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Sunderbans Damaged in Cyclone Amphan

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Why in News

Recently, the Chief Minister of West Bengal highlighted that about **28% of the Sunderbans** has been **damaged by Cyclone Amphan** and launched a drive for planting **mangroves** and trees to mark the **World Environment Day (5th June)**.

Key Points

- The Indian Sunderbans, an **area south of the Dampier Hodges line**, is spread over 9,630 sq km, of which the mangrove forest accounts for 4,263 sq km.
 - 1,200 sq km of that mangrove forest has been destroyed.
 - **Mangroves** not only **reduce wind speed** but **break the waves during a storm surge** caused by a cyclone.
 - **Trees turned yellow and red** after the cyclone mostly **due to salinity** and trees can only survive if the salinity of the soil comes down.
 - **Dampier Hodges line** is an imaginary line, passing through 24 Parganas South and North districts (West Bengal) which indicates the northern-most limits of the estuarine zone affected by tidal fluctuations.
- The **damage has been much on the Indian side** of the Sundarbans and not on the Bangladesh side.
- The CM has directed the Forest Department to be prepared to plant 3.5 crore mangroves by **14th July** which is celebrated as the **World Forest Day**.

Sundarbans

- It is a **vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem** in the **coastal region of Bay of Bengal** spread over **India and Bangladesh** on the delta of the **Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers**.
- The site is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes.

- It constitutes **over 60% of the country's total mangrove forest area.**
- Indian Sundarbans was recognised as **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, 'Wetland of International Importance'** under the **Ramsar Convention** in **January 2019** and also a **Biosphere Reserve** in **1989.**
- The area is **known for its wide range of fauna**, including 260 bird species and is home to many rare and globally threatened wildlife species such as the **Estuarine Crocodile**, Royal Bengal Tiger, Water Monitor Lizard, **Gangetic Dolphin** and **Olive Ridley Turtles.**
- The Sunderbans Delta is the **only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers.**

For its preservation, **Discovery India** and **World Wide Fund** (WWF) India partnered with the Government of West Bengal and local communities in the Sundarbans in 2019.

Mangroves

- Mangroves are the plant communities occurring in **inter-tidal zones along the coasts of tropical and subtropical countries.**
- Mangrove forests perform **multiple ecological functions** such as production of woody trees, provision of habitat, food and spawning grounds for fin-fish and shellfish, provision of habitat for birds and other valuable fauna; protection of coastlines and accretion of sediment to form new land.
- Among the states and Union Territories, **West Bengal has the highest percentage** of area under total Mangrove cover **followed by Gujarat and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**
- The **India State of Forest Report** gives the data about mangroves and their conditions in the country.

Source: TH