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Summary:

- **Protective Role of Mangroves:** Mangrove forests, like those in Bhitarkanika National Park, act as natural barriers against cyclones, reducing wave energy and preventing severe coastal erosion.
- **Cyclone Dana Case Study:** The recent Cyclone Dana highlighted the effectiveness of mangroves in mitigating cyclone impacts, with Bhitarkanika's mangroves significantly reducing damage.
- **Ecological and Economic Benefits:** Mangroves support biodiversity, act as carbon sinks, and

provide economic benefits through fisheries and tourism.

- **Conservation Efforts:** Initiatives like the MISHTI initiative and state-level programs aim to restore and protect mangrove ecosystems, involving community participation and stricter regulations.

What is the news?

Introduction: The Protective Role of Mangroves Amid Cyclones

- The recent landfall of Cyclone Dana near Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park and Dhamra Port once again highlighted the vital role mangrove forests play in shielding coastal regions from cyclones.
- Despite the cyclone's severity, the damage was less severe than anticipated, largely due to the dense mangrove forest cover of Bhitarkanika, underscoring the importance of this unique ecosystem in reducing the intensity and impact of cyclonic events.

Bhitarkanika's Resilience: A History of Cyclone Protection

- Bhitarkanika National Park, known for its lush mangrove ecosystems, has a longstanding reputation for withstanding extreme weather events, including the notorious Super Cyclone of 1999. Bhitarkanika's resilience can be attributed to its extensive mangrove forests, which act as natural buffers against cyclones and tidal surges. By breaking the force of incoming waves and reducing the speed of high winds, these mangroves prevent severe coastal erosion and limit inland damage.

Mangroves: Nature's Coastal Guardians

What are Mangroves?

- Mangroves are salt-tolerant trees found in coastal intertidal zones, adapted to thrive in brackish water. India's mangrove cover, especially prominent in regions like Odisha, Sundarbans, and the Andaman Islands, serves as a buffer against natural disasters and contributes significantly to biodiversity conservation.

Key Features of Mangroves

- **Salt Tolerance:** Mangroves thrive in salty conditions with specialized roots and leaves.
- **Biodiversity Support:** They provide habitat for fish, birds, and wildlife.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** Effective at absorbing CO_2, they mitigate climate change.

Role of Mangroves in Cyclone Mitigation:

- **Natural Barriers:** Mangroves act as effective natural barriers against storm surges and high winds, reducing the impact of cyclones on coastal communities by dissipating wave energy and slowing down water flowlization: The dense root systems of mangroves help stabilize the soil, preventing erosion and loss of land during severe weather events. This soil stabilization is crucial for maintaining the integrity of coastal ecosystems .
- Mangrove forests significantly reduce the height and velocity of storm surges, which can otherwise lead to severe flooding in coastal areas. Studies have shown that mangroves can lower storm surge heights by up to 50% .
- **Biodiversity Support:** Beyond various marine and terrestrial species, mangroves enhance biodiversity, which in turn strengthens the resilience of ecosystems to withstand and recover from extreme weather events .
- **Carbon Sequestration:** Mangroves are effective carbon sinks, helping mitigate climate change,

which is a significant factor in the intensity and frequency of cyclones. This environmental service contributes to long-term climate resilience .

- **Community Livelihoods:** Healthy mangrove ecosystems ies through fisheries and tourism, allowing communities to recover more quickly from cyclonic impacts due to diversified income sources .
- **Policy Support:** Recent initiatives, such as the MISHTI initiative and restoring mangroves along coastlines as a proactive approach to enhance coastal resilience against climate change and cyclonic events .

Mangrove Forests as a Barrier

- Mangroves absorb the first impact of cyclonic waves, reducing water velocity and wave energy. They act as a physical barrier, with their complex root systems anchoring the soil, which prevents erosion and lessens the chances of flooding. This recent example with Cyclone Dana demonstrated how intact mangrove systems are critical in protecting infrastructure, agriculture, and human lives.

Ecological and Economic Importance of Mangroves

Mangroves serve not only as physical barriers but also contribute significantly to the local and

global ecosystem:

- Biodiversity Hotspot: Mangroves host diverse marine and terrestrial species, supporting local livelihoods through fishing and tourism.
  Carbon Sequestration: They are one of the most efficient carbon sinks, storing carbon for centuries, and thus play a role in mitigating climate change.
- Economic Benefits: Beyond protection from natural disasters, mangroves support economic activities such as tourism, local fishing, and crab farming, which are sources of income for coastal communities.

Government and Community Efforts: Conservation Initiatives

- In recent years, both governmental and non-governmental bodies have increased efforts to conserve and expand mangrove cover in vulnerable regions. Initiatives in Odisha, including mangrove restoration and community-based conservation programs, have aimed to strengthen these natural defenses. Education and awareness campaigns encourage local communities to take an active role in protecting these ecosystems, understanding that their preservation is crucial for their own safety and economic stability.

Reports:

- Total Mangrove Cover: As of the Indian State Forest Report 2021, India has a total mangrove cover of 4,992 square kilometers, which constitutes approximately 0.15% of the country's total geographical area.

Geographical Distribution: Significant mangrove ecosystems are distributed across several states, including:

- Odisha (notably Bhitarkanika National Park)
- Andhra Pradesh (primarily in the Godavari-Krishna delta)
- Gujarat
- Kerala
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- *Largest Mangrove Forest: The Sundarbans, which span parts of India and Bangladesh, is recognized as the largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world.*
- *Significance of Bhitarkanika: Bhitarkanika National Park ranks second in India for mangrove cover, following the Sundarbans, highlighting its ecological importance.*

Mangrove Conservation Initiatives in India:

- Mangrove conservation in India has gained

significant attention in recent years, driven by the increasing recognition of their ecological importance in coastal protection, biodiversity support, and climate change mitigation. Here are some key initiatives aimed at conserving and restoring mangrove ecosystems across the country:

1. MISHTI Initiative

- The MISHTI (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes) was announced in the Union Budget 2023-24. It aims to enhance the coastline's mangrove cover through scientific planting and community engagement. This initiative focuses on creating sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities while strengthening the ecosystem's resilience against climate change and natural disasters

2. Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 2019:

- This notification provides stricter regulations for coastal development, helping to protect mangrove ecosystems.
- This government initiative seeks to enhance the resilience of coastal areas through integrated management of coastal and marine resources. It includes specific measures for the restoration of mangroves, promoting biodiversity, and improving the livelihoods of coastal communities

3. State-Level Initiatives

Many Indian states have launched their own programs to protect and expand mangrove areas:

- Odisha: The state has a comprehensive mangrove management plan that includes afforestation, protection of existing mangroves, and community involvement in conservation efforts. Odisha's mangroves have played a crucial role in reducing cyclone impacts, highlighting their significance.
- Maharashtra: Initiatives such as the Mangrove Cell under the Maharashtra Forest Department focus on conservation through awareness campaigns, restoration projects, and research.
- Gujarat: The state has implemented programs to restore mangrove ecosystems along its extensive coastline, focusing on public participation in conservation activities.

4. Community Involvement

- Engaging local communities is vital for successful mangrove conservation. Many initiatives promote sustainable practices that provide alternative livelihoods to fishing communities, reducing the pressure on mangrove ecosystems

5. Research and Monitoring

- The Indian government, in collaboration with various research institutions, conducts studies to assess the health of mangrove ecosystems, monitor changes over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of conservation strategies

The Path Forward: Expanding Mangrove Protection and Policy Support

- The experience with Cyclone Dana suggests the need for increased investment in the restoration and protection of mangrove forests. It is essential to address the threats facing mangroves, such as industrial development, aquaculture expansion, and pollution. Strengthening protective policies, enhancing conservation funding, and promoting mangrove-based sustainable livelihoods could ensure that these ecosystems continue to serve as shields against the ever-increasing intensity of cyclonic events due to climate change.

What are the Challenges with Mangrove Conservation ?

Mangrove conservation faces several significant challenges that threaten their health and the ecosystems they support.

Here are some key challenges:

- **Urbanization and Development:** Coastal development for urbanization, infrastructure, and tourism often leads to the clearing of mangrove forests. This results in habitat loss and fragmentation, diminishing the ecological functions that mangroves providee and Aquaculture**: The conversion of mangrove areas for agricultural activities, especially shrimp farming, has led to substantial mangrove degradation. This practice not only reduces mangrove cover but also alters local hydrology and water quality, impacting marine ecosystems .
- Climate levels, increased storm intensity, and changing rainfall patterns due to climate change threaten mangrove survival. While mangroves can adapt to some changes, rapid alterations in their environment may exceed their ability to adjust .
- **Pollution:** Industrial anf introduces pollutants into coastal waters, affecting the health of mangrove ecosystems. Pollutants can harm mangrove growth and reproduction, leading to declines in forest health .
- **Invasive Species:** Non-native species can disbalance of mangrove ecosystems by outcompeting native flora and fauna, reducing biodiversity, and altering ecosystem functions .
- **Lack of Awareness and Education:** Many coastal communnot fully understand the ecological and economic benefits provided by mangroves. This lack of awareness can lead to unsustainable practices that harm mangrove ecosystems .

- **Policy and Governance Issues:** Weak enforcement of environmentions and inadequate policies can hinder

conservation efforts. There may also be conflicts over land use, as local communities and industries vie for access to coastal resources .

- **Funding and Resources:** Limited financial resources for conservation iict restoration and protection efforts. Effective conservation often requires long-term investment and community engagement, which may not be readily available .

Conclusion: Lessons from Bhitarkanika's Mangrove Shield

- The case of Cyclone Dana near Bhitarkanika National Park serves as a powerful reminder of the invaluable role mangrove forests play in mitigating the impact of cyclones. As climate change intensifies the frequency and severity of such events, prioritizing mangrove conservation can be a sustainable solution to enhance the resilience of vulnerable coastal regions. Investing in these ecosystems not only safeguards lives and properties but also ensures the stability of biodiversity and climate systems crucial to our shared future.

Bhitarkanika National Park

- **Location:** Bhitarkanika National Park is located in the Kendrapara district of Odisha, India, situated

in the estuarine region of the Brahmani and Baitarani rivers. Its unique geographical setting allows it to serve as a crucial habitat for various species.

- **Size:** The park spans approximately 672 square kilometers, including a core area of 145 square kilometers dedicated to conservation efforts. This size makes it one of the significant protected areas in India.

Establishment:

- 1975: Established as a wildlife sanctuary.
- 1998: Designated as a national park.
- 2002: Recognized as a Ramsar site, highlighting its importance as a wetland of international significance.

Features of the Park

Bhitarkanika is characterized by a diverse range of ecosystems, including:

- Mangrove Swamps: The park features extensive mangrove forests that play a vital role in coastal protection.
- Rivers and Creeks: The intertidal zones are crisscrossed by numerous waterways, supporting a rich aquatic biodiversity.
- Estuaries and Marshes: These areas serve as critical habitats for various bird species and

aquatic life.
- Inland Floodplains and Forested Beaches: The floodplains support a variety of flora and fauna, while the beaches provide nesting sites for turtles.
- Mudflats: These areas are essential feeding grounds for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Wildlife

Bhitarkanika National Park is home to a rich variety of wildlife, including:

- Saltwater Crocodiles: The park is one of the few habitats for this species in India.
- King Cobra: A significant snake species found in the park.
- White Crocodile: Another rare species that inhabits the region.
- Black Ibis: A bird species commonly seen in the mangroves.
- Indian Python: Present in the park, showcasing the diversity of reptiles.
- Birds: Over 215 species of birds, including migratory birds, make Bhitarkanika a popular destination for birdwatchers.

Flora

The park boasts a variety of plant species, including:

- Mangrove Species: These trees are crucial for

coastal stabilization.

- Casuarinas: Found along the coastal edges.
- Reed Grasses: These contribute to the park's biodiversity.
- Teak and Salaia: Valuable timber species present in the area.
- Ziziphus and Kauriculata: Important for local ecosystems.
- Bamboo, Babul, and Palas: These species add to the park's rich vegetation.

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General Studies

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- Enter Name & Email
- Click on - Check Result
- Scroll down - Check out Solutions too.

Thank you.

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Category: **General Studies**

What was the total mangrove cover in India as per the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023?

- ○ 3,200 sq km
- ○ 4,992 sq km
- ○ 5,500 sq km
- ○ 6,500 sq km

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Category: **General Studies**

What are the primary threats to mangrove ecosystems in India?

○ Increased rainfall and flooding.

○ Urbanization, pollution, and agriculture.

○ Conservation efforts and awareness campaigns.

○ Natural disasters such as cyclones.

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Category: **General Studies**

Which of the following statements accurately describes the role of mangroves in coastal ecosystems?

○ Mangroves primarily grow in freshwater environments.

○ Mangroves are effective in stabilizing shorelines and reducing wave energy.

○ Mangroves do not support any biodiversity.

○ Mangroves primarily contribute to agriculture through crop production.

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Category: **General Studies**

Which of the following initiatives was launched by the Government of India to enhance mangrove conservation?

○ National Afforestation Programme

○ MISHTI Initiative

○ Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

○ National River Conservation Plan

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Category: **General Studies**

How do mangroves contribute to carbon sequestration?

○ By absorbing nitrogen from the atmosphere.

○ Through their extensive root systems that store carbon in the soil.

○ By preventing soil erosion.

○ By increasing soil fertility.

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Mains Questions:

Question 1:

Discuss the ecological and economic importance of mangroves in India, particularly in the context of cyclone mitigation and coastal protection. (Word Limit: 250)

Model Answer:

Mangroves play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and providing economic benefits, particularly in coastal regions of India. Ecologically, they serve as critical habitats for a diverse range of marine species, including fish, crabs, and birds, contributing to biodiversity. Economically, mangroves support local livelihoods through fisheries, tourism, and forestry.

- Cyclone Mitigation: Mangroves act as natural barriers against cyclones and storm surges. Their

dense root systems stabilize shorelines, reduce wave energy, and decrease the height and velocity of storm surges. Recent events, such as Cyclone Dana's landfall near Bhitarkanika, highlighted their protective capacity, as the cyclone caused less damage due to the dense mangrove cover. Historically, Bhitarkanika National Park has withstood several cyclones, demonstrating the crucial role of mangroves in disaster risk reduction.

- Conservation Efforts: Despite their importance, India has seen significant losses in mangrove cover due to urbanization, agriculture, and climate change. The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 indicated a slight increase in mangrove cover due to conservation initiatives. Programs like the National Coastal Mission Programme and the MISHTI initiative aim to restore mangrove ecosystems through community involvement and state-specific projects. Addressing challenges like pollution, invasive species, and funding shortages is essential for the continued conservation and restoration of mangrove forests.

In conclusion, mangroves are indispensable for ecological health and economic stability in coastal regions, especially concerning cyclone mitigation. Their conservation should be prioritized to enhance resilience against climate-related disasters.

Question 2:

Evaluate the challenges facing mangrove conservation in India and suggest measures to

enhance their protection.(Word Limit: 250)

Model Answer

Mangrove conservation in India faces multiple challenges that hinder the sustainability of these vital ecosystems. Key challenges include:

- Urbanization and Development: Rapid coastal development for urban expansion, infrastructure projects, and tourism often leads to the destruction of mangrove habitats.
- Agricultural Practices: The conversion of mangrove areas for agriculture and aquaculture, especially shrimp farming, has resulted in significant habitat loss.
- Pollution: Industrial and agricultural runoff introduces harmful pollutants into coastal waters, negatively impacting mangrove health and biodiversity.
- Climate Change: Rising sea levels and increased storm intensity threaten the survival of mangrove ecosystems.
- Invasive Species: Non-native species can disrupt local ecosystems, outcompeting native mangrove species and reducing biodiversity.

Measures for Enhancement: To enhance mangrove protection, the following measures are crucial:

- Strengthening Policies and Regulations: Implementing stricter regulations on coastal

development and ensuring compliance can help protect mangrove areas from exploitation.

- Community Engagement: Involving local communities in conservation efforts through awareness programs and sustainable livelihood initiatives can promote stewardship of mangrove ecosystems.
- Restoration Projects: Government initiatives, such as the MISHTI initiative, should be expanded to include community-led restoration projects, focusing on replanting mangroves and restoring degraded areas.
- Research and Monitoring: Continuous research on mangrove ecosystems is essential to understand their dynamics and the impacts of climate change. Regular monitoring can help identify areas needing intervention.
- Education and Awareness: Raising awareness about the ecological and economic importance of mangroves can foster community support for conservation efforts.

In summary, while challenges to mangrove conservation in India are significant, targeted measures that involve policy reform, community participation, and education can greatly enhance the protection and restoration of these vital ecosystems.

Remember: These are just sample answers. It's important to further research and refine your responses based on your own understanding and perspective. Read entire UPSC Current Affairs.

Relevance to the UPSC Prelims and Mains syllabus under the following

topics:

Prelims:

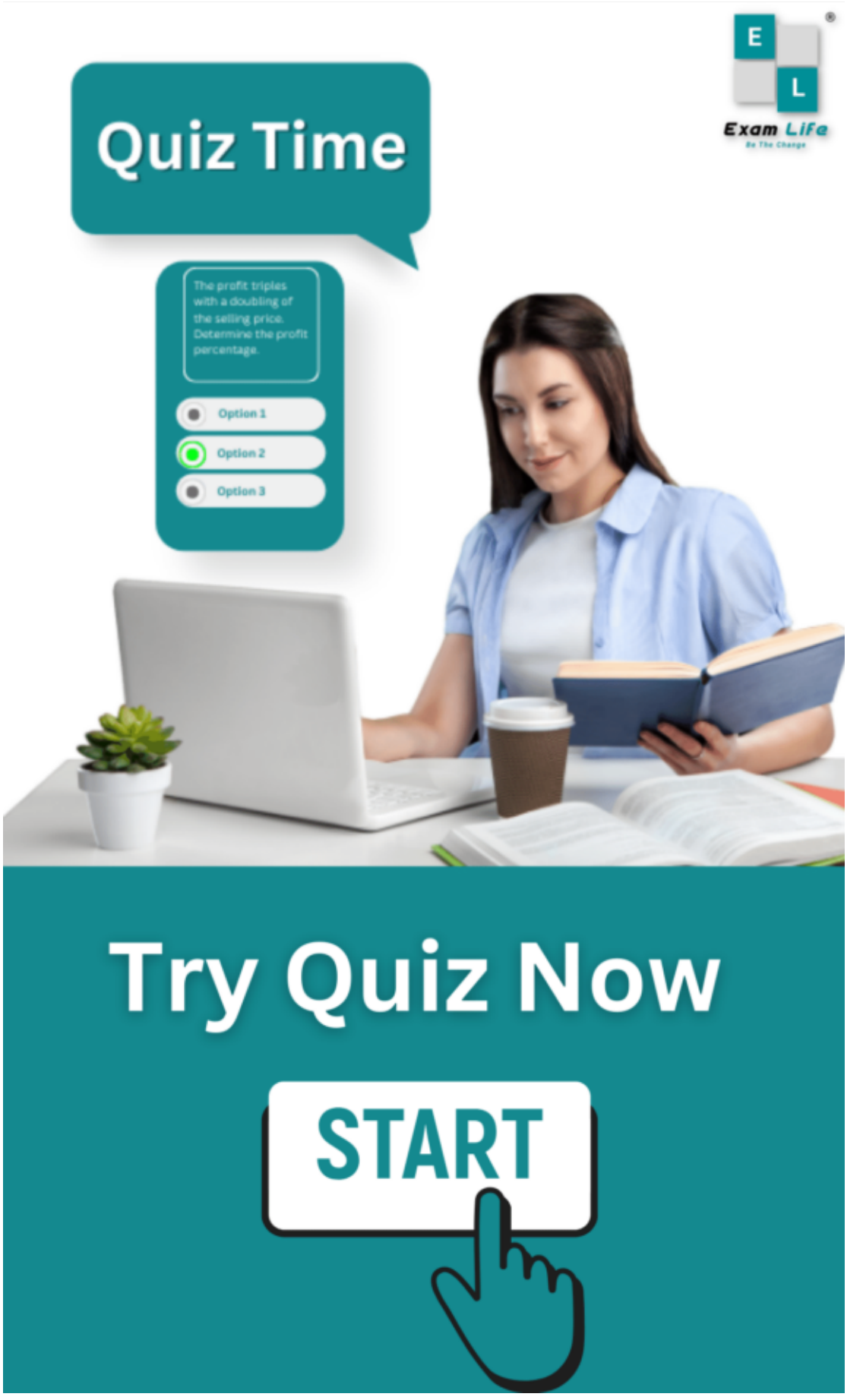
- **General Studies Paper I:**
- Environment and Ecology: The prelims syllabus covers various ecosystems and their roles in the environment. Questions related to the functions of mangroves, their biodiversity, and their contribution to climate change mitigation can be expected.
  Current Affairs: Relevant developments concerning environmental conservation, government initiatives (like the MISHTI initiative for mangrove planting), and the status of mangrove cover in India as reported in the India State of Forest Report can appear in the current affairs section of the prelims.

Mains:

- **General Studies Paper II:**
- Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice, and International Relations: This

section includes discussions on various government initiatives aimed at environmental protection, including those focused on mangrove conservation and management.

- **General Studies Paper III:**
- Economic Development: Questions related to sustainable development practices, the impact of environmental degradation, and measures for biodiversity conservation are included here. The economic benefits provided by mangroves, such as fisheries support and coastal protection, may also be explored.
- Environmental Conservation: Specific discussions on the role of ecosystems like mangroves in disaster risk reduction (such as cyclone mitigation) and their contribution to climate resilience are part of this syllabus segment.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