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News: Areas under AFSPA regime reduced: Shah

- The Union Home Ministry has considerably reduced the “disturbed areas” under the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA) in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, Home Minister Amit Shah announced recently.

Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)

- Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was enacted in **1958**, granting **extra-ordinary powers and immunity to the armed forces to bring back order in the disturbed areas.**
- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification **under Section 3 of the AFSPA.** An area can be **disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.**
- Once a region is declared ‘**disturbed**’ then it has to **maintain the status quo for a minimum of three months**, as per The Disturbed Areas Act of 1976.
- The **state governments can suggest** whether the Act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the act, their **opinion can be overruled** by the governor or the Centre.

- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the authority that would decide on the imposition of AFSPA in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh.
- Initially when the act came into force in 1958 the power to confer AFSPA was given only to the governor of the state. This **power was conferred on the central government with the amendment in 1978** (Tripura was declared a disturbed area by the central government, over the opposition by the state government).
- The act **does not explicitly explain the circumstances on which it can be declared as 'disturbed area'**. It only states that “the AFSPA only requires that such authority be of the opinion that whole or parts of the area are in a dangerous or disturbed condition such that the use of the Armed Forces in aid of civil powers is necessary.
- The **Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part** of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “**the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary**”.

Some of the Immunities / Powers include:

- **Fire upon anyone** after giving warning who is acting against law and order in disturbed areas.
- **Arrest anyone** without warrant.
- **Stop and search** any vehicle or vessel.
- **Legal immunity** for these actions.
- Presently, AFSPA is enforced in Area **under 8 police stations of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur (excluding 7 assembly constituencies of Imphal), Mizoram, Entire state of Nagaland and Jammu and Kashmir.**

News: Dip in Chilika Lake's dolphin population

- The dolphin population along Odisha's coast and in its Waterbodies has increased but the number of Irrawaddy dolphins in Chilika lake has fallen.

Irrawaddy Dolphins

- Irrawaddy Dolphins are **euryhaline species of oceanic dolphin** found in discontinuous subpopulations in **coastal areas of South and Southeast Asia**, and in **3 rivers namely, Irrawaddy (Myanmar), Mahakam (Borneo Islands of Indonesia) and Mekong (China).**
- Euryhaline organisms are able to adapt to a wide range of salinities.
- IUCN Status: **Endangered.**

- CITES Status: Appendix I.
- CMS Status: Appendix I.
- Wildlife Protection Act: Schedule I.
- Total population is estimated to be around 7500 of which more than 6000 are in Bangladesh.
- Recently, 151 Irrawaddy dolphins are spotted in Chilika Lake of Odisha in a dolphin census as compared to 162 in 2021.
- The Dolphin census is being carried out using Hydrophone monitoring technique. A hydrophone is a microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound.

Chilika Lake

- Chilika Lake is a brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha, at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal, covering an area of over 1,100km.
- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest brackish water lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef.
- Chilika Lake hosts 20% of the sea grass found in India. It has got the highest concentration of Seagrass in India.

- It has been listed as a **tentative UNESCO World Heritage** site.
- It is the **largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent**. The lake is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals.
- The **Nalabana Island or the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary, inside the lake, continued to be the most favoured destination for the birds**.
- The lake is an ecosystem with large fishery resources. It sustains more than 150,000 fisher-folk living in 132 villages on the shore and islands.
- The lagoon hosts over 160 species of birds in the peak migratory season. Birds from as far as the Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Aral Sea and other remote parts of Russia, Kirghiz steppes of Kazakhstan, Central and southeast Asia, Ladakh and Himalayas come here. These birds travel great distances; migratory birds probably follow much longer routes than the straight lines, possibly up to 12,000 km, to reach Chilika Lake.
- In **1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention**. It was a designated Montreux Site but delisted from it due to the actions of Gov.
- Recently, **5 Great Knots were seen in Chilika Lake after 5 years**.

- The latest dolphin census found that there are **151 Irrawaddy dolphins present in the lake compared to 162 in 2021**. The number of bottlenose dolphins also reduced from 26 in 2021 to 16 in 2022.