

**URANIUM MINING IN NALLAMALA HILLS**

**Prelims:** Environment- Pollution & Waste Management, Biodiversity

**Mains:** GS-III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

- ▶▶ **Context:** Joint Forum for People's Democratic Rights protests uranium mining in Nallamala Forest.

**Background:**

- ▶▶ Many of these forest reserves have rich mineral deposits under them which are being eyed upon by both- government departments and corporates.
- ▶▶ The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has been scouting the length and breadth of the country in search of high- grade uranium, given the severe shortage of domestic uranium to feed our ambitious nuclear energy program.

**Indian Uranium shortage:**

- ▶▶ India has 22 nuclear power reactors and domestic uranium is used in nuclear plants which are not under the international nuclear energy watchdog- **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.
- ▶▶ Without uranium fuel, these reactors are running at partial capacity, producing less electricity, while the starting of new plants have also been delayed.
- ▶▶ The DAE officials informed a parliamentary panel in 2018 that India was facing a 'critical shortage' of uranium and was growing increasingly **dependent on imports of uranium from Canada, Kazakhstan and Japan**.
- ▶▶ **Domestic source**
  - ❖ Currently, a major portion of domestic production of uranium was being extracted from the **Jaduguda mines of Jharkhand**.
  - ❖ But, because the uranium is being **dug at considerable depth, extraction costs have made the process unviable**.
  - ❖ Andhra Pradesh, and more recently Telangana, are the other states where uranium deposits have been found.
  - ❖ The **Cuddapah basin in Telangana** has been found to have the potential for high grade and extensive uranium deposits.

## Amrabad Tiger Reserve:

- ▶▶ The Department of Minerals, a wing of the DAE, zeroed-in on the lush forest of the **Amrabad Tiger Reserve**, which, in undivided Andhra Pradesh was a part of India's largest tiger reserve- the Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve.
- ▶▶ The latter continues to be the largest and the Amrabad Tiger Reserve carved from it, is the second largest tiger reserve in India.
- ▶▶ The **Amrabad Tiger Reserve lies in the Nallamala hills** and is home to the **Chenchu tribe**, which, in the past was primarily a hunter-forest produce gathering community who now eke out their livelihood by largely working under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) program**.

## About Nallamala Forest:

- ▶▶ Nallamala Forest is one of the largest undisturbed stretches of forest in South India.
- ▶▶ It is located in the Nallamala Hill which is a part of the Eastern Ghats
- ▶▶ The forest has a good tiger population, and a part of the forest belongs to the Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve.

## Protest by locals:

- ▶▶ The Joint Forum for People's Democratic Rights protested, demanding an end to uranium mining in Nallamala hills.
- ▶▶ The forum, which represents several organisations and activists, has voiced concerns over the mining in the forest region.

## Impact of Uranium Mining:

- ▶▶ Drilling of 4,000 deep holes will, activists believe, end up destroying the Amrabad Tiger Reserve which is home to a vast variety of wildlife.
- ▶▶ The exploration will **expose and pollute surface water, groundwater and leech minerals and dangerous chemicals into the Nagarjunasagar Dam**.
- ▶▶ Activists further warn that the **construction of roads will fragment and degrade the dry forests**, which may never recover after such a massive exercise.
- ▶▶ impact on Biodiversity
  - ❖ Cautioned against this move, noting that rare, endangered and unique species of flora and fauna will be destroyed.
  - ❖ Listing out the number of animals in this habitat, they mention the names of tigers, panthers, sloth-bears, wild dogs, jungle cats, foxes, wolves, pangolins, peafowls, bonnet macaques, pythons, cobras, nilgais, spotted deers and sambars- all of whom have been living there for centuries.

## Radiation:

- ▶▶ There is another problem with uranium mining. Radiation from these mines is known to cause havoc to the lives of people who live around them, as has been found in Jharkhand's Jaduguda.
- ▶▶ Around 50,000 villagers who live in this area suffer from serious radiation related health problems and the mines in East Singhbhum district have been found to be conducting their mining operations without adequate safety measures.
- ▶▶ large number of cases of villagers suffering from congenital deformities, sterility, cancer and spontaneous abortions.
- ▶▶ This could well be repeated in the case of the Chenchu tribe who are living in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve.

## Conclusion:

- ▶▶ Wildlife conservationists also point out that despite large investment of money and resources, nuclear energy remains a small blip on India's energy horizon, providing barely 3% of the electricity produced in the country.
- ▶▶ **Destroying scarce water bodies and entire ecosystems can hardly be compensated by uranium mining** which can be excavated in other parts of the country.
- ▶▶ Despite its miniscule contribution, nuclear energy looms large in the minds of our political establishment- who are willing to sacrifice scarce forest and biological resources, which occupy a mere 2% of the landmass of India for the sake of nuclear energy.

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