SHORTNEWS

SASCI INITIATIVE

Recently, the Ministry of Tourism launched the SASCI initiative to develop iconic and lesser-known tourist destinations across India.

About SASCI Initiative

Refers to - Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme for developing infrastructure and visitor experiences at emerging tourist destinations.

Aim - To create end-to-end tourist experiences that provide cultural, economic, and environmental value. Promote lesser-known destinations to reduce congestion at popular sites.

Objectives -

1. Encourage responsible and sustainable tourism.
2. Boost the local economy by creating employment for communities and artisans.
3. Attract high-value domestic and foreign tourists.
4. Ensure inclusive growth and community participation.
5. Preserve cultural heritage and strengthen the tourism ecosystem.

Key Features -

Selection Criteria - Projects selected through a challenge method evaluating connectivity, ecosystem, carrying capacity, utilities, project impact, sustainability, and private investment potential.

Funding Mechanism - 100% central funding for development; operation and maintenance by respective State Governments.

Implementation Timeline - Projects expected to be completed by March 2026.

Holistic Approach - Focus on comprehensive infrastructure, branding, sustainability, and tourism diversification.

Notable Projects

1. **Bateshwar (UP) -** Historical temples
2. **Ponda (Goa) -** Cultural and natural attractions
3. **Gandikota (AP) -** Grand Canyon of India
4. **Porbandar (Gujarat) -** Birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi
5. **Rang Ghar (Assam) -** Heritage amphitheater
6. **Matsyagandha Lake (Bihar) -** Eco-tourism
7. **Orchha (MP) -** Historical monuments

Significance

Economic Empowerment - Boosts local economies, livelihoods, and tourism revenues.

Sustainable Development - Promotes eco-friendly and responsible tourism.

Cultural Preservation - Safeguards heritage sites and local traditions.

Global Competitiveness - Positions India as a globally attractive tourism destination.

Community Engagement - Encourages local participation and private sector involvement.

ASIAN PALM CIVET

Kerala has been witnessing rising instances of human–civet encounters, as the Asian Palm Civet increasingly ventures into urban and semi-urban areas, raising ecological, cultural, and legal concerns.

About Asian Palm Civet

Species - Asian Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), also called Toddy Cat.

Features - Small, nocturnal mammal with slender body, pointed snout, and white facial mask.

Habitat & Range - Distributed across South and Southeast Asia, including India.

Diet - Omnivorous—feeds on fruits, insects, and small animals; key agent of seed dispersal.

Unique Trait: Produces Kopi Luwak coffee from digested beans.

Conservation Status - Least Concern (IUCN Red List). Protected under Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (India)

Ecological Significance

1. Seed Dispersal: Vital for forest regeneration and biodiversity.
2. Pest Control: Helps regulate insect and rodent populations.
3. Cultural Importance: Historically associated with toddy tapping in Kerala, hence called Toddy Cat.

About Civet Species

1. The African Civet (*Civettictis civetta*) is found in Sub-Saharan Africa, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and not found in India.
2. The African Palm Civet (*Nandinia binotata*) is found in Equatorial Africa, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and not present in India.
3. The Asian Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), also called Toddy Cat, is widespread in India and Southeast Asia, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and protected under Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
4. The Brown Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus jerdoni*) is endemic to the Western Ghats, India, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and protected under Schedule II of WPA 1972.
5. The Golden Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus zeylonensis*) is endemic to Sri Lanka, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and absent in India.
6. The Small Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*) is widely distributed in India and Southeast Asia, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and protected under Schedule II of WPA 1972.
7. The Large Indian Civet (*Viverra zibetha*) is found in Northeast and Eastern India, and Southeast Asia, listed as Near Threatened (IUCN), and protected under Schedule I of WPA 1972 (highest protection).
8. The Malayan Civet (*Viverra tangalunga*) is distributed in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, listed as Least Concern (IUCN), and not found in India.
9. The Large-spotted Civet (*Viverra megaspila*) is found in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia), listed as Endangered (IUCN), and absent in India.
10. The Owston's Civet (*Chrotogale owstoni*) occurs in Vietnam, Laos, and Southern China, listed as Endangered (IUCN), and not in India.
11. The Hose's Civet (*Diplogale hosei*) is endemic to Borneo, listed as Endangered (IUCN), and absent in India.
12. The Otter Civet (*Cynogale bennettii*) is found in Malaysia, Sumatra, and Borneo, listed as Endangered (IUCN), and not present in India.

About Indian Civets

India hosts four civet species – Asian Palm Civet, Brown Palm Civet, Small Indian Civet, and Large Indian Civet. The Large Indian Civet is the only Schedule I species in India. The other three – Asian Palm Civet, Brown Palm Civet, and Small Indian Civet – are protected under Schedule II of WPA 1972. All Indian civet species are Least Concern (IUCN), except the Large Indian Civet (Near Threatened). The Brown Palm Civet is endemic to the Western Ghats and important for seed dispersal.

Major threats - Habitat loss, hunting for musk, and zoonotic disease links. Conservation efforts: Legal protection, habitat conservation, and awareness programs.

PLANTING TREES IN TROPICS HAS MOST POSITIVE CLIMATE IMPACTS - STUDY

A new study published in *npj Climate Action* highlights that planting trees in tropical regions offers the strongest climate benefits, while in higher latitudes, tree planting may in some cases have a slight heating effect.

Findings of the Study

Tropical Advantage - Tropical regions provide the most powerful climate benefits from tree planting.

Year-Round Growth - In warm, wet regions, trees grow year-round, leading to more cooling benefits.

Latitude Limits - Higher latitudes may see reduced or even slightly warming effects from tree planting.

Cooling Mechanisms

Evapotranspiration ("Tree Sweating") - Trees pull water from soil, releasing vapor through leaves, cooling both the tree and surrounding air.

Humidity & Cloud Formation - More water vapor increases humidity, leading to cloud formation and reduced sunlight reaching Earth's surface.

Fire Suppression Effect - In tropical savannahs, trees resist fires better than grasses, reducing fire risks.

Carbon Capture - Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Tropical Region

Location - Geographically, the tropics lie between the Tropic of Cancer (23.5°N latitude) and the Tropic of Capricorn (23.5°S latitude).

Sunlight - This zone receives direct sunlight year-round, resulting in generally hot climates with minimal seasonal variation.

Rainfall & Vegetation - The region is typically marked by high temperatures, distinct wet and dry seasons, and dense vegetation such as tropical rainforests and savannas.

MERCATOR PROJECTION

The African Union (AU) has endorsed the Correct the Map campaign, calling for the replacement of the widely used Mercator projection with a more accurate map that reflects Africa's true size.

About Mercator projection

Origin - Introduced in 1569 by cartographer Gerardus Mercator.

Type - It is Classified as a cylindrical projection, though derived mathematically.

Features - Features a grid of right-angled latitude and longitude lines, making compass directions easy to follow.

1. *Meridians* - Shown as equally spaced, parallel vertical lines.
2. *Parallels of Latitude* - Depicted as horizontal straight lines, increasingly spaced farther apart from the Equator.

Limitations -

1. Not suitable for accurate world maps.
2. Scale distortion increases toward the poles.
3. Greenland (real size: comparable to DRC) looks as large as the entire African continent.
4. Europe, North America, and Russia look disproportionately big.
5. India appears smaller than its actual landmass.

Alternatives -

1. **Gall-Peters Projection (1970s) -** Adopted in some schools (e.g., Boston in 2017). Shows continents in their true relative size.
2. **Equal Earth Projection (2018) -** Proposed by the AU as a replacement. Offers better proportionality without excessive distortion.