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Decrease in Dolphin Number: Chambal River

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Why in News

According to the latest census report prepared by the Madhya Pradesh forest department, the **number of dolphins in Chambal river** has been reduced by **13% in 4 years**.

- There are just **68 dolphins left** in the 435-kilometre-long **Chambal river sanctuary** which passes through three states i.e. **Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Gangetic Dolphins** are the sanctuary's main attraction.
- The decreasing trend is continuing from 2016 when there were **78 dolphins**.

Key Points

- The maximum **carrying capacity** of dolphins in Chambal is 125.
The **carrying capacity of an environment is** the maximum population size of a biological species that can be sustained in that specific environment, given the food, habitat, water, and other resources available.
- The dolphins were spotted for the first time in 1985 in Chambal river (a **tributary of Yamuna**) near Etawah, Uttar Pradesh. That time, the number was more than 110.

- **Reasons:**

- **Unfavourable Habitat:** It faces the threat of hunting and entanglement in fishing gear due to fragmented habitats.
- **Poaching:** Fragmented habitats lead to the problem of poaching for not only dolphins, but also for **gharials**.
- **Illegal Sand Mining:** It is rampant in Bhind and Morena in MP and Dholpur in Rajasthan and putting the **whole ecosystem of the river in danger**.
 - Further, the forest team never gets support from locals.
 - In 2006, the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) ordered a ban on mining in the sanctuary area to save the flora and fauna of the river.
- **Consumption of Water:** Chambal is a lifeline for three states i.e. MP, UP and Rajasthan and the locals are withdrawing water daily.

It has led to **gradual decrease in the water levels** and needs to be addressed properly to save the dolphins as well as gharial.
- **Lack of Studies:** Dolphins are a sensitive animal. There is a need of study on their **favourable environment** and **communication system**.

The Forest Department of MP has collaborated with the scientists of **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** to do a research for safeguarding and increasing the population of dolphins in Chambal.

Gangetic Dolphin



- **Scientific Name:** *Platanista gangetica*
- It is a highly intelligent **freshwater mammal** placed into the infraorder Cetacea.
- It is India's **national aquatic animal** and is popularly known as '**Susu**'

- **Habitat:** It is found in parts of the **Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems** in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
 - It requires at least 3 metre depth and 266.42-289.67 m³ per sec flow of water for sustainable habitat.
 - It is among the **four freshwater dolphins in the world**. The other three are:
 - The '**Baiji**' now likely extinct from the Yangtze River in China,
 - The '**Bhulan**' of the Indus in Pakistan, and
 - The '**Boto**' of the Amazon River in Latin America.
 - These four species live only in rivers and lakes.
- **Characteristics:** It has rudimentary eyes and uses echolocation (through ultrasonic sound) to navigate and hunt.
- **Threats:** Habitat destruction, Poaching, Pollution

Source: HT