International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict – 6 November

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News

The 'International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict' is observed every year on 6 November. The UN General Assembly declared it on 5 Nov 2001 by resolution 56/4, inviting Member States and UN bodies to observe it. The day recalls that environmental damage in war – polluted water sources, torched crops, felled forests, poisoned soil – often goes unnoticed. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), at least 40% of internal conflicts in the last 60 years have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources (timber, diamonds, gold, oil, fertile land, water).

Key facts

Date	6 November (every year)
Declared by	UNGA resolution 56/4, 5 Nov 2001
UNEP finding	≥40% of internal conflicts in 60 years linked to natural resources; such conflicts twice as likely to relapse
ENMOD Convention	UNGA 10 Dec 1976; signed at Geneva 18 May 1977; in force 5 Oct 1978
UNEA resolution	UNEP/EA.2/Res.15, 27 May 2016 – protecting the environment in conflict-affected areas (tabled by Ukraine, adopted by consensus)

Background

- Vietnam War: US forces sprayed huge amounts of the herbicide 'Agent Orange' to strip forest cover; its dioxin contaminant caused long-term health and environmental damage. The idea of 'ecocide' grew out of this.
- Gulf War (1991): retreating Iraqi forces set hundreds of Kuwait's oil wells on fire and oil was released into the Persian Gulf – causing severe air and sea pollution.
- International law: the ENMOD Convention bans the hostile use of environmental modification techniques (e.g. weather or rain manipulation) having 'widespread, long-lasting or severe' effects. Additional Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Conventions bans methods of warfare causing 'widespread, long-term and severe' damage to the natural environment.
- UNEP: set up after the 1972 Stockholm Conference; HQ Nairobi (Kenya). It carries out post-conflict environmental assessments and work on natural resources and peacebuilding.

Tamil Nadu link: during World War I, on the night of 22 Sept 1914, the German warship 'Emden' shelled Madras, destroying several oil tanks of the Burmah Oil Company. Since then 'Emden' has been used in Tamil for a fearless, daring person.

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