

Spot-bellied eagle owl

- A wildlife team recently stumbled upon a spot-bellied eagle owl (*Bubo Nipalensis*) for the first time in the Seshachalam forest, and for the third time in Andhra Pradesh.
- The bird's habitat, found on large trees in thick forests, is spread across the Indian subcontinent.
- Seshachalam Hills are hilly ranges part of the Eastern Ghats in southern Andhra Pradesh state, in southeastern India.
- The Seshachalam hill ranges are predominantly present in the Tirupati district of the Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh, India.
- The ranges were formed during the Precambrian supereon (3.8 billion to 539 million years ago). Minerals contained in these hills include sandstone and shale interbedded with limestone.

THE HINDU

Parliament vs judiciary

- "Speaking on January 11 at the 83rd All India Presiding Officers (Assembly Speakers) Conference in Jaipur, Rajasthan, he said that "in a democratic society, the basis of any basic structure is the supremacy of

people, the sovereignty of parliament.

- The ultimate power is with the legislature. Legislature also decides who will be there in other institutions. In such a situation, all institutions must confine to their domains. One must not make incursion in the domain of others."
- Constitution is a product of a collective vision.
- That vision was built on distinct, if interwoven, ideals: among others, that India would be governed by the rule of law, that our structure of governance would rest on Westminster parliamentarians, that the powers of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary would be separate, that the courts would be independent of government, and that our States would have absolute power over defined spheres of governance.
- Any amending body organized within the statutory scheme, howsoever verbally unlimited its power, cannot by its very structure change the fundamental pillars supporting its constitutional authority".
- As the Court would later explain in *Minerva Mills vs Union of India* (1980) and incidentally at stake, there was the very survival of the

idea that fundamental rights are inviolable “Parliament too is a creature of the Constitution”.

- Therefore, it can only have such powers that are expressly vested in it. If those powers are seen as unlimited, Parliament, the Court found, “would cease to be an authority under the Constitution”; it would instead “become supreme over it because it would have the power to alter the entire Constitution including its basic structure”.
- In other words, the principle that Parliament is proscribed from changing the Constitution’s essential features is rooted in the knowledge that the Constitution, as originally adopted, was built on an intelligible moral foundation.
- As Justice H.R. Khanna wrote in his controlling opinion in Kesavananda, through an interpretation of the word “amendment”.
- The dictionary defines “amendment” to mean a “minor change or addition designed to improve a text”.
- As Justice Khanna saw it when the Constitution that emerges out of a process of the amendment as stipulated in Article 368 is not merely the Constitution in an altered form but a Constitution that is devoid of

its basic structure, the procedure undertaken ceases to be a mere amendment.

THE HINDU

Eco sensitive zone

The story so far:

- Ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) are intended to safeguard ‘protected areas’ national parks and wildlife sanctuaries by transitioning from an area of lower protection to an area of higher protection.
- However, the creation of these zones has provoked protests in Kerala and some other regions.

What are protected areas?

- Protected areas cover 5.26% of India’s land area as 108 national parks and 564 wildlife sanctuaries.
- They are notified under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- Protected areas do away with even those activities permitted in ‘reserve forests’, where the rights of forest-dependent communities those residing on and/or accessing forest land are extinguished, unless specifically allowed.
- However, this rights- negating ‘fortress conservation model’, has come under repeated criticism from conservation scientists, bringing in

the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 which is also known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

- FRA recognizes the customary and traditional rights (both individual and collective) of forest -dwellers on forest land, including in protected areas.
- Gram sabhas are now the statutory authorities empowered to conserve, protect and manage forests, wildlife, and biodiversity lying within the traditional village boundaries.
- These areas under gram sabhas are to be a new category of forests called 'community forest resource' (CFR).
- Gram sabhas have to integrate their CFR conservation and management plan into the 'working plan' of the Forest Department, with the required modifications.

What are ESZs?

- Surrounding protected areas is a region of more than 1,11,000 sq. km or 3.4% percent of the country's land which falls under the ESZ regime.
- Governments have notified 341 ESZs in 29 States and five Union territories, while another 85 ESZs are awaiting notification.
- Together, protected areas and ESZs cover 8.66% of India's land area.

- The ESZs span notified forests outside protected areas, most of which could also come under gram sabhas' jurisdiction under the FRA.
- The extent of ESZs from the boundary of a protected area ranges from 0 to as much as 45.82 km (in Pin Valley National Park, Himachal Pradesh).
- Fifteen States have ESZs exceeding 10 km.

What is the problem?

- Significantly, parts of the ESZs in ten States Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Telangana fall within the Scheduled Areas notified under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Such Scheduled Areas cover over 11% of the country's land area and are thickly forested and mountainous.
- They are preponderantly populated by Scheduled Tribe groups and are notified by the President under Article 244 where the Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996 apply.
- The PESA recognises habitation-level gram sabhas to be competent

to safeguard and preserve community resources on forest and revenue lands in Scheduled Areas.

- However, the MoEFCC has shown no inclination to amend the Indian Forest Act 1927, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (under which ESZs are notified) to comply with the PESA and FRA.
- In fact, in the Forest Conservation Rules, compliance with the FRA, recognition of forest rights and the gram sabha's consent were preconditions for considering proposals to divert forest land for non-forestry purposes until the MoEFCC did away with them in 2022.
- The Ministry has also overlooked demands by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes to restore the erstwhile FRA compliance procedure.

THE HINDU

Halteria eats virus

- A particular genus of plankton can consume viruses as well as “grow and divide given only viruses to eat”.
- We already know of other cells that can ‘consume’ viruses in an effort to destroy them such as the macrophage cells of the human immune system.
- Plankton of the genus Halteria, they claim to have found, can each consume 10,000 to a million virus particles a day, increase their population using the metabolised energy, and provide more food for the zooplanktons that consume the Halteria.
- This could be significant for the marine food chain.

What is plankton?

- Plankton are microscopic organisms that can only move with a current.
- They don't have hair-like facilities to actively propel themselves.
- Halteria plankton are ciliates, meaning they have hair-like structures called cilia on their surface.
- Sometimes they can beat some of these cilia to jump short distances, but not often as it requires too much energy.
- A type of plankton the phytoplankton is found nearer the surface of many water bodies.
- It is an autotroph, which means it can make its own food by consuming carbon dioxide, among other compounds, through photosynthesis.
- Small fish and larger plankton called zooplankton eat phytoplankton for

their nutrition; they are in turn eaten by larger fish, and so forth.

- When phytoplankton die, they drift around where they are, becoming part of a coastal nutrient cycle, or they drift down towards the seafloor, where they decompose.
- Their constituents then become available for microbes or are sequestered into the seafloor.
- So, phytoplankton brings carbon and other nutrients from the atmosphere and sea surface down to the seafloor and help replenish the food chain (and also 'trap' carbon into their own bodies and as sediments).
- They are joined by bacteria that make their own food by oxidizing sulphur, iron, or hydrogen, in a process called chemosynthesis.

The role of Halteria

- Halteria plankton are found in large numbers in freshwater bodies.
- They are heterotrophs meaning they can't produce their own food.
- Instead, they are well-known bacterivores they consume bacteria to power themselves.

THE HINDU

ASER Report 2022

- As many as 72.9 per cent of the surveyed students go to government schools, it said. The report also highlights an increase in the number of private tuition takers.
- Enrollment in government schools have increased significantly since 2018 when a regular nationwide survey was done by the organization last time as per the report
- The period from 2006 to 2014 saw a steady decrease in the proportion of children (aged 6 to 14) enrolled in government schools.
- In 2014, this figure stood at 64.9% and did not change much over the following four years.
- However, the proportion of children (aged 6 to 14) enrolled in government schools increased sharply from 65.6% in 2018 to 72.9% in 2022.
- Increase in government school enrollment is visible in almost every state in the country," the report states.
- On the contrary, the number of students taking private tuition classes has increased.
- As per the ASER 2022 report, the percentage of Class 1-8 students taking tuition classes is at 30.5% in 2022, compared to 26.4% in 2018.

- “In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, the proportion of children taking paid private tuition increased by 8 percentage points or more over 2018 levels,”
- More girls now going to school
- The number of girls in the age group 11-14 years who do not go to schools has also decreased 2% in 2022 compared to 4 % in 2018.
- “This figure is around 4% only in Uttar Pradesh and is lower in all other states,” as per ASER 2022.
- The decrease in the proportion of girls not enrolled in school is even sharper among older girls in the 15-16 age group.
- In 2008, nationally, more than 20% of girls in the 15-16 age group were not enrolled in school. Ten years later, in 2018, this figure had decreased to 13.5%.
- The proportion of 15-16-year-old girls not enrolled has continued to drop, standing at 7.9% in 2022," the report claims.
- In only three states, the number of girls not going to school is above 10% Madhya Pradesh (17%), Uttar Pradesh (15%), and Chhattisgarh (11.2%), the report highlights.

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