

## Deforestation in Brazilian Amazon at record low in November, surges in Cerrado savanna

Agence France-Presse  
SAO PAULO

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon hit a record low for the month of November, according to figures released on Friday, as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's government touted its environmental record at the UN climate talks.

Satellite monitoring detected 201 square kilometre of forest cover destroyed in Brazil's share of the world's biggest rainforest last month, a drop of 64% from November 2022, according to data from the



**Dipping numbers:** Satellite monitoring detected a drop of 64% in deforestation in Brazil's share of the rainforest last month. REUTERS

national space research agency's DETER surveillance programme.

It was the lowest on record for the month since

monitoring began in 2015.

Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January vowing "Brazil is back" in the climate fight after

surging deforestation under far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro, proudly presented his administration's "dramatic" progress on curbing the destruction of the Amazon this week at the COP-28 climate talks in Dubai.

Mr. Lula has vowed to achieve zero deforestation by 2030.

### Not all good

But the good news on the rainforest – whose carbon-absorbing trees are key in the race to tackle climate change – was offset by record-high deforestation for November in the Cerrado

savanna, a biodiverse region below the Amazon that has been hit by a recent surge in clear-cutting, mainly for farming.

There, deforestation rose 238% from November 2022, to 572 square kilometre.

Increased environmental policing by Mr. Lula's government has "drastically reduced deforestation in the Amazon, though many challenges remain," said Ana Carolina Crisostomo of the World Wildlife Fund's Brazil office.

But "it is urgent to prioritise action in the Cerrado," she said.

## Stalin announces ₹6,000 each to all flood-hit families

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday announced ₹6,000 each to all families affected by Cyclone Michaung. The amount will be distributed through fair price shops.

The Chief Minister, who chaired a meeting attended by his Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Secretary, and other officials, also increased the solatium, to ₹5 lakh from ₹4 lakh, for the kin of those who lost their lives in the floods. Guidelines will be issued soon for identifying the beneficiaries, a government official said.

An official release said a sum of ₹8,000, up from ₹5,000, would be given to those who need to repair their damaged huts.

### Crop loss compensation

Mr. Stalin also increased the compensation to ₹17,000 from ₹13,500 per hectare of paddy field where damage to the crops was more than 33%. The compensation for the loss of perennial crops and trees per hectare will be ₹22,500, instead of ₹18,000, and the compensation for loss of dry crops has been increased from ₹7,410 to ₹8,500 per hectare. The amount for loss of cows and buffaloes is ₹37,500, up from ₹30,000.



M. K. Stalin

The amount for those who have lost goats and sheep is ₹4,000, up from ₹3,000.

For fishermen, the compensation for fully damaged catamarans, including nets, will be ₹50,000, instead of ₹32,000.

For partly damaged boats, the amount has been increased from ₹10,000 to ₹15,000. The grant for fully damaged vallam-type boats has been increased to ₹1 lakh from ₹75,000. Fully damaged mechanised boats will get a grant of ₹7.5 lakh, instead of ₹5 lakh. Compensation for damaged nets is ₹15,000, up from ₹10,000.

The Chief Minister said the government was getting milk powder, drinking water bottles, bread, and biscuits from various districts. It has so far distributed 58,222 kg of milk powder; 9,67,000 water bottles; 2,65,000 loaves of bread, and 10,38,175 packets of biscuits.

## Low rate of disposal of POCSO cases by fast-track courts, finds research paper

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

With over 2.43 lakh POCSO cases pending trial in Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) as of January 31, 2023, a new research paper by the India Child Protection Fund (ICPF) has estimated that each of the over 1,000 such courts in the country are currently clearing just 28 cases on average every year, as opposed to the initially envisioned 165 cases per year.

The FTSCs were set up in 2019, specifically for trying cases related to sexual offences, those under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The idea was to allow these special courts to deal with these cases to fulfil the mandate of finishing the trial in one year. However, the re-

**'Arunachal Pradesh will take 30 years for trial in all pending POCSO cases to come to a close'**

search paper, titled 'Justice awaits: an analysis of the efficacy of justice delivery mechanisms in cases of child sexual abuse in India', estimated that under the current pendency rates, Arunachal Pradesh would take 30 years for trial in all pending POCSO cases to come to a close. Similarly, it would take Delhi 27 years, Bihar 26 years, West Bengal 25 years, Uttar Pradesh 22 years, and Meghalaya 21 years to clear their respective backlogs in POCSO cases.

It also said: "Each FTSC was expected to dispose of 41-42 cases in a quarter

and at least 165 in a year. The data suggests that FTSCs are unable to achieve the set targets even after three years of the launch of the scheme."

"The scheme was supposed to deliver the legal mandate for the completion of trial of such cases within one year and yet out of the total 2,68,038 cases that were under trial, only 8,909 cases resulted in conviction," a statement from the ICPF said.

The Delhi-based ICPF, which is a non-profit working against online sexual exploitation of children, said that this report is based on data from Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Women and Child Development and National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which released the latest crime statistics for 2022 just last week.

## What does a special package mean for PVTGs?

Where do the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups live in India? What is their population? Why is so little known about them? When was the last count done? How is the Pradhan Mantri-Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) scheme expected to benefit PVTGs?

Abhinav Lakshman

### The story so far:

**I**n December 6, the Tribal Affairs Ministry told the Rajya Sabha that the population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) was not in decline, citing information provided by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (ORGI). This was in variance with the State-wise Census data provided by the Ministry to a Parliamentary panel last year showing that the numbers of these tribal groups fell almost 40% in at least nine States and Union Territories in the first decade of this century.

### Who are the PVTGs?

Initially known as Primitive Tribal Groups, the PVTGs are defined by the government as tribal communities that show either a declining or stagnant population, use of pre-agrarian technology, economic backwardness, low literacy etc. They are found to be living in some of the remotest and most inaccessible areas in the country. There are 75 such communities which are spread over 18 States and Union Territories, according to government figures. A book, *The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in India: Privileges and Predicaments*, published by the Anthropological Survey of India in 2016 and edited by K.K. Misra and others, says the highest number of PVTGs are found in Odisha (15), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar and Jharkhand (9), Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (7), Tamil Nadu (6) and Kerala and Gujarat (5 each). The rest, the writers said, are scattered in Maharashtra and West Bengal (3 each), Karnataka and Uttarakhand (2 each), and

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is yet to compile an accurate and current dataset of the PVTG population

one each in Rajasthan, Tripura and Manipur. All the four tribal groups in the Andaman, and one in Nicobar Islands, are recognised as PVTGs. The last available Census that counted all 75 communities was from 2001, which put their total number around 27.6 lakh.

In the Introduction, Misra and Suresh Patil write that one of the reports of the Government of India reveal that most of these groups were small in number, had not attained any significant level of social and economic progress, and inhabited remote localities with poor infrastructure and administrative support, thus becoming "the most vulnerable sections" among the Scheduled Tribes, needing special attention.

### What does the PM-JANMAN aim to do?

The Cabinet recently approved the ₹24,000 crore Pradhan Mantri-Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan after the Prime Minister announced the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Development Mission early this year that would take basic facilities like roads, power, homes, mobile connectivity, etc. to the most backward among the Scheduled Tribes, the PVTGs.

The first announcement of this package came early this year during the Budget Session, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that a PM-PVTG Development Mission would be launched, for which the Government was planning a ₹15,000 crore expenditure, to be spent over a period of three years. Officials said the package has seen a massive contribution from the office of President Droupadi Murmu, who took a special interest in overseeing the plans.

### How will it work?

The allocation cleared by the Union Cabinet on November 29 for this package stood at ₹24,104 crore out of which the central share would be ₹15,336 crore and the share for the respective State governments would stand at ₹8,768 crore. The government has said that as for the launch of the package, there were a little over 22,000 villages where PVTGs reside and where this will be implemented.

However, the implementation of the programme will be done through nine ministries, which will ensure that existing schemes are taken to these PVTG-inhabited villages. The targets that the government has set for itself are to build 4.9 lakh pucca homes, lay 8,000 km of connecting roads, link all households with piped water, set up 1,000 mobile medical units, construct 2,500 anganwadi centres, 1,000 multipurpose centres and 500 hostels, install mobile towers in 3,000 villages, and so forth. The plan also intends to

set up vocational and skill training centres in 60 aspirational PVTG blocks and build 500 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras to help people trade in forest produce, in addition to connecting 1 lakh of these households to an off-grid solar power system and bringing in solar street lights.

Out of the entire ₹24,000 crore allocation, more than ₹19,000 crore is to just build the pucca homes under the PM-AWAS scheme and lay 8,000 km of connecting roads, which will be implemented by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Senior officials in the Tribal Affairs Ministry told *The Hindu* that its own scheme for the development of PVTGs is just a small component of the PM-PVTG Mission. "The goals are to build roads, telecom connectivity, water and sanitation. The monies for these efforts will go into the Scheduled Tribe Component (STC) of these respective ministries from where it will be allocated for the development of these groups," an official explained. The Tribal Affairs Ministry's Budget Estimates for 2023-24 showed just ₹256.14 crore allocated for the development of PVTGs.

### What are the challenges?

Ever since the announcement of the package, officials of the Tribal Affairs Ministry have been making contact with the 22,000 PVTG villages, in order to understand the needs of each of them. Many of the officers were sent on tours to assess the villages' needs, following which a detailed proposal was placed before the Cabinet, which cleared the initial estimates for the package in November.

However, even as the government proceeds to implement the project, the principal challenge facing it is the lack of current data, which has already been flagged by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment. While the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has said that it had started conducting baseline surveys to measure the progress of the campaign, it is yet to compile an accurate and current dataset of their populations. Even as per the population data submitted to the House panel last year, which was based on the 2011 Census, the government was unable to tabulate the population of PVTGs in Maharashtra, Manipur and Rajasthan. The current project is thus going ahead with the estimate that the PVTG population is "around 28 lakh". Further, the government has not yet made any results of the baseline surveys public. It told Parliament this week that no Census since 1951 had accounted for PVTGs separately and has not submitted any data on their socio-economic indices to the House panel either.

In 2013, a National Advisory Council (NAC) report on the state of PVTGs had recommended that as a first, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs should design and conduct a Census specifically for the PVTG communities to not just enumerate but also find out the status of education, health, and housing.



**Not enough data:** Khond tribals, who are part of the PVTGs, cultivate land at Kothavedhi village, Anakapali district in Andhra Pradesh. v. saku

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## Are crimes against women on the rise?

What do data from the National Crime Records Bureau indicate for 2022?

Which are the laws that deal with women's safety? What are the hurdles in their implementation?

What are the challenges that stand in the way of effective justice?

**Sreeparna Chakrabarty**

### The story so far:

**T**he crime rate may have declined in 2022 (258.1 per lakh population compared to 268 per lakh population in 2021), but crimes against women rose 4% in 2022 compared to 2021, according to the annual report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) released on December 4.

### What was the nature of the majority of crimes against women?

The majority of crimes against women were of cruelty by husband or his relatives (31.4%), kidnapping and abduction of women (19.2%), assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (18.7%) and rape (7.1%). Further, 13,479 cases were registered under the Dowry Prohibition Act.

Activists and lawyers attribute this to a patriarchal society. "Despite high levels of education, male mindsets and societal attitude remain unchanged," says Supreme Court lawyer Shilpi Jain. According to women's rights activist Mariam Dhawale, India over the last few years has witnessed a strengthening of regressive value systems which women's movements had struggled to overcome for decades. "There is a

"Women in many States, particularly in rural areas, do not visit a police station without a male relative, let alone register an FIR"

glorification of anti-women practices," she points out. According to Jayashree Velankar, director of women's organisation, Jagori, "dowry or bride price both connote commodity status of women who are traded between families for their productive and reproductive labour. What we need is a strong political will, and not mere rhetoric, to bring in policies and programmes that will focus on creating conditions to elevate women's status."

### What does an increase in the registration of crimes against women indicate?

The NCRB's report reveals that over 4.45 lakh cases of crimes against women were registered in 2022, equivalent to nearly 51 FIRs (first information report) every hour. The rate of crimes against women per lakh population stood at 66.4 while the filing of charge sheets in such cases was pegged at 75.8. The high crime rate is an indicator of the persistent "lower status and inequality" faced by women and girls, says Ms. Velankar. "Women and girls continue to be treated as permanent shock absorbers across class, caste and other axes. It is an outcome of reconstruction of patriarchy in the neo-liberal economy era," she says. According to Ms. Jain, the increase in crimes against women shows the attitude of Indian society towards women: "We claim to be very progressive but we are very primitive." The rise can also be attributed to the fact that though India has tough laws for protection of women, their implementation remains a challenge, she adds.

Retired IPS officer Meeran Chaddha Borwankar strikes a note of caution. "The NCRB report mainly shows that women feel confident to approach the police and get criminal cases registered," she points out. Increase in numbers, according to her, should not be equated with increase in crime. Take the case of Delhi. With 14,247 cases in 2022, Delhi recorded the highest rate of crimes against women in the country at 144.4 per lakh, way above the country's average rate of 66.4. Experts believe the higher numbers show that more cases are being registered in Delhi. In contrast, in many other parts of India, the registration of crime is low and the fear of the police high, says Vipul Mudgal of Common

Cause India, an NGO. Women in many States, particularly in the rural areas, would not even visit a police station unaccompanied by a male relative, let alone register an FIR for sexual harassment or domestic violence, he says.

Ms. Borwankar feels that women in the capital are aware of their rights and therefore approach police stations more freely than in the hinterland. "At the same time, I am aware that the capital and most parts of north India is not considered safe for women especially at night."

### What are the key laws for women's safety?

Some of the key laws for women's safety in India are: The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. Experts say that implementation faces dual problems of shoddy investigation by police and time taken by courts to deliver justice. "The laws are good and were so even earlier. The problem is with policing," says Ms. Jain. There is a severe lack of police officers with requisite training for investigations. Most of the investigating officers are juniors with a poor pay scale. This hampers the actual investigation and preparation of chargesheets, she points out. When it reaches the courts, at trial courts which are the first step, the cases take four to five years. If there is an appeal, it takes another 10-15 years. Despite fast-track courts for looking into grievous crimes, the fact is they remain as slow as ever. There is no seriousness in dealing with the crime, adds Ms. Jain.

Another factor, according to Mr. Mudgal, is that while women police officers are involved in all crimes against women, their proportion in the force is dismal and the rate of their recruitment is very slow in all States without exception. This also causes disproportionate levels of workload on women police personnel leading to slower rates of charge-sheeting and convictions. According to a response provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the Rajya Sabha in February 2023, the representation of women in the police force (as of January 1, 2022) remained at 11.7% of the total state police force. This puts undue stress on the limited workforce leading to a high pendency, experts point out.



SUDHAKARA JAIN

# 'Compensation should not incentivise risk-taking'

ICMR's consensus policy statement on human challenge studies insists that payment should take into account the loss of wages, incidental expenses, and time and efforts made to participate in CHS

R. Prasad

**B**ased on their experience in participating in human challenge studies – technically called the Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS) – (where participants are deliberately infected with disease-causing pathogens) and responses from 117 potential participants, the authors of an August 2023 paper have argued that \$20,000 for a six-month hepatitis C virus challenge study in the U.S. is "reasonable".

The amount is five times higher than the payments given out to CHIS participants, as per a survey of 25 such studies.

Among the many contentious ethical issues that riddle the human challenge studies, disproportionate payment amounting to inducements for participation tops the list.

The ICMR's Bioethics Unit, which introduced a consensus policy statement on CHIS, says that payment should take into account the loss of wages and the time spent and efforts made while participating in CHIS. But it has made altruism central to participation.

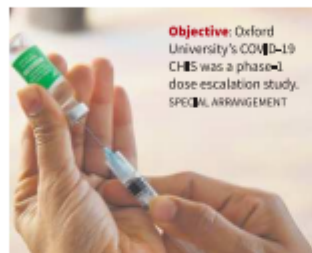
## Independent monitor

Jake D Eberts, Communications Director at IDay Sooner and a participant in the Shigella and Zika virus CHIS studies and one of the authors of the August 2023 paper disagrees with ICMR's policy statement that centres altruistic motives to participate in a CHIS study.

"If someone joins a

## Not meant to compensate for inherent risks

Remuneration is proportional to the study duration, the number of visits required, and the level of inconvenience



■ A CHS study is performed in a controlled environment with a relatively small number of participants and in a short amount of time

**Objective:** Oxford University's COVID-19 CHS was a phase-I dose escalation study. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- Human challenge studies are generally done only when the risk to participants is considered to be very low
- Diseases most frequently studied using CHS are either self-limiting or treatable
- As per the ICMR's consensus policy statement on CHS, payment is for loss of wages, and the time spent and efforts made while participating in CHS. But it has made altruism central to participation
- In general, inconvenience and time are the two biggest factors used for deciding the compensation amount in the U.S.
- In the U.S., the compensation is very often provided for the visits and activities that are actually completed

CHIS for the money, as long as they understand the risks, I don't think that's inherently bad." Jake was paid \$7,350 for the Shigella CHIS study and less than \$5,000 for the Zika study. IDay Sooner serves as an independent monitor in CHIS so participants can reach out with their concerns and complaints.

"Imposing a ceiling on compensation does not actually protect low-income people. What protects low-income people (and everyone) is an informed consent process and an ethics review process that makes sure the risks of the study, whether it is a CHIS or other study, are not excessive, and makes sure that participants understand what they are signing up for. Theoretically, if those two conditions are met, compensation could be extremely high and still be ethical (though that would raise different problems)," says Jake.

She says that compensation for the hepatitis C CHIS study will be under \$10,000 and not \$20,000 as proposed by her and others in the August 2023 paper.

"We proposed that figure in part because we think it's important to start a conversation about why compensation in general for CHIS in the U.S. should be higher," Jake says.

"There is definitely a spectrum of motivators for participants, but the important thing is that we do not set the compensation at a scale that we believe would induce someone to engage in a 'risk' that they otherwise would never agree to experience," Dr. Wilbur H. Chen, Professor of Medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, U.S. says in an email to The Hindu. Dr. Chen has conducted human challenge studies for cholera, *Campylobacter*, *Shigella*,

and enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* (ETEC) in the last five years.

Dr. Anna Durbin, Professor of International Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the principal investigator of the Zika CHIS study says that the payment is based on the time of each visit, the number of specimens collected, and what other studies in the area are paying; she had earlier undertaken dengue human challenge studies.

"Our approach to the compensation of research participants follows an ethical framework of the Wage-Payment Model which provides a payment scheme according to what an unskilled labourer who engages in somewhat risky jobs (e.g., a day labour construction worker) might be paid," Dr. Chen says.

"The compensation of \$7,350 [for the Shigella study] may appear like a large

amount of money but is only provided for the visits and activities that are actually completed," clarifies Dr. Chen, who was the principal investigator of the study.

"The local IRB [Institutional Review Board] has oversight over the research and also determines whether our compensation rates are set at a level of 'inducement'. We calculate the compensation based on a somewhat objective set of measures and have made this a standardised compensation across our many different studies."

Paul Zimmer-Harwood from IDay Sooner who had participated in the malaria and COVID-19 CHIS studies (conducted by the University of Oxford) was paid £1,800 and £5,250, respectively.

"The remuneration is proportional to the number of study visits and the duration spent in the quarantine unit, rather than the inherent risks of the study. In the U.K., it is a strict guideline that compensation should not incentivise risk-taking behaviour but should instead be commensurate with the time and commitment a participant invests in the study," says Paul in an email to The Hindu.

"The compensation paid to participants in a study like the Malaria CHIS is decided based on the duration of the study, the number of visits required, and the level of inconvenience. The aim is to compensate participants for their time and effort, not to pay for the risk they are taking."

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### Team MRF officially crowned European Rally champion

Team MRF Tyres was officially crowned the 2023 European Rally champion at the FIA prize-giving ceremony in Baku on Friday. "We are very proud and humbled with the success so far, and a big credit goes to the technical and development team at MRF Tyres. We also extend our thanks to our drivers, co-drivers and teams who played a vital role in the development and performance of MRF Tyres," said Arun Mammen, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of MRF Tyres, who received the prestigious trophy.