence**, calling itself a **'Near-Arctic State'** and building nuclear icebreakers.
- With rising global interest and military activity, **tensions in the Arctic are likely to increase** in the coming years.



Ahead of SC hearing, rights bodies ask Centre to defend Forest Rights Act

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing on challenges to the **Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006**, a coalition of **114 Adivasi rights bodies and environmental organizations** from across India sent a letter to **Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram**. Their demand was for the **Ministry to strongly defend the FRA**, a landmark legislation aimed at recognizing and protecting the rights of tribal and traditional forest-dwelling communities over forest land.

Ahead of SC hearing, rights bodies ask Centre to defend Forest Rights Act

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing on the challenges to the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 114 Adivasi rights bodies and environmental organisations from across the country on Monday wrote to Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, demanding that his Ministry defend the 2006 law that was brought in to recognise and protect the forest rights of tribal people and other traditionally forest-dwelling communities.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 also known as the FRA, was challenged in the Supreme Court in 2008 by Wildlife First, an NGO which called for the eviction of people whose FRA claims had been rejected.



There were widespread protests in 2019 seeking withdrawal of the court's order on eviction for tribal people from forests. FILE PHOTO

In 2019, the court ordered the eviction, and following widespread protests, the Tribal Affairs Ministry intervened, showing procedural lapses in FRA claims approvals. The court stayed the eviction order and called for detailed data on the rejection of claims.

The letter to Mr. Oram, signed by the rights bodies on Monday, said that the

review of rejected claims initiated on orders of the Supreme Court had not been carried out by State governments properly, adding that neither the States nor the Centre had taken the exercise seriously.

"This resulted in either no review or haphazard arbitrary reviews resulting in repetition of rejections. State governments have followed their own me-

chanisms and processes, with some States even using technology that undermines especially the decision-making authority of the Gram Sabhas, and procedure for determining rights as statutorily required in FRA," the rights bodies said in their letter.

'Wrongful denials'

Citing the case of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the rights bodies said that the use of satellite imagery to verify FRA claims continues to take place without officials visiting the ground to verify them. "The excessive reliance on satellite imagery, without abiding by the list of evidence provided in FRA, has led to wrongful denials of rightful claims," they said, adding that even the Tribal Affairs Ministry had flagged possible issues with the use of technology in the implementation of the FRA.

Background of the FRA Challenge

- The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**, or FRA, was enacted to grant **legal recognition to the land and resources used by Adivasi and other forest-dependent communities**.





- However, in 2008, an NGO called **Wildlife First** filed a case in the **Supreme Court**, arguing that people whose **FRA claims had been rejected should be evicted from forest lands.**
- In 2019, the **Supreme Court ordered the eviction of such individuals**, but after **widespread protests**, the **Tribal Affairs Ministry intervened**, highlighting procedural lapses in claim approvals.
- As a result, the **court put a stay on the eviction order** and called for a **detailed review of FRA claim rejections.**

Concerns Raised by Rights Groups: In their letter to Minister, they highlighted the following issues:

1. Lack of Seriousness in Reviewing Rejected Claims

- ◆ **Many State governments had either not conducted reviews at all or had done so arbitrarily.**
- ◆ Different States used their **own mechanisms**, some of which were in **violation of FRA procedures.**
- ◆ The statutory role of **Gram Sabhas (village councils)** in deciding claims was **undermined in some cases.**

2. Use of Satellite Imagery Leading to Wrongful Rejections

- ◆ In States like **Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh**, authorities used **satellite imagery as the primary tool** to verify claims which replaced **onground verification by officials**, leading to **wrongful denials** of claim.
- ◆ Even the **Union Tribal Affairs Ministry** had flagged concerns about the **improper use of technology** in implementing the FRA.

