

## Today's Prelims Topics

### India-U.S. Cooperation on Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA)

#### Context

India and the U.S. are strengthening their **Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA)** collaboration through the **Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance**.

#### About Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA)

- ASIA is a strategic initiative launched jointly by India and the United States to enhance defense collaboration, particularly in the realm of autonomous systems and underwater domain awareness (UDA).
  - **UDA is a maritime concept that involves using technology, strategies, policies etc. to monitor everything under the sea.**
- It aims to bolster industry partnerships and production capabilities within the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Key Objectives of ASIA:**
  - **Strengthening Defense Ties:** ASIA seeks to deepen defense cooperation between India and the U.S. by focusing on the co-development and co-production of advanced autonomous technologies.
  - **Enhancing Underwater Domain Awareness:** A primary focus is on UDA technologies, which are crucial for maritime security and monitoring.

#### U.S. Offerings to India

- India is the **first country** to receive U.S. industry collaboration on sensitive UDA technologies.
- **Co-development and Co-production Opportunities:**
  - **Sea Picket Autonomous Surveillance System** (ThayerMahan)
  - **Wave Glider Unmanned Surface Vehicles (USVs)** (Boeing's Liquid Robotics)
  - **Low-Frequency Active-Towed Sonar** (L3 Harris)
  - **Multistatic Active (MSA) Sonobuoys** (Ultra Maritime, co-produced with Bharat Dynamics Ltd.)
  - **Large Diameter Autonomous Undersea Vehicles** (Anduril)
  - **Triton Autonomous Underwater and Surface Vehicles** (Ocean Aero)

#### Source:

- [The Hindu - Underwater domain awareness](#)

## Marital Rape Exception

### Context

The Chhattisgarh High Court ruled that the marital rape immunity under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) also applies to Section 377 of the IPC.

### Key Legal Provisions

- **Section 375 of the IPC (Rape):**
  - It defines rape as sexual intercourse with a woman against her will, without her consent or under certain other circumstances.
  - **Exception 2 under Section -375 (IPC):** It states that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is not considered rape if the wife is over the age of **15**.
  - **Changes under Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** It has retained the same exception under **Section-63**, but raised the age of the woman from **15 to 18**.
- **Section 377 of the IPC (Unnatural Offences):**
  - This section criminalises “carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal,” originally aimed at criminalising homosexuality.
  - It does not include the marital rape exception found in **Section 375**.

### Chhattisgarh High Court's Ruling

- **Interpretation of Marital Rape Exception:**
  - The Court highlighted that **Section 375** includes a marital rape exception, meaning non-consensual sex within marriage is not punishable as rape.
  - Given this exception, the Court ruled that **Section 377** could not be applied to non-consensual acts between married couples, as this would contradict the principle in **Section 375**.
- **Section 377 and Non-Consensual Acts**
  - The High Court noted that **Section 377** continues to punish non-consensual “unnatural offences,” but, after the **2018 Supreme Court ruling** decriminalising homosexuality, **Section 377** only applies to non-consensual acts, such as bestiality.
  - Therefore, the Court held that if **unnatural sex** occurs between consenting married partners, **Section 377** does not apply, since it is not deemed an offence.
- **Implications of the Ruling → Loss of Legal Recourse for Married Women**
  - Previously married women who experience non-consensual sex, used **Section 377** to initiate prosecution for sexual acts without consent. After this ruling they no longer have that recourse, as **Section 377** is now also protected by the marital rape immunity.

### Source:

- [Indian Express - Marital Rape Exception](#)

## PM Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojana

### Context

In the Union Budget 2025, the Union Finance Minister has announced a new scheme Pradhan Mantri Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojana.

### About Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDKY)

- **Objectives:**
  - **Enhancing Agricultural Productivity:** Improving the overall output from agricultural activities.
  - **Adopting Crop Diversification and Sustainable Agriculture Practices:** Encouraging diversified cropping systems and environmentally sustainable agricultural methods.
  - **Improving Irrigation Facilities:** Ensuring better irrigation systems to improve water access for farming.
  - **Augmenting Post-Harvest Storage:** Strengthening storage infrastructure at the **panchayat** and **block** levels to prevent crop wastage.
- The programme is motivated by the **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)** which was launched in 2018 to “to quickly and effectively transform 112 most under-developed districts across the country.”
  - **ADP focused on 3 Cs:** Convergence, Collaboration & Competition.
- **Parameters for Selection:**
  - **Low Productivity:** Districts with low agricultural output.
  - **Moderate Crop Intensity:** The cropping intensity, which measures the efficiency of land usage, will be considered.
    - It is defined as the ratio of the gross cropped area to the net area sown.
    - For example, India's cropping intensity in 2021-22 was **155%**, showing how efficiently land was utilized.
  - **Below-Average Credit Parameters:** The financial credit available to farmers in each district will be a consideration.

### Key Features

- **Beneficiaries:** Expected to benefit **1.7 crore farmers**.
- **Budget Allocation:** No separate allocation announced; funds will be managed through the convergence of existing schemes.

### Source:

- [Indian Express - Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojna](#)

## Devolution Index ranking of Panchayat Raj system

### Context

Karnataka has topped the overall Devolution Index (DI) ranking of the Panchayat Raj system among States in India.

### About Devolution Index (DI) 2024

- **Purpose:** The report ranks Indian States/UTs based on their devolution (transfer of power and resources) to Panchayati Raj institutions.
- **Prepared by:** Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj & Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi
- **Ranking Parameters:** Overall Devolution Index (DI), Framework, Functions, Finances, Functionaries, Capacity Enhancement and Accountability.
- **Top 3 States:**
  - Karnataka : **72.23** (Rank 1)
  - Kerala : **70.59** (Rank 2)
  - Tamil Nadu : **68.38** (Rank 3)
- **Other High Performers:**
  - Maharashtra : **61.44** (Rank 4)
  - Uttar Pradesh : **60.07** (Rank 5)
  - Gujarat : **58.26** (Rank 6)
- **Moderate Performers:** Bihar, Assam, Sikkim, Uttarakhand.

### Performance Across Key Dimensions

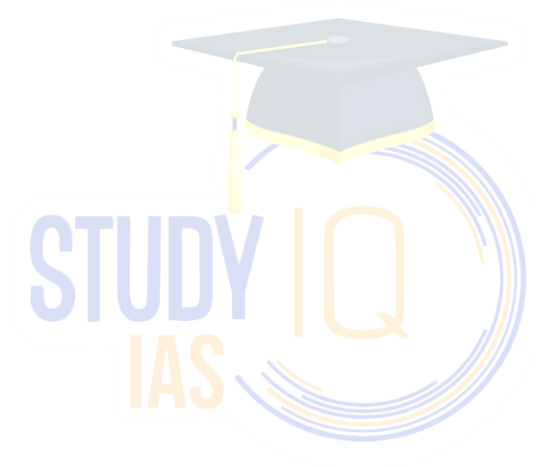
- **Framework (Legal and Institutional Setup)**
  - **Top Performer:** Kerala (83.56)
  - **Criteria Considered:**
    - Regular panchayat elections
    - Reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and women
    - Establishment of **State Election Commission** and **State Finance Commission**
- **Functions (Extent of Powers Given to Panchayats)**
  - **Top Performer:** Tamil Nadu (60.24) & Karnataka (57.62)
  - **Key Findings:**
    - Karnataka delegates **maximum number of functions** to panchayats.
    - Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Karnataka have **strong taxation powers**.
- **Finances (Availability of Funds and Fiscal Autonomy)**
  - **Top Performer:** Karnataka (**70.65**)
  - **Evaluation Factors:**
    - Timely release of **15th Finance Commission grants**
    - Financial autonomy of panchayats
- **Accountability (Transparency, Social Audits, and Governance Mechanisms)**
  - **Top Performer:** Karnataka (81.33)
  - **Key Indicators:**
    - Social audit implementation
    - Gram Sabha participation
    - Panchayat-level transparency and anti-corruption measures
    - Performance-based incentives for Panchayats
- **Functionaries (Human Resources for Panchayat Administration)**
  - **Top Performer:** Gujarat (90.94)
- **Capacity Building (Training of Panchayat Representatives and Officials)**
  - **Top Performer:** Telangana (86.19)

○ **Evaluation Based on:**

- Presence of **Panchayat Training Institutions**
- Training programs for elected representatives and officials

**Source:**

- [The Hindu - Devolution Index](#)



## Insurers agree on customer-friendly Bima Vistaar plan

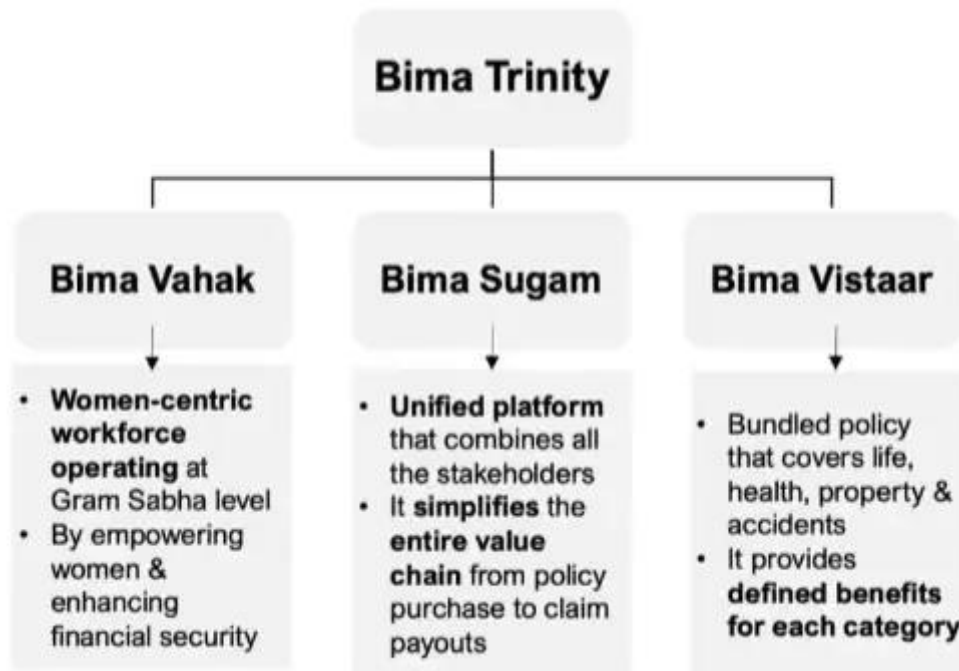
### Context

India's insurance companies have agreed on a simple, comprehensive and customer-friendly model for Bima Vistaar.

### About Bima Vistaar

- It is a simple, **comprehensive and customer-friendly** composite insurance product.
- **Initiated by:** Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).
- **Coverage Areas:**
  - Life insurance (death coverage)
  - Personal accident insurance
  - Property insurance
  - Surgical hospitalisation coverage
- **Co-Insurance Model:** Each type of risk is co-insured by **all insurers dealing with that specific insurance line** under an **omnibus co-insurance arrangement**.

### Bima Trinity : A Three-Pronged Approach to Insurance Expansion



Source:

- [The Hindu - Bima Vistaar](#)

## Stubble burning contributes only 14% PM2.5 in Delhi-NCR

### Context

According to a latest study **stubble burning** contributes only about **14% of PM2.5** in Delhi-NCR and is **not the primary source** of particulate matter in the region.

### Details of the Study

- The study utilized field measurements, **airmass trajectories**, and **particle dispersion and chemical transport model simulations**.
- **Declining Stubble Burning Events:**
  - From **2015 to 2023**, stubble-burning events in **Punjab** and **Haryana** declined by over **50%**.
  - In **2023**, stubble-burning events in **Punjab** decreased by **31%** and in **Haryana**, by **37%**.
- **Air Quality in Delhi-NCR:**
  - Despite a significant decline in stubble burning, **PM2.5 concentrations in Delhi-NCR** remained **stubbornly high** and in the "**very poor**" to "**severe**" category during the **winter months** (December to February) since 2016.
  - Factors like **stagnant winds**, **lower mixing heights** and **temperature inversions** in the winter months contribute to high pollution levels in Delhi-NCR.
  - This indicates that sources beyond stubble burning play a significant role in air pollution.
- **Role of Wind and Weather:**
  - While **strong winds** can carry pollution from stubble burning, **weather conditions** like **low winds** and **temperature inversions** play a more important role in trapping and keeping pollutants in the air.
  - **Local emissions** from vehicles, industries and other sources are also a significant cause of pollution.

### Local Sources of Pollution

- The study found that **PM2.5 levels** and **CO (carbon monoxide)** concentrations increase at **night** in Delhi, suggesting that pollution comes from **local sources** such as **vehicles**, **biomass burning** and **fossil fuel burning**.
- If stubble burning were the main cause, **CO levels** would remain stable at all times, but they increase at night, pointing to **local pollution** as a major contributor.
- **Local Contributions:**
  - **Transport sector** is the largest contributor to PM2.5, accounting for **30%**.
  - **Local biomass burning** contributes about **23%**, while **construction industry and road dust** contribute **10%**.
  - **Cooking and industrial activities** contribute about **5-7%**.
  - **Stubble burning** contributes only about **13%** to PM2.5 levels, primarily in **October-November**.

### Source:

- [The Hindu - Stubble Burning](#)

## Surge in Soyabean Oil Imports from Nepal to India

### Context

Imports from Nepal surged by 14 times during the April-November 2024 period compared to the same period in the previous year.

### About

- India's **total soyabean oil imports** increased by **19%** during the **April-November 2024 period**, reaching nearly **\$3 billion**, up from **\$2.5 billion** in 2023.
- Imports from **Brazil** (a major soyabean oil producer) declined during the same period, dropping to **\$549 million** from **\$849.19 million** the previous year.
- **Duty Revision and Impact on Soyabean Oil Imports:**
  - India raised the basic customs duty on refined oils like palm oil, soya oil and sunflower oil by 20% in September 2024 to protect Indian oilseed farmers.
  - This increase in duty led to a significant surge in **soyabean oil imports from Nepal in November 2024**, which increased to **\$23.46 million**, compared to **\$1.42 million** in **November 2023**.
- A report from the **International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)** noted that Nepal's lower tariffs on edible oils (compared to India) allow it to refine and re-export the oil to India at a lower cost.

### Tariff Advantage for Nepal

- **Nepal enjoys a 30% tariff advantage** due to a **zero-duty access** for its products into India under the **Nepal-India Treaty of Trade (2009)**.
  - Under the **Nepal-India Treaty of Trade**, Nepal enjoys **duty-free access** to Indian markets for most of its goods, except for certain items like **cigarettes, alcohol** and **cosmetics**.
- **Nepal's increased soyabean oil exports** to India have raised concerns over potential misuse of trade advantages under the **Nepal-India Treaty of Trade**.

### Soybean

- It is a leguminous crop known for its high protein and oil content.
- It is a major source of edible oil, protein-rich animal feed and industrial products like biodiesel.
- **Growing Conditions:**
  - It is a **kharif crop &** grows well in fertile, well-drained loamy soil.
  - It requires an optimal temperature of **20°C to 30°C** during the growing season.
- **Top 3 Soyabean producing states of India:** Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra & Rajasthan.
- **Top Soyabean producing countries:** Brazil, USA, Argentina, China & **India**.

### Source:

- [Indian Express - 14 fold increase](#)



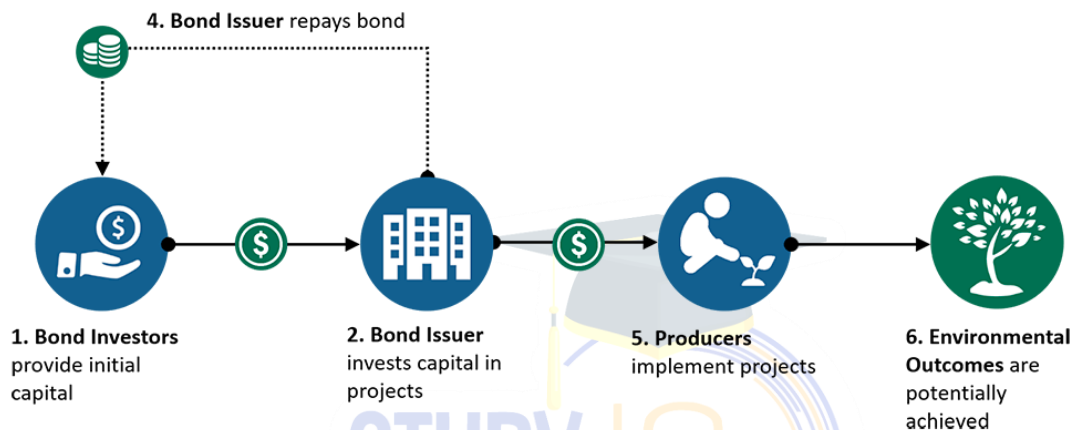
## Sovereign Green Bonds

### Context

India's SGrB issues have faced challenges in gaining investor interest, making it hard for the government to secure a greenium.

### About Sovereign Green Bonds

- **Sovereign Green Bonds (SGrBs)** are debt instruments issued by governments to raise funds for projects aimed at reducing emissions and enhancing climate resilience.
- **India has issued SGrBs** eight times since 2022-23, raising nearly **Rs 53,000 crore** in total.
- The government uses **around 50% of the funds** raised from SGrBs for energy-efficient projects, such as the production of **electric locomotives** under the **Ministry of Railways**.
- **Working Mechanism of SGrBs:**



### Challenges with India's Sovereign Green Bond (SGrB) Market

- **Lack of Investor Demand:**
  - Lower **Greenium in India**. Globally, green bonds can secure a **greenium of 7-8 basis points**, but in India, it has often been just **2-3 basis points**.
    - Greenium refers to the savings an issuer of a green bond realises on the associated coupon payment because the bond is green.
    - It is the amount by which the yield on the green bond is lower, compared with the conventional bond.
- **Liquidity Issues:**
  - **Small issue sizes** and the tendency for investors to hold the bonds until maturity have **stifled secondary market trading**.
  - Without a vibrant secondary market, SGrBs lose out on one of the advantages of conventional bonds — the ability to trade and access liquidity.
- **Lack of a Robust Ecosystem for Green Investments:**
  - India lacks a strong ecosystem for **social impact funds** and **responsible investing mandates**.
- **Post-Issuance Transparency Issues:**
  - **Lack of transparency** around how the funds raised from green bonds are being used has affected investor confidence.
  - **India's Department of Economic Affairs** has not yet released the **allocation and impact report for 2023-24**, which provides essential information to investors. This delays assessments on how funds are utilized and limits investor trust.

### Source:

- [Indian Express - Sovereign Green Bonds](#)

## Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025

### Context

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, is likely to be introduced by the Union Home Minister in the ongoing Budget session of Parliament.

### Key Provisions of the Bill

- **The Bill will replace four existing laws:**
  - The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920
  - The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
  - The Foreigners Act, 1946
  - The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000
- **Roles and Functions:**
  - Defines the role of Immigration Officers and the Bureau of Immigration (BoI).
  - Specifies requirements related to passports, visas and registration of foreigners.
- **Obligations of Institutions:**
  - **Educational Institutions:** Must admit foreign nationals and follow prescribed guidelines.
  - **Hospitals and Medical Institutions:** Required to admit foreign nationals as well.
- **More Power to Immigration Officers** - Under the new law, immigration officers will have:
  - Greater authority to detain, investigate, and deport illegal immigrants.
  - The power to control movements of restricted foreigners.
  - A foreign national can be denied entry or stay if they pose a **threat to national security, sovereignty, or public health.**
    - The Immigration Officer's decision regarding admissibility will be final and binding.
- **Penal Provisions:**
  - **Entering without a passport:** Penalty of **5 years imprisonment** or **fine up to ₹5 lakh** or both.
  - **Use or supply of forged documents:** Penalty of **2 to 7 years imprisonment** and a fine ranging from **₹1 lakh to ₹10 lakh.**
  - **Overstaying beyond visa limits:** Penalty of **3 years imprisonment** and a fine up to **₹3 lakh.**
- **State Role in Detection and Deportation:**
  - **State Police Involvement:** Since there is no federal police force dedicated to detecting and deporting illegal foreigners, State police have been entrusted with this task.
  - States can set up **detention centres** (though not explicitly mentioned in the Bill) for foreigners awaiting deportation.

### Other Mechanisms to Track Foreigners' Movement

- The MHA has asked States to create two committees to identify foreigners who entered India before and after **January 1, 2011**, and overstayed their visa.
- **Foreigners Identification Portal:** It allows State police to upload biometrics and details of illegal foreigners, helping prevent fraudulent document issuance (like Aadhaar cards).

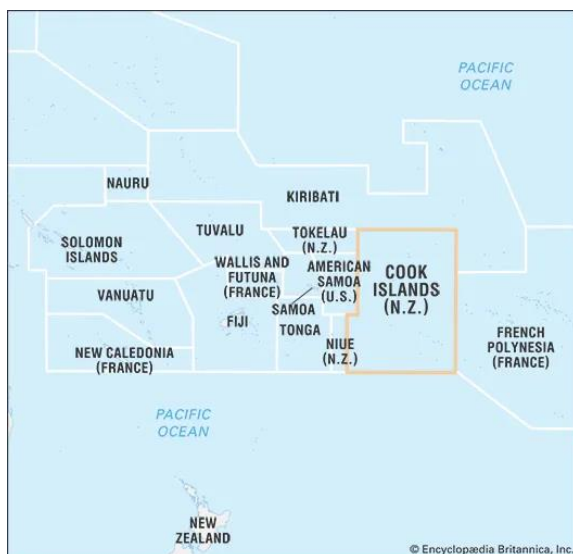
### Source:

- [The Hindu - New Bill on Foreigners](#)

## Places in News

### Cook Island

- Recently Cook Islands signed an **“action plan for the comprehensive strategic partnership”** with China.
- The agreement **expands diplomatic and economic relations** between Cook Islands and China.
- **Concerns raised by New Zealand:**
  - New Zealand claims it was not properly consulted before the Cook Islands signed the agreement.
  - **Cook Islands is a self-governing entity** but has a **"free association"** agreement with New Zealand.



- **Location:** South Pacific Ocean
- **Total Islands:** 15 volcanic and coral islands
- Cook Islands is **not fully independent**. It operates as a **self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand**.
- It manages **internal affairs independently** but relies on **New Zealand for defense and foreign policy**.
- **Free Association" Agreement:**
  - Cook Islanders are **citizens of New Zealand** and can live/work in New Zealand freely.
  - New Zealand provides **financial aid and diplomatic support**.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Cook Island](#)

## News in Shorts

### 8th Indian Ocean Conference

- Recently the 8th **Indian Ocean Conference (IOC)**, was held in **Muscat, Oman**. Its theme was "Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership."

#### About Indian Ocean Conference (IOC)

- IOC was started by the India **Foundation in 2016**. The first conference was held in **Singapore**.
- It serves as a platform for nations within and beyond the Indian Ocean region to discuss and collaborate on regional affairs

#### Source:

- [The Hindu - Indian Ocean conference](#)

### 'India's largest' coal block

- Recently mining has started in the Deoch-Pachami Coal block.

#### About Deoch-Pachami Coal Block

- Location:** Birbhum district, West Bengal, near the Bengal-Jharkhand border
- It is the **Largest coal block in India & Second-largest in the world**.
- Major Concerns of the local people:** Forced land acquisition, Displacement of tribal communities, Environmental degradation and Delay in promised jobs & compensation.

#### Facts

- India holds the **5th biggest** coal reserves in the World.
- Top 5 States** in terms of total coal reserves in India are: Jharkhand > Odisha > Chhattisgarh > West Bengal > Madhya Pradesh.
- Reserve Highest:** USA, Russia, Australia, China, India
- Highest Production:** China, India, Indonesia, USA, Australia.
- 4 types of Coal** are found in India: Anthracite (Highest grade), Bituminous, lignite, Peat (Lowest grade).
- Major Coal Mines in India:** Jharia (Jharkhand), Raniganj (West Bengal), Korba (Chhattisgarh), Singrauli (Madhya Pradesh).

#### Source:

- [The Hindu - India's largest coal block](#)

### Big Tech's Backtracking on DEI Goals

- Big Tech giants such as Google, Meta and Amazon are backtracking on their DEI initiatives.

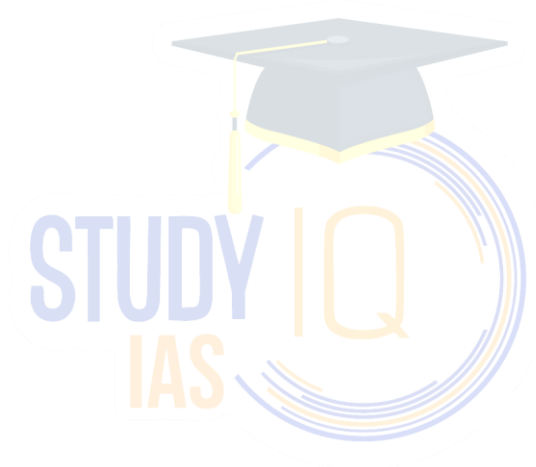
#### What is DEI?

- DEI stands for** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Objectives of DEI:**
  - Ensure representation of diverse groups (diversity).
  - Provide measures to correct past discrimination (equity).
  - Support individuals in thriving alongside their peers (inclusion).
- Examples of discrimination addressed by DEI:** Sexism, racism, religious hate, casteism, ableism, queerphobia etc.
- DEI schemes such as hiring diverse individuals, funding their training, or reserving specific

opportunities for them are meant to improve the representation of different communities in the workplace.

Source:

- [The Hindu - DEI Goals](#)



## Editorial Summary

### Panchayati Raj Institutions

#### Context

In present days big shifts in both technology and society are threatening to make panchayats irrelevant.

#### Introduction of Panchayati Raj in India

- The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in India was formally introduced through the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**, which institutionalized a three-tier system of local governance in rural areas.
- Objective: **To decentralize power and promote democratic self-governance at the grassroots level.**
- **Key features of the 73rd Amendment:**
  - **Three-tier system:** Gram Panchayat (village level), Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Zilla Parishad (district level).
  - **Regular elections:** Every five years to ensure continuity.
  - **Reservations:** 50% of seats reserved for **women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** to promote inclusivity.
  - **Devolution of powers:** The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution lists **29 subjects** (e.g., agriculture, education, health, and rural development) to be managed by PRIs.

#### Successes of Panchayati Raj

- **Massive Political Participation:** Panchayat elections are now **keenly contested**, with over **3 million representatives** elected, making it one of the world's largest democratic participatory setups.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Around **14 lakh elected women representatives** (nearly 50%) are now part of local governance, ensuring gender inclusivity.
- **Implementation of Social Sector Schemes:** PRIs play a major role in implementing programs like **MGNREGA (employment guarantee scheme), mid-day meal schemes, health and sanitation programs**, and rural housing schemes.
- **Strengthening of Local Leadership:** Many **grassroots leaders** emerging from PRIs have moved on to higher political offices at the state and national levels.
- **Improvement in Service Delivery:** Areas with strong PRIs have witnessed **better implementation of rural development projects** related to roads, water supply, and public health.

#### Distress Factors of the Panchayati Raj System

- **Decline in Public Participation:** A decrease in public engagement in local governance.
- **Overdependence on Centrally Sponsored Schemes:** Many central government programs now **bypass PRIs** and directly deliver benefits to citizens (e.g., **PM-KISAN cash transfer scheme**).
  - PRIs are **reduced to implementation agencies** rather than decision-making bodies.
- **Plateau in Administrative Decentralization:** State governments need to devolve staff and cede administrative control to local governments for effective functioning, but progress has stagnated.
  - According to a 2022 report by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, less than 20% of States have devolved all 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

- **Reduced Fiscal Autonomy:** Direct transfers to panchayats increased from ₹1.45 lakh crore under the Thirteenth Finance Commission (2010-15) to ₹2.36 lakh crore under the 15th Finance Commission (2021-26).
  - However, there has been a significant reduction in untied grants, from 85% in the Thirteenth Finance Commission to 60% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission.
- **Rapid Urbanization:** India has experienced rapid urbanization, shifting the policy focus to cities and towns.
  - In 1990, nearly three-quarters of India lived in rural areas, which has decreased to around 60% and continues to decline.

### Ways to Revive the System

- **New Vision for Panchayati Raj:** Adopting a new perspective on panchayats beyond being mere last-mile delivery instruments for social sector schemes.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Using technology to deepen citizen engagement in local planning, decision-making, and accountability processes. A networked Panchayati Raj system could bridge the rural-urban divide by supporting safe internal migration.
- **Focus on Water Conservation and Renewable Energy:** Focusing the role of panchayats on enabling water conservation and renewable energy generation at scale<sup>1</sup>. Panchayats can reclaim their role in managing common property resources by combining scientific practices, traditional knowledge, and public finances.
- **Community-Based Disaster Risk Management:** Panchayats can play a key role in implementing community-based disaster risk management programs, integrating early warning systems, disaster-resilient infrastructure, and capacity-building for residents.
- **Reviving Local Governance:** Reviving local governance in substantive terms, as a significant proportion of India's population (94 crore people) still lives in villages, with over 45% engaged in agriculture.

Source: [The Hindu: Panchayati Raj Movement is in Distress](#)

## Pakistan- Bangladesh Thaw

### Context

The emergence of Muhammad Yunus as Chief Adviser to the interim Bangladesh government has led to renewed interactions with Pakistan.

### Background

- Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971 resulted in strained bilateral relations, with **historic grievances** acting as a major barrier to reconciliation.
- Sheikh Hasina's tenure (15 years) saw **frosty ties** with Pakistan, worsened by her **pro-India stance** and her family's history with the **Pakistani ruling elite**.
- **2016 diplomatic tensions**: Both countries expelled diplomats, highlighting deteriorating relations.

### Recent Developments in Pakistan- Bangladesh Relation

- Bangladesh hosted a **high-level Pakistani military delegation** in Rangpur.
- A visit by Lieutenant-General S.M. Kamr-ul-Hassan, the Bangladesh Army's second-in-command, to Rawalpindi to meet with Pakistan's Army, Navy, and Air Force chiefs.
- **Resumption of direct flights** between Dhaka and Islamabad.
- **Bangladesh's participation in Pakistan's Aman 2025 naval exercises** in the Arabian Sea, including the deployment of a major Bangladeshi warship to Pakistan for the first time in over a decade

### Underlying Factors Driving the Shift

- **Anti-India Sentiment**: Politics in both Bangladesh and Pakistan are riding on a general anti-India sentiment.
- **Diversification of Foreign Policy**: Dhaka intends to diversify its foreign policy trajectory in the subcontinent.
- **Search for New Allies**: Bangladesh is in search of a new form of nationalism, a new form of government, and new allies.
- **Reduced Demand for Apology**: Muhammad Yunus has watered down Dhaka's demand for Pakistan to apologize for the "1971 genocide," now seeking a "resolution of the issues".
- **Economic Considerations**: Pakistan aims to increase annual trade with Bangladesh to more than four times the current level within a year. Bilateral trade increased by an estimated 27% between August and December 2024.

### Ground Realities and Challenges

- **Public Opinion in Bangladesh**: Many Bangladeshis still view the separation from Pakistan as a cornerstone of their national identity, making substantial diplomatic progress challenging without addressing this historical grievance.
  - The scars of the 1971 Liberation War define the relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The atrocities committed by the Pakistani military left an indelible mark on Bangladesh's national consciousness.
- **Limited Gains from Pakistan**: A partnership with Islamabad offers limited strategic and economic gains for Dhaka, given the misalignment between the economic realities of both countries.
- **Geographical Separation**: The geographical separation of Bangladesh and Pakistan by Indian territory creates connectivity and political hurdles for smooth trade.



### Implications for India

- **Countering India's Influence:** The diplomatic maneuvers are perceived as Pakistan's efforts to counter New Delhi's faltering influence in Dhaka after Ms. Hasina's ouster.
- **Growing List of Hostile Neighbors:** With the count of hostile neighbors now growing, which includes the Maldives and Nepal's increasing alignment with China, New Delhi has a new cause for concern.
- **Potential Axis:** There is scope for an axis involving Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan.
- **Security Concerns:** Security in its northeast States is a concern for India.

### India's Approach

- **Understanding Economic and Geographical Realities:** India should ground its approach in an understanding of the economic and geographical realities.
- **Economic Dependence:** Bangladesh will find it challenging to adopt an overtly anti-India stance, given its geographic proximity and economic dependence on India.
  - In 2023, Indian exports to Bangladesh were \$11.25 billion, while Bangladesh's exports to India stood at approximately \$2 billion.
- **Vigilance and Red Lines:** India must remain vigilant and clarify its red lines with Bangladesh in critical areas such as terrorism, weapons trade, joint military drills, and maritime security.
- **Constructive Engagement:** New Delhi should constructively engage with Bangladesh, emphasizing people-to-people contacts, cultural exchanges, and developmental projects. Both countries must continue cooperation on border trade and smuggling, water sharing, and refugee concerns.
- **Addressing Sentiments:** New Delhi needs to proactively address prevailing anti-India and anti-Hindu sentiments in Bangladesh and capitalize on its economic engagement to reinforce its ties with Dhaka.
  - Maintaining a constituency that is favorable to India within Bangladesh remains crucial for long-term strategic stability

Source: [The Hindu: Interpreting the recent Pakistan Bangladesh thaw](#)

## Detailed Coverage

### Development Vs Environment Debate

#### Context

Over 2,500 citizens gathered in Baner, Pune, for a 'Chipko' agitation, protesting against Riverfront Development (RFD) project.

#### What are the Key Issues?

- **Ecological damage.**
- Concerns over **tree cutting** (11,000 trees to be felled).
- Fears that **concretization of riverbanks** may **increase flood risks** instead of preventing them.

#### Why Infrastructure Development is Essential?

- **Economic Growth:** Infrastructure boosts productivity, facilitates trade, and attracts investment, driving overall economic development.
- **Job Creation:** Large-scale projects in transportation, energy, and urban development generate employment across various skill levels.
- **Improved Connectivity:** Roads, railways, and digital infrastructure enhance accessibility, reducing travel time and fostering regional integration.
- **Better Quality of Life:** Infrastructure in healthcare, education, and housing improves living standards and social well-being.
- **Industrial and Technological Advancement:** Modern infrastructure supports industries, promotes innovation, and enhances global competitiveness.
- **Resilience and Disaster Management:** Robust infrastructure mitigates risks from natural disasters, ensuring safety and quick recovery.

#### How Development Impacts the Environment

- **Deforestation and Habitat Loss:** Expansion of **cities, industries, and agriculture** leads to large-scale **deforestation**.
  - Mature trees provide critical ecosystem services (carbon sequestration, habitat for birds and small mammals, microclimate regulation) that cannot be easily replaced.
  - **Example: Aarey Forest (Mumbai) clearance for Metro project** led to protests.
- **Air and Water Pollution:** Industrialization and urbanization increase **air pollution (CO<sub>2</sub>, PM2.5, NOx emissions)**.
  - Water bodies get contaminated due to **untreated sewage and industrial effluents**.
  - **Example: Ganga and Yamuna rivers face severe pollution despite cleaning efforts.**
- **Climate Change and Global Warming:** **Fossil fuel consumption** in industries, transport, and power plants raises **greenhouse gas emissions**.
  - Leads to **rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events**.
  - **Example: Heatwaves in India (2023) linked to climate change due to urban expansion.**
- **Soil Degradation and Desertification:** **Overuse of chemical fertilizers, mining, and deforestation** deplete soil fertility.
  - **Urban expansion and infrastructure projects** reduce arable land.
  - **Example: Thar Desert is expanding due to overgrazing and deforestation in Rajasthan.**
- **Water Scarcity and Groundwater Depletion:** **Excessive water extraction** for irrigation, industries, and urban areas lowers groundwater levels.
  - Dams and river diversions disrupt **natural water flow and aquatic ecosystems**.
  - **Example: Bangalore and Chennai face water crises due to over-extraction of groundwater.**

- **Loss of Indigenous Livelihoods:** Infrastructure projects like **dams, highways, and mining** displace **tribal and rural communities**.
  - Traditional occupations like **farming and fishing** are impacted.
  - **Example: Hasdeo Aranya (Chhattisgarh) coal mining project threatens tribal land and forests.**
- **Replacement Challenges:** The practice of “planting 10 times more trees” as a mitigation is misleading since replanted trees often cannot match the ecological value of mature trees.
  - There is a lack of scientific rigor in counting and ensuring the quality of replacement tree cover.
- **Loopholes in Governance:** Laws like **Environment Protection Act (1986), Forest Conservation Act (1980), and EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment)** exist.
  - However, **dilution of environmental regulations** to favor industries often leads to conflicts.

### Key Movements Against Deforestation

- In 1730, **Amrita Devi** from **Khejarli village, Rajasthan**, courageously opposed the **Maharaja of Jodhpur’s** orders to cut down trees.
  - As she and **363 members of her Bishnoi tribe** hugged the trees in protest, they were brutally executed.
  - This sacrifice led the Maharaja to impose a ban on tree-cutting in the region.
- **Silent Valley Movement (1973-1985):** Protest against a hydroelectric project in Kerala to protect biodiversity.
- **Chipko Movement (1973):** A grassroots movement in Uttarakhand against deforestation.
- **Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984):** A major industrial disaster that intensified discussions on environmental regulations.
- **Buxwaha Forest Diamond Mine Protest (2021):** Over 200,000 trees were expected to be cut in the Buxwaha forest for the diamond project.
  - This led to widespread protests, legal challenges, and social media campaigns aiming to halt the project and protect the Buxwaha forest.
- **Nandgaon Solar Plant Opposition (2025):** In Nandgaon, Maharashtra, local farmers protested against Tata Power's proposed 100-megawatt solar development.
  - The farmers, who had cultivated the land for generations, viewed the project as a corporate land grab, leading to legal disputes and halting the project's progress.

### Laws in India Related to Conservation of Forests and Environment

- **The Indian Forest Act, 1927:** Regulates the management of forests, categorizes forests into Reserved, Protected, and Village Forests, and provides guidelines for forest conservation and commercial usage.
- **The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Establishes protected areas like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and prohibits hunting, poaching, and illegal trade of wildlife.
- **The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** Regulates water pollution and establishes pollution control boards at central and state levels to monitor water quality.
- **The Forest Conservation Act, 1980:** Restricts deforestation and conversion of forest land for non-forest purposes without government approval.
- **The Environment Protection Act, 1986 :** Grants the central government power to take measures for environmental protection, including setting pollution standards and conducting environmental impact assessments (EIA).
- **The Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Aims to conserve biodiversity, regulate access to biological resources, and ensure equitable benefit-sharing from their use.

- **The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Recognizes the rights of forest-dependent communities and ensures their participation in forest conservation.
- **The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016:** Mandates compensatory afforestation and ecosystem restoration in case of forest land diversion for development projects.
- **The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** Regulates air pollution, empowers pollution control boards, and restricts industrial emissions.
- **The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010:** Establishes the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to handle environmental disputes and ensure speedy resolution of cases related to environmental protection.

#### Committee Recommendations on Balancing Environment and Development

- **Brundtland Commission (1987):** Highlighted the interconnection between environmental sustainability and economic activities, leading to discussions on environmental accounting, sustainable development, and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
- **Mishra Committee (1976):** Reported that Joshimath in Uttarakhand is built on loose sand and stone deposits rather than solid rock, recommending a ban on new construction in the area to prevent land subsidence.
- **Dr. Kasturirangan Committee (2012):** Proposed conservation of the Western Ghats' biodiversity while ensuring sustainable and inclusive development, recommending that 37% of the region be designated as Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA).
- **T.S.R. Subramanian Committee (2014):** Suggested amendments to environmental laws to streamline regulatory processes, improve transparency, and strengthen enforcement mechanisms for effective environmental governance.
- **Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan Committee (2018):** Focused on solid waste management in India, emphasizing improved waste disposal strategies, recycling promotion, and pollution reduction to encourage sustainable living.

#### Proposed Solutions

- **Minimize Tree Cutting:** Trees should only be felled as a last resort, after a careful, individual assessment.
  - Developments should first explore options to realign or modify plans to retain existing trees.
- **Tree Translocation & Preservation:** Where possible, suitable trees should be translocated rather than removed.
  - Use technology to map and catalog trees (including size, species, health) so that development plans can be adapted accordingly.
- **Integrated Urban Planning:** Create an integrated approach that involves urban planners, environmental experts, and development authorities from the outset to design projects that balance both development and green preservation.
- **Sustainable Development Models:** Concepts like circular economy, green infrastructure, and low-carbon development can bridge the gap.
- **Stronger Governance and Coordination:** Establish better coordination among various agencies and form a dedicated tree authority to enforce tree protection laws effectively.

#### Sources:

- [The Big Picture - Development vs Environment](#)
- [The Hindu: Tree hugging protest against Pune riverfront project reignites development vs nature debate](#)