

# The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

**Tuesday, 06 May, 2025**

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The case of Duglai village represents the intersection of issues related to governance, tribal welfare, law & order, development in Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) areas, and gender-based violence. It reflects both the challenges of inclusive development and the reactive nature of administrative action in underdeveloped regions.

## In this remote M.P. hamlet, unprecedented civic push follows a horrific crime

**Mehul Malpani**  
BALAGHAT

It's afternoon in Duglai, a village in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district, and around a dozen residents are huddled around two electricians busy installing power meters outside the house of a resident, Shyamal Tekam. Above them, a third electrician is replacing power cables damaged several decades ago with new lines.

Duglai is located deep inside the forests of Balaghat, which was last month removed from the Union Home Ministry's list of the districts "most-affected" by left-wing extremism (LWE) and notified as a "district of concern", suggesting that Maoist influence in the area is on the wane.

Till 10 days ago, the village was isolated from the

rest of the country. Except for a few weeks nearly 12 years ago, when electricity poles and cables were laid for the first time, it has never had electricity.

"The cables got damaged within a few weeks and were never replaced," said Mr. Tekam. It has also never been connected with the State road network. But the 130-odd Gondispeaking residents here, most of whom live in mud houses with thatched roofs, have seen a flurry of activity over the past few days, with senior district officials, police officers, and political leaders making frequent visits and supervising the large-scale civic infrastructure overhaul, which includes a plan to lay a road connecting Duglai with a link road.

While the administration says that the works are part of the Centre's civic in-

frastructure push in LWE-affected areas, many Duglai residents claim that the civic revamp started only after an outcry following the gang-rape of three minor girls and a woman last month.

### The assault

The incident happened around 1.30 a.m. on the intervening night of April 23 and 24, when six Duglai residents – four girls and a woman, aged between seven and 20, and their uncle – were returning from a wedding in the neighbouring Thakurtola village located two kilometres away. The group was accosted by seven men who had chased them on motorcycles from the venue of the event.

As per the police, the accused beat the group's male member, gang-raped four victims, and fled.



Electricity is being extended to Balaghat's Duglai village, which was cut off from the rest of the country till 10 days ago. A.M. FARUQUI

On the morning of April 24, the victims' parents, along with residents of Thakurtola, approached the family members of the accused in Bhagatpur, 3.5 kilometres away, but were

allegedly turned away. Bhagatpur has electricity, roads, concrete houses, cattle, tractors and other farm machines.

"They first refused to believe that their sons had

done this and later offered us money to settle the matter among ourselves," said the father of one of the survivors.

Balaghat Superintendent of Police (SP) Nagendra Singh told The Hindu that while some area residents were pushing for a "settlement", the victims stood their ground.

"The village has been under the influence of Maoists for a long time, during which people here have been taught to avoid the police and the administration. Now, with the police visiting the area daily, people have begun to open up," he said.

### 'Won't back down'

On April 25, the survivors, their parents and members of a few tribal outfits reached the Godri police checkpoint and an FIR was filed under charges of gang

rape, assault, and provisions of the POCSO Act. By evening, the police arrested the accused, identified as Lokesh Matre, 22, Inglesh Matre, 19 (brothers), Ajayendra, 27, Maniram Bahe, 21 (brothers), Raju Bagdate, 21, Rajendra Sabre, 24, and Lal Chand Khare, 34. While the accused are currently in judicial custody, the survivors are staying at a State-run shelter home for children in Balaghat town.

Reena\*, one of the survivors, said the pressure from families of those accused to reach an agreement did not deter her from pursuing the case.

"Before leaving us in the jungle, they threatened us. But I told the police everything," she said.

Meanwhile, Kankar Munjare, a former MP and a prominent political figure in the area, dubbed

the "hurried" development works in Duglai an "insult" to the survivors and their families.

"Does someone have to get raped or killed to get basic civic services? This is not a form of compensation but an insult to their suffering," he said.

Balaghat Collector Mrunal Meena said there is no connection between the crime and the civic services push in the area.

"We had identified 200 priority villages for electrification under the DAJGUA [Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan] scheme, and the work is under way in many other villages as well. Duglai is among the villages most affected by Maoism. But we are working to connect these places with the mainstream," he said.

\*names changed to protect identity

### Key Issues Highlighted:

- Lack of Basic Civic Infrastructure:** Duglai village remained without electricity and road connectivity for decades. While infrastructure was attempted 12 years ago, it was never sustained. This reflects gaps in implementation, monitoring, and governance, especially in remote tribal and forested areas.
- Reactive Governance vs Proactive Planning:** The sudden civic overhaul—installing electricity, laying roads—came after public outrage following a horrific gang rape. This raises ethical and policy concerns: Should tragedy be the trigger for development? It questions the nature of the State's developmental priorities and timing.
- Left-Wing Extremism and State Presence:** Duglai's recent removal from the list of LWE-affected districts and its reclassification as a "district of concern" indicates a decline in Maoist influence. However, long-standing mistrust of the State, weak police presence, and absence of public services have created a vacuum of governance, contributing to underdevelopment and alienation.

## Daily News Analysis

4. **Social and Judicial Courage in Marginalized Communities:** Despite pressure from accused families and societal stigma, the survivors pursued legal action. This reflects a shift in tribal communities' willingness to engage with the justice system and the importance of State support mechanisms like shelter homes and tribal rights organizations.
5. **Gender-Based Violence and Rural Vulnerability:** The incident highlights the vulnerability of women and girls in remote areas—not only to physical violence but also to institutional neglect. Lack of street lighting, road access, and police outposts often delay justice and increase risk.

### Governance Implications:

- **Policy Design vs Ground Reality:** Despite schemes like DAJGUA for tribal development, actual implementation is often delayed or misaligned with people's needs.
- **Monitoring Mechanisms:** Infrastructure, once built, must be monitored for sustainability. The failure of electric poles laid years ago underscores the need for post-implementation evaluation.
- **Ethics in Governance:** As pointed out by a former MP, development should not be linked to tragedy. This highlights the need for dignity-based, not crisis-based, service delivery.

### Conclusion:

The Duglai episode illustrates the dual failure of proactive governance and social justice. While infrastructural push is welcome, it must not be conditioned by crisis. There is a need for systemic, inclusive, and anticipatory governance in remote and tribal regions to ensure dignity, safety, and development for all citizens - before tragedy compels action.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques :** Reactive governance in tribal areas undermines the principles of inclusive development. In light of recent developments in Madhya Pradesh's Duglai village, critically examine the role of State in delivering justice and infrastructure in LWE-affected regions.



The escalating tensions between India and Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 civilians were killed, has drawn international concern. The United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres issued a strong statement urging "maximum restraint" and cautioning against military confrontation, describing the situation as being at a "boiling point."

## India-Pakistan tension at its 'boiling point', says UN chief calling for calm

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

A military solution is "no solution" to the India-Pakistan conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday, calling for "maximum restraint" and offering to help in any way to bring down tensions between the two countries.

In one of his strongest such statements thus far, Mr. Guterres cautioned that both countries must avoid a military confrontation that he said could easily "spin out of control", describing the tensions since the Pahalgam attack as the "highest in years", and reaching a "boiling point".

"Now is the time for maximum restraint and stepping back from the brink. That has been my message in my ongoing outreach with both countries. Make no mistake, a military solution is no solution, and I offer my good offices to both governments in the service of peace," Mr. Guterres said in a statement at the UN in New York on Monday.

Mr. Guterres, who had called Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the Pahalgam terror attack, repeated his condemnation



**Peace appeal:** United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says both countries must avoid a military confrontation. AP

of the killings of 26 men, and said he was in touch with both countries. He said the targeting of civilians was "unacceptable" and those responsible must be brought to justice through "credible and lawful means".

"United Nations stands ready to support any initiative that promotes de-escalation, diplomacy and the renewed commitment to peace," he added.

### 'Closed-door' meet

The UN Secretary-General's statement came even as the UN Security Council members were due to hold a "closed-door" meeting on the situation, where Pakistan, as a current member, is present. After a UNSC resolution last

month, that was watered down at Pakistan's instance, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke to all other non-permanent members of the UNSC, including Greece, which has taken the Presidency of the UNSC this month.

Mr. Guterres's statement came on the heels of a number of statements from other countries calling for de-escalation and diplomacy as Mr. Modi has been meeting with military chiefs to discuss a possible strategy to respond to the Pahalgam attacks. In briefings to foreign envoys, the Ministry of External Affairs has said the attack had "cross-border linkages" while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has blamed Pakistan directly for "sup-

porting, training and funding" terrorist organisations.

### Restraint calls

However, several countries including the U.S., U.K., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the European Union have issued statements counselling restraint and avoiding a broader conflict. On Monday, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim issued a statement after a call with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who cancelled his visit to Malaysia amid rising tensions offering to mediate between India and Pakistan, with "close ties to both", and hoped for a swift de-escalation of tensions, adding support for an "independent and transparent" investigation into the Pahalgam attack.

The MEA did not respond to requests for comments on the UNSG statement as well as that of the Malaysian Prime Minister.

In a comment believed to be aimed at those counselling restraint and dialogue, Mr. Jaishankar said on Sunday that India looked for "partners" and not for "preachers", in expectations from the world in general, and Europe in particular.

### Key Issues Highlighted:

## Daily News Analysis

- 1. Rising Regional Tensions:** The UNSG's use of strong language - "boiling point", "highest in years" - reflects the seriousness of current Indo-Pak tensions, post the Pahalgam terror attack. India has attributed the attack to cross-border linkages, further worsening bilateral ties.
- 2. Call for Restraint and Diplomacy:** Multiple international actors - UN, U.S., UK, EU, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia — have called for de-escalation and diplomacy. The UN Chief also reiterated that "a military solution is no solution", urging both countries to step back from the brink.
- 3. India's Diplomatic Stand:** India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has maintained that Pakistan is responsible for cross-border terrorism, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh directly blamed Pakistan for funding and supporting terrorist groups. At the same time, India has refrained from accepting third-party mediation, aligning with its long-standing policy on bilateralism regarding Pakistan.
- 4. UN's Role and Limitations:** The UN Secretary-General offered his "good offices" to mediate - a gesture often symbolic unless accepted by both parties. India's response remains cautious, and it did not publicly comment on this offer or on Malaysia's offer of mediation.

### Diplomatic Implications:

- The situation puts India's strategic autonomy and sovereignty principles to test. India seeks global support but rejects unsolicited intervention.
- UNSC's internal debate, especially Pakistan's current presence as a member, adds complexity to India's engagement with multilateral bodies.
- India's External Affairs Minister's comment - "India looks for partners, not preachers" - reflects India's stance that moral lectures from the international community are not welcome without mutual respect and understanding of security concerns.

### Conclusion:

The India-Pakistan standoff post-Pahalgam attack presents a critical juncture for South Asian security and diplomacy. While the UN's plea for restraint underscores the international stakes in regional peace, India's assertive posture reflects the tension between sovereign right to act and global diplomatic pressures.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques :** "India's refusal to accept third-party mediation in the Indo-Pak conflict reflects its strategic assertion of sovereignty." In the context of recent UN and international calls for restraint, critically analyze India's diplomatic approach. **(250 words)**

Following the Pahalgam terror attack (April 22, 2025), geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan have escalated. In this context, credit rating agency Moody's released an assessment on the macroeconomic impact of these tensions, especially on Pakistan's economy and, to a lesser extent, on India's fiscal position.

## Increase in tensions could impair Pakistan's access to external financing: Moody's

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A persistent increase in tensions with India could impair Pakistan's access to external financing and pressure its foreign exchange reserves, which remain well below what is required to meet its external debt payment needs for the next few years, the rating agency Moody's said on Monday.

On India, it does not expect major disruptions in economic activity because it has minimal economic relations with Pakistan. However, higher defence spending will potentially weigh on India's fiscal strength and slow its fiscal consolidation.

"Our geopolitical risk assessment for Pakistan and India accounts for persistent tensions, which have, at times led to limited military responses. We assume that flare-ups will occur periodically, as they have throughout the two sovereigns' post-independence history, but that they will not lead to an outright, broad-based military conflict," it said in a report.

Pakistan military has undertaken mobilisation



**On the lookout:** Security personnel keeping vigil in Srinagar on Monday amid high alert after the Pahalgam terror attack. PTI

of heavy equipment along the border with India and has been conducting a series of exercises since tensions flared up in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22.

"Sustained escalation in tensions with India would likely weigh on Pakistan's growth and hamper the government's ongoing fiscal consolidation, setting back Pakistan's progress in achieving macroeconomic stability," Moody's said.

Pakistan's macroeconomic conditions have been improving, with growth gradually rising, inflation declining and foreign exchange reserves increasing amid continued progress in the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) programme, it noted.

It observed that macroeconomic conditions in India would be stable, bolstered by moderating but still high levels of growth amid strong public investment and healthy private consumption.

"In a scenario of sustained escalation in localised tensions, we do not expect major disruptions to India's economic activity because it has minimal economic relations with Pakistan (less than 0.5% of India's total exports in 2024), the agency said. "However, higher defence spending would potentially weigh on India's fiscal strength and slow its fiscal consolidation."



**Key Points from Moody's Report:****1. Impact on Pakistan:**

- **External Financing at Risk:** Sustained tensions with India may impair Pakistan's access to external financing and place stress on its foreign exchange reserves, which are already insufficient to meet short-term external debt obligations.
- **Macroeconomic Progress Threatened:** Although Pakistan's macroeconomic situation has shown signs of improvement (declining inflation, gradual growth, IMF-backed reforms), continued hostilities could derail:
  - a. Growth trajectory,
  - b. Fiscal consolidation efforts,
  - c. Macroeconomic stability.
- **Military Mobilization:** Pakistan's military has responded with border exercises and mobilisation of heavy equipment — signalling increased expenditure on defence and potential diversion of developmental resources.

**2. Impact on India:**

- **Minimal Trade Exposure:** India's economic exposure to Pakistan is very low (<0.5% of total exports), limiting the direct trade-related impact.
- **No Major Disruptions Expected:** India's economic activity remains resilient due to strong fundamentals:
  - a. High public investment,
  - b. Healthy private consumption,
  - c. Moderating but robust growth.
- **Fiscal Implications:** However, prolonged border tensions could lead to:
  - a. Increased defence spending,
  - b. Slowdown in fiscal consolidation efforts,
  - c. Potential pressure on fiscal deficit and public debt targets.

**3. Geopolitical Risk Outlook:**

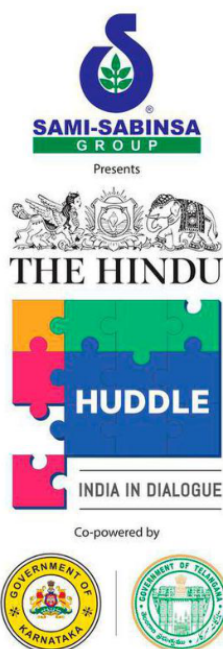
- Moody's notes that periodic flare-ups are a historic feature of India-Pakistan relations, but anticipates no full-scale conflict.
- The situation is likely to remain tense with occasional limited military responses.

**Conclusion:**

The Moody's report is a reminder of how geopolitical instability can have far-reaching economic consequences, especially for economically vulnerable nations like Pakistan. For India, while macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong, sustainable peace and reduced defence spending could catalyze even stronger economic outcomes. Strategic foresight, diplomatic engagement, and continued focus on economic resilience are the way forward.

India's federal structure, though enshrined in the Constitution, is witnessing increasing strain. While the Seventh Schedule clearly demarcates powers between the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists, the real-world practice of federalism in India is shaped as much by politics as by constitutional design. With a future delimitation exercise, political centralisation, and shifting identity politics, a renewed discussion on federalism has become essential.

## The Huddle to discuss reimagining India's federalism



**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Federalism in the Indian context has always been a complex and contested space, involving give and take between the Centre and the States.

Despite the constitutional and regulatory frameworks of the nation supporting the division of powers between the Centre and the States through the Seventh Schedule, specifying the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, pork barrel politics exerts an outside influence on governance decisions across the board in the modern era, and resource sharing is often premised on currying political favour.

Beyond contestation in the sphere of policymaking, there is now an existential challenge to the re-

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presentational power of States within the Indian Union, specifically in the Lok Sabha, in the form of a future delimitation exercise.

Will this exercise, now gathering steam and likely to be implemented in the aftermath of the next Census, lead to States that have brought down their respective population growth rates face a reduction in the number of MPs that

they can send to New Delhi? Will the fact that these States have also broadly been top performers in terms of economic growth and all-round development be factored into the calculation of how many MPs will be assigned to each of them?

In the arena of pure politics too, the intensity of competition has reached unprecedented levels, in terms of the BJP seeking to

expand its already-broad footprint into States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal, and deepen its grip on the political system in States such as Karnataka. Regional and other Opposition political parties in these States have offered a stout defence of a different political ideology to muscular nationalism. At the heart of this hard-fought political battle, playing out in every constituency of India, is a deeper question about identity politics that goes to the very soul of the pluralistic vision of Indian democracy - will it remain a country that tolerates diversity in religion, language, caste, and more, or will homogenising socio-political forces win the day?

To debate these transformational questions at the heart of India's democ-

racy, *The Hindu Huddle*, which will be held in Bengaluru on May 9 and 10, will host a panel of senior Ministers to debate the topic, "More than a sum of parts: reimagining India's federalism".

Helming this discussion will be Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, Minister of Information Technology and Digital Services for Tamil Nadu, Priyank Kharge, Minister for IT-BT, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj for Karnataka, and P. Rajeev, Minister for Law, Industries and Coir for Kerala. Narayan Lakshman, Curator of *The Hindu Huddle* and Opinion Editor, *The Hindu*, will moderate the discussion.

If you have any questions that you would like the moderator to ask the panellists, write to [huddle@thehindu.co.in](mailto:huddle@thehindu.co.in)

### Key Issues Highlighted in the Report:

#### 1. Constitutional Framework vs. Political Reality:

- The Indian Constitution provides a federal structure with a strong unitary bias, especially during emergencies.
- Despite the structural framework, actual governance is affected by pork barrel politics, wherein resource allocation is influenced by political loyalty rather than objective criteria.
- This undermines the fiscal autonomy and bargaining power of States, especially those governed by parties opposed to the Centre.

#### 2. Impending Delimitation and Representation Crisis:



## Daily News Analysis

- The proposed delimitation post-2026 (likely following the next Census) is a major concern, especially for Southern and Northeastern States.
- These States have successfully controlled population growth and contributed significantly to national development, but they now face a potential reduction in Lok Sabha representation due to their lower population growth compared to northern States.
- This raises a fundamental equity question: Should representation be based solely on population, or should contributions to national development and good governance also be considered?

### 3. Rise of Competitive and Centralising Politics:

- The BJP's political expansion into historically non-aligned or regional stronghold States (like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal) has intensified federal tensions.
- The increasing dominance of the Centre in policymaking, often sidelining State voices, is seen as a threat to cooperative federalism.
- Opposition parties have defended diverse ideological frameworks, including regional identities, welfare-centric governance, and pluralism.

### 4. Identity Politics and Pluralism:

- At the heart of the federal debate is a larger ideological contest over India's pluralist democratic values.
- Will India continue to be a federation that tolerates and celebrates religious, linguistic, caste, and cultural diversity, or will it drift toward cultural homogenisation and majoritarianism?
- This concern intersects deeply with federal values, as diversity is often manifested through regional aspirations and autonomy.

### Conclusion:

- The Hindu Huddle's focus on "Reimagining India's Federalism" is timely and significant. As India navigates demographic transitions, political centralisation, and ideological polarisation, the debate on what kind of federation India must become is not just academic — it is existential. The challenge is to create a federal structure that is more than the sum of its parts, embracing diversity while ensuring equity, efficiency, and unity.

## UPSC Prelims Practice Question

*Ques : Consider the following statements regarding Delimitation in India:*

- 1. The primary objective of delimitation is to redraw the boundaries of constituencies based on population data.*
- 2. Delimitation in India is carried out by the Election Commission of India.*
- 3. The next delimitation exercise in India is scheduled to be based on the population data from the 2021 Census.*

*Which of the above statements is/are correct?*

- a) 1 and 2 only*
- b) 2 and 3 only*
- c) 1 and 3 only*
- d) 1 only*

*Ans: c)*

## UPSC Mains Practice Question

*Ques: The constitutional idea of federalism in India is being tested by demographic changes, political centralisation, and identity politics. Discuss in the context of the proposed delimitation and Centre-State relations.(150 Words)*

In a global context where conservation laws are increasingly exclusionary, India's Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 stands out as a progressive and inclusive legal framework that aligns conservation with the rights and governance of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). The FRA not only addresses historical injustices but also offers a decentralised, democratic approach to forest and biodiversity management.

## India's Forest Rights Act stands apart from exclusionary laws globally

Most of the world's biodiverse regions are in places indigenous communities have traditionally lived and governed; they have protected biodiversity and nurtured it while being nurtured in return; laws that secure their tenure and recognise their rights can thus strengthen traditional governance

Aditi Vaiperei  
Prakriti Mukerjee

In many parts of the world, conservation laws and policies are becoming more exclusionary. They are disenfranchising local communities and indigenous people, disregarding their rights and role in conservation, and allowing the state as well as private interests to exploit resources.

Conservation science and its legal frameworks are rooted in colonial ideas, and define nature as "pristine" and untouched by humans. When wielding this approach – often called the fortress model – exclusive spaces called "protected areas" are created, where conservation is implemented with centralised state control, criminalising indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as encroachers.

Researchers have found that the fortress conservation model has displaced 10 to 20 million people around the world by separating their lives, livelihoods, and cultures from landscapes cordoned off as protected areas. While global conservation legislation is fairly recent, the role of IPLCs like the Maasai and Ogiek in Kenya, the Batwa in Uganda, the Ache in Peru, and Adivasi in India is well-documented. Most of the world's biodiverse regions are in places where these communities have traditionally lived and governed.

This is no coincidence: IPLCs have been custodians of local biodiversity, protecting it against being exploited and nurturing it while being nurtured in return. In turn, laws that secure IPLCs' tenure and recognise their rights can strengthen traditional governance systems used to sustainably manage their lands.

### Conservation with laws

In the prevailing global scenario, laws are crucial to facilitate conservation. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the largest international legal instrument from which many conservation and biodiversity-related multilateral treaties and legal frameworks have emerged. First presented at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, 196 countries are party to the CBD today, with their national legal frameworks being guided by the CBD framework. The CBD's main objectives are conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of biodiversity, including landscapes, species, and genetic resources.

India, one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries, is a signatory to the CBD and has a rich history of community-led environmental protection and conservation campaigns. It enacted the Biological Diversity Act (BDA) in 2002 to implement the objectives of the CBD. The Act provides for a three-tier institutional system: the National Biodiversity Authority is at the Centre and the State Biodiversity Boards and the Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) operate at the local level, to promote the conservation of local plants, animals, and habitats including documenting biodiversity-related traditional knowledge.

While attempts have been made to include communities in conservation through programmes such as Joint Forest Management, broader forest and resource laws have historically denied Adivasi and other traditional communities their access to forests and criminalised their rights, leading to large-scale dispossession. India formalised the protected-area model under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and Project Tiger in 1973. As of February 2025, the country has already notified 1,24 protected areas with 58 tiger reserves. Experts have recorded at least six lakh people displaced in this manner as a result.

Then, in 2006, Parliament passed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, or FRA, in a critical turning point in Indian legislation. The FRA linked the recognition of the rights of forest dwellers and Adivasis with the governance, management, and conservation of forests, natural resources, and biodiversity. To achieve this, the Act provides a framework for democratic, decentralised governance and management by vesting institutional authority in village-level gram sabhas.

### IPLCs and conservation

At present, many international legislative institutions are recognising the crucial role indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) play in biodiversity



An adivasi farmer fires dry paddy at her farm in Payarghodi village near Dang district in Gujarat. FILE PHOTO

conservation. Indeed, IPLCs have been campaigning to have their rights recognised at international meetings of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (the climate COP) and of the CBD.

Since 1992, the CBD has urged countries to "respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" through Article 8(j). Many protocols, working groups and subcommittees have been set up over the years to realise the Article's vision – to ensure governments recognise IPLC rights – but progress has been slow.

In 2007, the UN passed its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to address the discrimination IPLCs face throughout the world and to emphasise their right to "maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions."

### The Indian constitution

India voted in favour of this Declaration in 2007 yet the government has refrained from using the term and concept of "indigenous peoples" in its own laws, claiming all Indians are indigenous. However, the Indian constitution recognises Scheduled Tribe groups and provides an advanced framework to recognise and protect their rights. The Constitution also includes provisions related to Scheduled and Tribal Areas with Articles 244 and 244A. The 2011 Census reported that Adivasi numbered around 104 million, then 8.6% of the Indian population, effectively the world's largest population of indigenous people in a single country.

Over the years, the government has also advanced this constitutional framework by enacting parliamentary legislations, including the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas), or PESA, Act 1996 and the FRA 2006.

In fact, the FRA is arguably one of the most advanced legal frameworks in the world. It legally recognises the relationships between tenure security, rights of forest dependent communities, and biodiversity conservation and creates democratic mechanisms to strengthen these bonds. The Act also recognises that Adivasi and other traditional forest dwellers, have suffered historical injustice.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), which CBD signatories adopted at their COP-15 summit in 2022 in Canada, seeks to integrate and ensure equitable

**The FRA is arguably one of the most advanced legal frameworks in the world; it legally recognises the relationships between tenure security, rights of forest dependent communities, and biodiversity conservation, and creates democratic mechanisms to strengthen these bonds**

representation of IPLCs and their traditional knowledge in the implementation of the framework. The KMGBF envisions a world living in harmony with nature with a list of 23 targets to achieve it.

An important one is titled '30 by 30', i.e. countries committing to bring 30% of the world's land and marine areas under their protection by 2030. The targets also mention consultation and inclusion of IPLCs, their cultural practices, and their traditional knowledge.

The FRA, on the other hand, adopts a more nuanced approach to conserving biodiversity. Of the 13 kinds of rights recognised under the Act, two are especially important in the present context: "right of access to biodiversity and community, right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity, and cultural diversity," and "right to protect, regenerate, or conserve or manage any community forest resource that they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use."

### The situation in 2025

In November, the CBD's COP-16 summit established a permanent subsidiary body for IPLCs and also adopted a programme of work on Article 8(j). This body made the CBD the only UN Convention with a dedicated platform to implement the rights of IPLCs.

India also came up with a list of 23 targets under its updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) that it aims to achieve by 2030. While these targets protect the rights of local communities and conserving biodiversity, the plan itself establishes existing protected areas. Even though updated NBSAPs emphasise a paradigm shift towards a bottom-up governance approach – as in the FRA – it excessively involves State forest departments and State-led conservation measures over decentralised approaches.

The implementation of the updated NBSAPs rely significantly on the BMCs (which have yet to become fully functional). It's not clear how the NBSAPs will build synergy between the different

governance approaches.

Thus, for all these international victories, the struggle for the rights of IPLCs in conservation approaches is far from over. The premise of the '30 by 30' agenda itself jeopardises these rights because it promotes the idea that simply expanding protected areas will arrest biodiversity loss.

### Beyond protected areas

The KMGBF makes provisions to move beyond protected areas through its "other effective area-based conservation measures" (OECMs). India plans to notify the OECM guidelines soon. Some experts have expressed optimism that this is an opportunity to involve communities in conservation.

Each OECM is to be identified by four features: shouldn't already be a protected area; is already governed and managed by governments, private entities or IPLCs; makes sustainable efforts to conserve biodiversity; and protects ecosystem functions as well as cultural, socio-economic, etc. values.

But without proper checks and legal recognition of rights, OECMs can become tools of exploitation – just the way the CBD and the BDA are designed to "monetise" nature in a way that accrues benefits to IPLCs yet renders biodiversity and traditional knowledge vulnerable to being exploited for corporate interests. It therefore behoves the BDA framework to strengthen the existing FRA framework.

Indeed, the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs stressed in its response to the draft Biodiversity Rules 2024 (dated April 10, 2024): that instead of creating new mechanisms to manage resources and biodiversity, the government should combine them with the gram-sabha-led community forest resource management systems under FRA. It also asks that before declaring any biodiversity heritage sites, the government must ensure it has completed the process of settling forest dwellers rights under the FRA and received the prior informed consent of in fact gram sabhas.

Research estimates that FRA has the potential to protect at least 4 crore ha of forest land, including existing protected areas. To enable it to do so without also dispossessing the stewards of this land, other laws and policies must comply with the FRA.

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**Key Highlights and Issues:****1. Global Shift Towards Exclusionary Conservation:**

- Many conservation models worldwide still reflect colonial 'fortress conservation' ideology, where protected areas are cordoned off from human presence and centrally governed.
- This has led to the displacement of 10 to 20 million people globally, criminalising IPLCs who have traditionally managed these ecosystems.
- Such approaches ignore that most biodiverse regions overlap with areas governed by IPLCs, who have historically protected and sustained biodiversity.

**2. India's Legal and Institutional Evolution:**

- India formalised exclusionary conservation through the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and Project Tiger (1973), displacing an estimated 6 lakh people.
- The Biological Diversity Act (2002), aligned with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), created institutions like National Biodiversity Authority, State Boards, and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs).
- However, these frameworks often failed to adequately integrate or empower forest-dwelling communities.

**3. Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 – A Paradigm Shift:**

- FRA legally acknowledges 13 types of rights, including:
  - a. Community forest rights
  - b. Access to biodiversity
  - c. Rights over traditional knowledge and cultural diversity
- It links conservation with tenure security and community-led governance, placing authority in Gram Sabhas.
- Recognises Adivasis and forest dwellers as stewards of biodiversity rather than encroachers.

**4. International Frameworks and IPLCs:**

- Article 8(j) of the CBD and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) emphasize respect for traditional knowledge and IPLC rights.
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) (COP-15, 2022) promotes IPLC inclusion with its '30 by 30' target.
- Yet, critics argue that expanding protected areas without securing rights may jeopardise IPLCs' livelihoods and cultural autonomy.

**5. India's 2025 Position and Concerns:**

## Daily News Analysis

- India's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) includes community rights and bottom-up governance in theory but continues to rely heavily on State-led conservation and under-functional BMCs.
- The push for Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) could empower IPLCs if implemented inclusively—but risks becoming exploitative without legal safeguards.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has emphasised aligning OECM and biodiversity laws with FRA frameworks, ensuring prior informed consent of Gram Sabhas before declaring Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

### Conclusion:

The Forest Rights Act marks a critical departure from exclusionary conservation models and is arguably one of the most progressive legal frameworks in the world for inclusive biodiversity governance. However, its effective implementation remains inconsistent and vulnerable to dilution. For India to truly lead in ethical, sustainable conservation, existing laws like the FRA must be central, not peripheral, to any future biodiversity strategy or conservation agenda.

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques : Which of the following statements regarding the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 is/are correct?**

1. It provides legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwellers.
2. It allows Gram Sabhas to manage community forest resources.
3. It replaces the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 in protected areas.

**Select the correct answer using the code below:**

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

**Ans: a)**

## Daily News Analysis

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques :** The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is not merely a welfare legislation but a powerful tool for environmental justice. Discuss in the context of inclusive forest governance and tribal rights.





**Paper 02: Polity , Governance & Social Justice****UPSC Mains Practice Question: Caste****enumeration is both a tool for empowerment and a source of political fragmentation.****Examine this statement in light of recent debates on caste-based census in India.(250 words)****Context :**

For the first time since 1931, the Indian government has decided to include caste-based data in the national census. This move has sparked debate on both its logistical complexities and socio-political implications, particularly in relation to affirmative action, social justice, and governance.

**Key Issues and Themes:****1. Historical and Policy Background:**

- Since Independent India's censuses, caste enumeration has been limited to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and religion-based demographics.
- OBCs (Other Backward Classes) have benefitted from reservations based on Mandate of the Mandal Commission, but without an accurate, updated count.
- The last attempt at caste-based enumeration was in the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, which faced major data classification issues, yielding over 46

**Cast of characters****Caste census presents both challenges and opportunities**

**F**or the first time since 1931, Census forms will record the caste of Indians, but questions remain on the extent of the impact that the data would have on India's affirmative action programmes. Decadal censuses, until now, have categorised citizens as SCs, STs and as per religion. In decades of reservation for SCs, STs, and OBCs, there have been concerns about which communities or individuals within these groups are able to access the benefits. The demands for a creamy layer to eliminate the economically better-off sections from reservation quotas, and for sub-categorisation to ensure smaller or relatively more backward communities are not crowded out, have gained moral and political legitimacy. The Supreme Court of India, last August, cleared the way for sub-categorisation within SCs and STs and the Justice G. Rohini Commission in 2023 finished a study to examine sub-categorisation within OBCs. The Court's judgment was quick to draw a sharp fault line within SC and ST communities on the issue of sub-categorisation and the potential for upset in the Commission's report has forced the government to keep its findings closely guarded. Caste groupings continue to be a determinant of political and social life and empirical data on these are essential for more effective development planning. However, the search for increased representativeness through slicing and relabelling of social groups could be an infinite process, leaving some group or the other always dissatisfied.

The other challenge is the logistics of how caste enumeration should be conducted in a country where community-based claims are numerous. The understanding of what caste is, the difference between a sub-caste and a caste group, and the reconciliation of the understanding of caste names with their morphing according to linguistic and regional variations are issues. This gap in understanding caste was reflected in the SECC 2011 dataset as well, which yielded more than 46 lakh different "castes". Apart from the fact that there is no repository of all castes except for the lists of SCs, STs, and OBCs, the question of how to classify communities as castes, tribes, or socially and educationally backward classes continues to be litigated in High Courts and the Court in the form of countless petitions for inclusion or exclusion. The decision to enumerate caste can also be an opportunity to arrive at a consensus on these questions. The political diatribe that accompanied caste enumeration exercises in Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana shows that this could be volatile. The Centre should build consensus on the details, now that all parties are in agreement with caste enumeration in principle. That will keep the integrity of its finding intact and beyond reproach.

lakh caste names.

## 2. Legal and Judicial Developments:

- The Supreme Court's 2023 ruling upheld the constitutionality of sub-categorisation within SCs and STs.
- The Justice G. Rohini Commission report on OBC sub-categorisation was completed but remains undisclosed due to political sensitivity.
- These developments aim to ensure fairer distribution of reservation benefits and intra-group equity, especially among marginalised sub-sections of large social groups.

## 3. Opportunities from Caste Enumeration:

- **Policy Precision:** Comprehensive caste data can make affirmative action and welfare schemes more targeted, inclusive, and data-driven.
- **Development Planning:** It enables empirical grounding for schemes in health, education, employment, and housing for backward communities.
- **Social Justice:** Helps identify intra-group disparities, avoiding elite capture of benefits within SCs, STs, and OBCs.
- **Legitimacy of Claims:** Official recognition of castes/sub-castes can help settle inclusion/exclusion disputes and strengthen democratic participation.

## 4. Challenges and Concerns:

- **Classification Complexity:** Without a unified caste directory, distinguishing between caste, sub-caste, regional variants, and their linguistic variations is difficult.
- **Data Integrity:** The risk of inflated, manipulated, or inconsistent self-reporting of caste identities, as seen in SECC 2011.
- **Legal Contention:** Ongoing litigation over caste categorisation and inclusion in reservation lists creates judicial burden and social discontent.
- **Political Volatility:** Experiences from Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana show that caste surveys can be emotionally charged and politically polarising, affecting social cohesion.
- **Endless Fragmentation:** As social groups seek recognition for access to benefits, constant relabelling and reclassification may create perpetual dissatisfaction.

**Conclusion:**

The upcoming caste census presents a rare opportunity to base India's social justice policies on evidence rather than estimates. However, it must be implemented with political consensus, administrative clarity, and sensitivity to social dynamics. Otherwise, it risks becoming a source of division rather than a tool for inclusion. The government must institutionalise checks, clarify classifications, and promote transparent, inclusive data practices to uphold the constitutional promise of equality.





**Paper 02& 03: Governance& Indian Economy**

**UPSC Mains Practice Question:** India relies heavily on foreign ports for transshipment. In this light, evaluate how ports like Vizhinjam can help realise the objectives of the Sagarmala Programme and the National Logistics Policy. (250 words)

**Context :**

The commissioning of the Vizhinjam International Transshipment Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport in Kerala marks a significant turning point in India's maritime infrastructure. Developed under a public-private partnership (PPP) between Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd (APSEZ) and the Kerala government, it addresses India's longstanding dependence on foreign ports for transshipment and aims to transform the country into a major global maritime player.

**Key Features and Strategic Importance:**
**1. Strategic Location and Natural Advantage:**

- Located on the east-west shipping axis, Vizhinjam lies close to major international maritime routes linking Europe, West Asia, and Southeast Asia.
- With a natural draft of 20 metres, the port can handle ultra-large container vessels without significant dredging, reducing maintenance costs and improving efficiency.

**2. Reducing Foreign Dependence:**

- India currently transships nearly 75% of its container cargo through foreign ports like Singapore, Colombo, Salalah, and

**Maritime hub**

The Vizhinjam port offers enormous economic benefits for India

**T**he commissioning of the Vizhinjam International Transshipment Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport, developed by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) under a public-private partnership model with the Kerala government, marks a milestone in India's maritime history. For a country such as India, which relies heavily on foreign ports for handling around 75% of its inbound and outbound transshipment cargo, resulting in an annual revenue loss of approximately \$200 million-\$220 m, the port presents enormous economic opportunities. Its natural draft of about 20 metres, requiring minimal capital dredging, and its proximity to international shipping routes linking Europe, West Asia and the Far East – the east-west shipping axis – position it as a strong contender to become a transshipment hub. This could potentially bring home a significant portion of Indian cargo transshipment handled by the Singapore, Colombo, Salalah and Dubai ports. Ultra-large container vessels can berth without deviating from their route, thereby saving costs. As India's first semi-automated port equipped with remote-controlled quay cranes and an AI-powered vessel traffic management system, Vizhinjam will significantly reduce vessel turnaround times. India's container throughput capacity last year was approximately 20 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units), contrasting with China's 330 million TEUs. This highlights the need for modern ports such as Vizhinjam along India's coastline.

Following the project's agreement in 2015, the Kerala government faced challenges, including protests from fisherfolk supported by the Latin Church, natural calamities and the COVID-19 pandemic. Commercial operations commenced in July 2024, with 265 ships, including large mother ships, having berthed so far. In the first phase, the Kerala government invested ₹5,595 crore, Adani Ports spent ₹2,454 crore, and the Union government provided a viability gap fund loan of ₹818 crore – a funding structure that sparked political debate. For Vizhinjam, an all-weather port, to become a game-changer in South Asia's maritime trade, the Centre and the State must ensure the timely completion of rail and road connectivity, which is crucial for leveraging the port's full potential. This will facilitate efficient cargo delivery to the entire hinterland of South India. The subsequent development phases, for which APSEZ and the Kerala government have signed an agreement involving an investment of around ₹9,500 crore by 2028, must also be implemented promptly. Warehousing, logistics, and industrial facilities are essential for the port to evolve into a thriving commercial maritime hub.

Dubai, leading to annual losses of ~\$200–220 million.

- Vizhinjam offers a viable domestic alternative, enhancing India's logistics autonomy and trade sovereignty.

### **3. Technological Edge:**

- India's first semi-automated port, equipped with remote-controlled quay cranes and AI-based vessel traffic management, will ensure faster turnaround times and operational efficiency.
- This positions Vizhinjam as a future-ready port, aligned with global best practices.

## **Challenges and Implementation Hurdles:**

### **1. Socio-environmental Protests:**

- The project faced strong resistance from local fishing communities, supported by the Latin Church, over fears of livelihood loss and environmental degradation.
- This highlights the need for inclusive development with proper rehabilitation, compensation, and dialogue mechanisms.

### **2. Natural and Pandemic Disruptions:**

- The project suffered delays due to natural calamities and the COVID-19 pandemic, testing the resilience of project planning and execution.

### **3. Political and Financial Controversies:**

- The funding structure, including ₹5,595 crore from the Kerala government, ₹2,454 crore from Adani Ports, and ₹818 crore as central viability gap funding, triggered political debates over privatization and public accountability.

## **Opportunities and the Road Ahead:**

### **1. Enhancing National Throughput Capacity:**

- India's container throughput (20 million TEUs) is far below China's (330 million TEUs) — a gap that Vizhinjam could help bridge.

### **2. Multiplier Economic Benefits:**

- Development of warehousing, logistics parks, and industrial corridors around the port could generate employment, boost exports, and support South India's industrial hinterland.

### **3. Importance of Last-mile Connectivity:**

- Success depends on timely completion of rail and road links, which will allow smooth movement of goods to and from the port.
- The integration of Vizhinjam with National Logistics Policy and Sagarmala initiative will further enhance its viability.

**Conclusion:**

Vizhinjam port presents a historic opportunity for India to position itself as a transshipment and logistics hub in the Indo-Pacific. To realise its full potential, the project must be completed in a timely, inclusive, and sustainable manner. A well-connected and efficiently governed Vizhinjam can not only reduce India's trade dependency but also serve as a blueprint for next-generation maritime infrastructure.

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