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State of India's Environment 2026 — 7 of 9 Planetary Boundaries Breached

5 May 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

REPORTS & SCHEMES

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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State of India's Environment 2026 — 7 of 9 Planetary Boundaries Breached

5 May 2026 · 4 min read ·

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

WHY IN NEWS

The **State of India's Environment (SOE) 2026** report — published annually by the **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)** and **Down To Earth** magazine — has been released, sounding alarm on multiple environmental crises simultaneously threatening India. The report documents that **7 of 9 planetary boundaries** have now been breached globally; extreme weather events in India occurred on **99% of days in 2025**, causing 4,419 deaths; and critical gaps in air quality monitoring leave most Indians without real-time pollution data.

PLANETARY BOUNDARIES — STATUS

The concept of **Planetary Boundaries** was introduced by **Johan Rockström et al. (Stockholm Resilience Centre)** in 2009 — defining nine Earth-system processes within which humanity can safely operate. Exceeding these boundaries risks triggering irreversible and abrupt global environmental change.

#	PLANETARY BOUNDARY	STATUS (2026)
1	Climate change	Breached
2	Biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss)	Breached
3	Land-system change	Breached
4	Freshwater change	Breached
5	Biogeochemical flows (nitrogen/phosphorus)	Breached
6	Novel entities (plastics, chemicals, nuclear waste)	Breached
7	Ocean acidification	Breached (newest, 7th)
8	Atmospheric aerosol loading	Within safe zone
9	Stratospheric ozone depletion	Within safe zone (recovering)

Ocean Acidification (7th): Ocean pH has dropped by 0.1 units since pre-industrial times — a 30–40% increase in acidity (pH is logarithmic). Driven by absorption of atmospheric CO₂, acidification threatens coral reefs, shellfish, and marine food chains.

EXTREME WEATHER IN INDIA — 2025 DATA

METRIC	VALUE
Days with extreme weather events	99% of days (January–November 2025; 331 of 334 days tracked)
Deaths from extreme weather	4,419
Cropland area affected	17.41 million hectares
Most lethal event type	Heatwaves and heavy rainfall/floods
Human-tiger conflict deaths	At least 43 (Jan–June 2025, near tiger reserves)

Context: “Extreme weather” includes heatwaves, heavy rainfall, flooding, cyclones, lightning, and cold waves. The 99% figure covers January–November 2025 (331 of 334 days) — the period analyzed in the Climate India 2025 report. The near-daily occurrence reflects accelerating climate change impacts on South Asia.

AIR QUALITY MONITORING GAP

METRIC	FIGURE
Population within 10 km of CAAQM	Only 15% (~200 million)
Total Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQM)	Insufficient relative to India’s 1.4 billion population
Coverage gap	85% of Indians have no nearby real-time air quality data

CAAQM: Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations — installed by CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) and State PCBs. They measure PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, NO₂, SO₂, CO, O₃ in real time. The data feeds AQI (Air Quality Index) readings.

Implication: Without monitoring, millions live with untracked dangerous pollution — particularly in industrial towns, smaller cities, and rural areas near biomass burning.

ABOUT CSE AND THE SOE REPORT

FEATURE	DETAIL
Publisher	Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)
Magazine	Down To Earth (CSE's flagship publication)
SOE frequency	Annual
CSE founded	1980
CSE Director General	Sunita Narain
Headquarters	New Delhi
Known for	Championing environmental justice, filing PILs, Pollution Index

CSE's earlier landmark work includes the **Pollution Index** (ranking polluted cities), the **Green Rating Project** (industry environmental performance), and advocacy for **Euro/Bharat emission norms** for vehicles.

KEY ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS HIGHLIGHTED

1. Biodiversity and Forest Cover

- India has 5.03% of the world's biodiversity despite being 2.4% of global land area
- Forest cover: 21.76% of India's land (State of Forest Report 2023)
- Human-wildlife conflict intensifying near protected areas

2. Water Stress

- India is among the top countries facing **Day Zero** water scenarios in multiple cities
- 21 Indian cities (including Delhi, Bengaluru) projected to face acute water shortage by 2030 (NITI Aayog)

3. Solid Waste and Plastics

- Novel entities (plastics, persistent chemicals) now a breached planetary boundary
- India generates ~62 million tonnes of municipal solid waste annually; only ~22 million tonnes treated

4. Land Degradation

- ~30% of India's land area faces degradation (desertification, salinisation, erosion)
- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh among most affected

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Environment	Planetary boundaries, climate change, biodiversity, air quality
GS3 — Environment	Extreme weather, disaster management, NDMA
GS2 — Governance	Pollution monitoring gap, CPCB, environmental regulation

Mains Keywords: State of India's Environment 2026, CSE, Down To Earth, planetary boundaries, ocean acidification, extreme weather, CAAQM, air quality monitoring gap, biosphere integrity, land degradation, human-wildlife conflict, Sunita Narain

Prelims Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
SOE 2026 publisher	CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) + Down To Earth
Planetary boundaries breached	7 of 9
7th breached boundary	Ocean acidification
Ocean acidity increase	30–40% since pre-industrial era
Extreme weather days 2025	99% of days (Jan–Nov 2025; 331 of 334 days tracked)
Extreme weather deaths 2025	4,419
Cropland affected	17.41 million hectares
Population near CAAQM	Only 15% (within 10 km)
CSE Director General	Sunita Narain
Planetary boundaries concept	Johan Rockström et al., 2009; Stockholm Resilience Centre

Source: State of India's Environment 2026 — 7 of 9 Planetary Boundaries Breached — [Ujiyari.com](https://ujiyari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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