

NEWS TODAY

Panel by Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) Recommends Ways for Eliminating Proxy Participation in PRIs

Report of the committee is titled as “Transforming Women’s Representation and Roles in Panchayati Raj Systems and Institutions: Eliminating Efforts for Proxy Participation”.

➤ In **Mundona Rural Development Foundation vs UoI (2023)** Supreme Court directed forming committee to examine proxy participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).




Women’s Reservation in PRIs

- **Constitutional Mandate:** 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) established a three-tiered panchayat system and also mandated 1/3rd reservation of seats for women in PRIs.
 - ⊕ This quota was further expanded to nearly 50% by 21 States (Bihar was the first such state).
- **Current Representation:** 46.6% of elected panchayat representatives are women.
- **Issue of Proxy Representation:** Many elected women serve as mere figureheads, with male relatives (like sarpanch pati) taking control.
 - ⊕ Such practices give the impression that ‘women are not effective leaders’, defeating the purpose of reservation.

Key Reforms Proposed by the Committee

- **Strict Penalties:** Punishment for proven cases of male interference, though specifics remain undefined.
- **Stronger Policies:** Kerala-style gender-exclusive quotas, public swearing-in ceremonies, and women panchayat federations.
- **Technological solutions:** Virtual reality simulation training, integrating AI-powered query-driven replies to provide real-time legal guidance to WERs [Women Elected Representatives] in vernacular languages etc.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Helplines, watchdog committees, and whistleblower rewards for reporting proxy leadership.
 - ⊕ Use of Panchayat Nirnay Portal to allow citizens to track elected pradhans’ participation in meetings and decisions.

Importance of Women Participation in PRIS

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|  <p>Greater Response to Women’s Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in reserved panchayats are twice as likely to address requests or complaints from women citizens (MIT, 2003) • Political decentralization improves maternal healthcare, boosting institutional births and safe deliveries |  <p>Better Community Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-led councils invest more in essential infrastructure: water, sanitation, roads, schools, health centers, and irrigation • Research by NCAER (2010) confirms impact on community development |  <p>Pathway to Higher Political Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger grassroots leadership creates opportunities for women to increase their presence in higher political offices • Builds pipeline for representation in Lok Sabha & State Legislatures |
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At UN Biodiversity COP16.2, FAO Urges Bold Action to Align Agrifood Systems with Global Biodiversity Goals

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 16.2) in Rome builds on COP16 momentum in Colombia, where FAO launched Agri-NBSAPs with the Colombian government and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

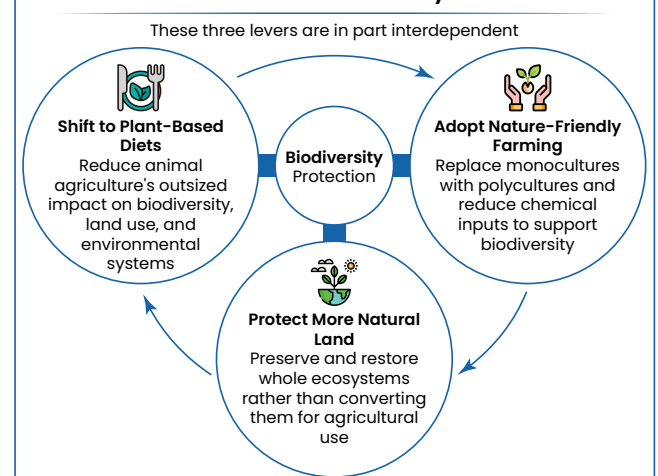
About Agri-NBSAPs

- Agri-NBSAP aims to assist governments in integrating agrifood systems (AFS) into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and their implementation.
 - ⊕ NBSAP provides a framework for biodiversity conservation, enables sustainable use of biological resources.
 - ◆ Countries frame NBSAP under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) which aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.
- It provides a collective mechanism to help governments build capacity, identify and implement strategic levers across AFS to achieve their NBSAP targets.

Why AFS should be Integrates into NBSAPs?

- **Meeting KM-GBF Goals:** Over half of 23 targets of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) are related to agriculture.
 - ⊕ KM-GBF aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.
- **Cutting Emissions:** Agrifood systems produce nearly 1/3 of global greenhouse gases driving climate change, which further degrades habitats and causes biodiversity loss.
- **Protecting Food Security:** Biodiversity supports pollination, soil fertility, and pest control.
 - ⊕ Biodiversity decline threatens 3 billion lives with 75% of food crops depend on pollinators.

Key Reforms Needed in Agrifood Systems to Protect Biodiversity



India's approach to Africa focuses on building than extracting: Minister of External Affairs

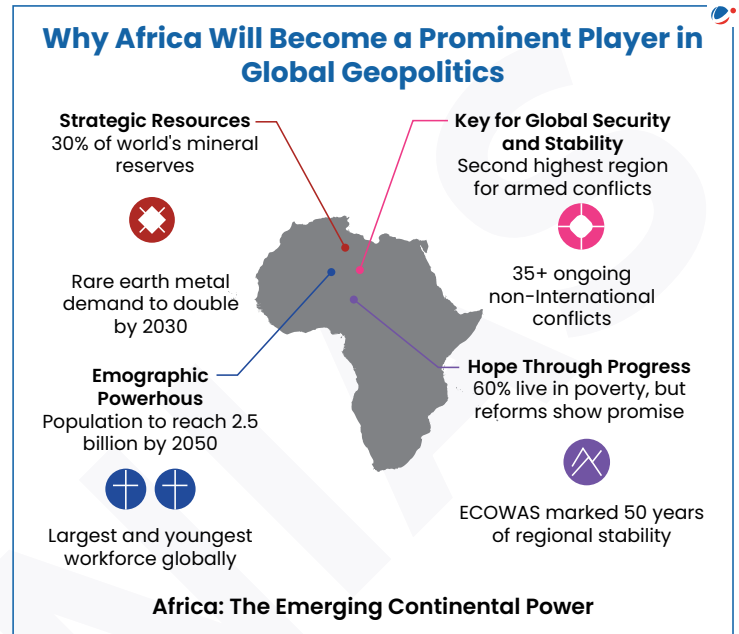
At the Japan-India-Africa Business Forum, the Minister emphasised India's commitment to Africa through **capacity-building, skill development, and technology transfer** (a sharp contrast to China's extractive model).

- **India fosters mutual growth**, while China controls various strategic mineral reserves, in Africa. Unlike China's debt trap policy, India offers **duty-free trade**.

Evolving Nature of India-Africa Relations

- **Expanding Economic Presence:** India is **Africa's 4th largest trading partner** with nearly **\$100 billion** in bilateral trade.
- **Driving Sustainable Development in Africa:** India Provides a **\$12 billion concessional credit**, funding **200+ infrastructure projects** in railways, power, agriculture, etc.
 - ⊕ **ITEC Program & Pan-African e-Network, e-VidyaBharti & e-ArogyaBharti** are key initiatives.
- **Giving Voice to Africa:** India advocated for **African Union's permanent G20 membership** during India's presidency.
 - ⊕ Platforms like the **India-Africa Forum Summit** to enhance cooperation.
- **India-Japan-Africa collaboration:** Leveraging Japan's investment, India's technology, and Africa's talent for shared growth.
 - ⊕ Indian and Japan launched **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)** in 2017 to further democratic, sustainable, and inclusive development in Africa.

India's engagement with Africa is important as following Asia's rise, the coming decades are expected to be of Africa's (refer to the infographic).



CII Study highlights the need of Quality Transformation in Indian Manufacturing

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) released a report titled '**Raising the Standard: Quality Transformation in Indian Manufacturing**' which underscores need for continuous improvement and proactive quality assurance practices to **maintain compliance and boost competitiveness in global market**.

Key highlights of the Report

- Majority of companies (77%) observed a **significant improvement in quality consciousness** over the past decade.
- **Key drivers promoting shift towards quality** include regulatory compliances, pursuit of strong **brand reputation** and customer trust, **competitive pressures**, and **technological advancements**.
- **Gaps in National Quality Standards:** Lack of specific national standards in few sectors including Technology and Capital Goods reflects an uneven or incomplete regulatory landscape.

Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Quality in Indian Manufacturing

Policy Agenda

- ⊕ **Quality-Centric Skilling and Certification Programs:** To equip workers with quality-specific skills in precision control, quality management systems, and compliance with international standards.
- ⊕ **'Quality as a Service' (QaaS) Partnerships:** Develop a PPP initiative to provide shared quality infrastructure and expertise through a "Quality as a Service" model.

Industry Agenda

- ⊕ **Continuous Quality Improvement Training for Leadership and Management:** To train senior and middle management in continuous quality improvement (CQI) practices and advanced quality metrics, etc.
- ⊕ **Digital Supplier Quality Management Systems:** To provide real-time data and insights into supplier performance, enabling proactive quality monitoring and ensuring that quality issues are detected and addressed promptly.

Initiatives taken to ensure quality manufacturing in India

- **Standardization & Compliance – BIS, FSSAI, DCGI** set industry-specific standards, ensuring product safety and international alignment. (e.g., ISI mark for certified quality).
- **MSME Sustainable (ZED) Certification:** Extensive drive to create awareness amongst MSMEs about Zero Defect Zero Effect (ZED) practices.
- **Make in India & PLI Schemes –** Promote globally competitive manufacturing with quality-driven incentives across key sectors. (e.g., Electronics, Automotive).

Southern States will not lose Seats on Delimitation: Union Home Minister

While promising that the southern States would get their rightful share of any increase in seats, Minister also assured that not a single Lok Sabha seat is going to be reduced on a pro rata basis.

Concerns of Southern States with Delimitation

- **Population control penalty:** Delimitation based on population may reduce the number of seats for southern states, penalizing them for effective governance on population control.
- **Imbalance in Political representation:** Redistribution based on population could lead to a dilution of political representation for southern states in Parliament.
- **Federalism and regional autonomy:** Significant shift in representation could weaken federalism as national policies might be tailored to suit northern states' priorities.

About Delimitation

- It is the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
- **Constitutional Provisions**
 - ⊕ **Articles 82 and 170** provide for readjustment and the division of each State into territorial constituencies (Parliamentary constituencies and Assembly constituencies) by such authority and in such manner as Parliament may, by law, determine.
 - ⊕ **Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution of India** provide for reserving number of seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of States.
 - ⊕ **84th Constitutional Amendment, 2001:** Froze the delimitation of constituencies until the first census after 2026.
- **Delimitation Commissions:** Till date, Delimitation Commissions have been Constituted 4 times under Delimitation Commission Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972, and 2002.
- **Orders of Delimitation Commissions**
 - ⊕ **Orders have the force of law** and cannot be challenged in court.
 - ⊕ **Come into effect on a date specified by the President of India.**

Australia unveiled a new Roadmap for Economic Engagement with India

Australia's ambitious roadmap focuses on deepening and diversifying its trade and investment ties with India identifying four "superhighways of growth" - clean energy, education and skills, agribusiness, and tourism.

Key highlights of the Roadmap

- **Identifies nearly 50 specific opportunities** to focus and accelerate Australia's engagement with India in several areas such as defence, industries, sports, culture, space, and technology.
- **Australia-India Trade and Investment Accelerator Fund:** It will help Australian businesses unlock new commercial opportunities in India.
- **Australia-India Business Exchange (AIBX)** to accelerate B2B engagement.
- **Reinvigorated Australia-India CEO Forum:** To provide a key business-to-business mechanism to accelerate commercial engagement.
- **Maitri ('friendship') Grants programme:** To enhance P2P, B2B and cultural links between the two nations.

Evolving relationship between India and Australia

- **Trade: Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) 2021** gave a boost to free trade with Australia aiming to place India among its top three export markets by 2035.
- **Nuclear cooperation:** Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement signed in 2014.
- **Strategic partnership:** Australian Government in its **National Defense Strategy (NDS) 2024** identified India as 'top-tier security partner' in the Indo-Pacific Region.
- **Defense cooperation: Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and Defense Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement** have been signed.
 - ⊕ **AUSTRAHIND, AUSINDEX, Pitch Black** are a joint military exercise between two countries.

Also In News



Bhitarkanika National Park (BNP) in Odisha

Migratory birds leave BNP due to rise in temperature.

About BNP

- **Ecosystem:** India's 2nd largest mangrove ecosystem after the Sunderbans.
 - ⊕ Formed by creeks & canals fed by Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra, and Patasala rivers.
- **Fauna:** Consists of largest population of endangered Saltwater Crocodiles in India.
 - ⊕ **Olive Ridley turtles'** nest on Gahirmatha and other nearby beaches.
 - ⊕ Other key species include **Migratory birds, 8 Kingfisher varieties, deer, hyenas, wild boars, etc.**
- **Unique Phenomenon:** Bagagahana or the heronry near Surajpore creek wherein thousands of birds colonise the creek for nesting and the aerial acrobatics performed before the mating.



Caspian Sea

Environmental activists raised concerns over the rapidly declining water levels in the Caspian Sea.

- It has already lost nearly 31,000 square km since 2005.

About Caspian Sea

- It is the largest enclosed water body in the world.
- **The sea is bordered by five countries:** Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Iran.
 - ⊕ **Kazakhstan has the longest coastline** along the Caspian Sea.
- Its **oil reserves** are estimated at **48 billion barrels**.
- **Reasons for declining water level:** The climate crisis, excessive water use for agriculture, and pollution from nuclear waste, industry and poor urban planning, etc.



TAX | **General Anti Avoidance Rules**

Income tax authorities can issue reassessment notices under **General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR)** under the **proposed Income Tax Bill, 2025**.

About GAAR

- It is an **anti-tax avoidance law to curb tax evasion and avoid tax leaks**.
- It acts as a **tool for checking aggressive tax planning** especially that transaction or business arrangement which is/are entered into with the objective of avoiding tax.
- Currently, since **April 01, 2017**, it has been established under the **Income Tax Act, 1961**.
- GAAR was reviewed by an **expert committee led by Parthasarathy Shome**.

Tantric Buddhism and Relics

A **1.4m Buddha head** and stupas (1,500+ years old) found in **Ratnagiri, Odisha**, confirm its role as a **Tantric Buddhism hub**.

- Buddhism has **three main schools: Theravāda** (orthodox), **Mahāyāna** (includes Zen & Pure Land), and **Vajrayāna** (includes Tibetan Buddhism).

Evolution of Tantric Buddhism

- Tantric Buddhism was a shift from **abstract philosophy to sadhana (practical methods) for enlightenment**.
- Mahayana Buddhism** introduced **mantras & rituals**, leading to two branches: **Mantrayana (early Tantra) & Paramita-yana**.
- The **mantra-yana may be regarded as the 'initial' stage of Tantric Buddhism** when yogic practices got added to it, it became full-fledged **Tantric Buddhism**.

FCT | **WHO FCTC**

WHO marks 20 years of its first global treaty, the **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)**.

About WHO FCTC

- Genesis:** Adopted in **2003**, enforced in **2005**.
- Purpose:** Provides a **legal framework for tobacco control** which includes **large pictorial health warnings, smoke-free laws, and higher taxes**.
- India's Role:** Ratified in **2004**, served as **South-East Asia's regional coordinator**.
- Impact:** **5.6 billion people** covered by at least one policy, contributing to **declining global smoking rates**.

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI)

AWBI will honour **Champions of Animal Protection Award** under two major categories **Prani Mitra and Jeev Daya Award**.

- This initiative aims to recognize **outstanding individuals and organizations** for their remarkable contributions to animal welfare and protection.

About AWBI

- Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act (PCAA) 1960** established the AWBI in 1962 as a **statutory advisory body** on Animal Welfare Laws and promotes animal welfare.
- It was **started under the stewardship of Rukmini Devi Arundale**, well known humanitarian.
- It consists of **28 Members including 6 Members of Parliament (2 from Rajya Sabha and 4 from Lok Sabha)**.

Battle of Karnal

Battle of Karnal fought on February 24, 1739 shaped the political landscape of the subcontinent.

About the Battle of Karnal

- Fought between **Nadir Shah, ruler of Afsharid Persia** and the **Mughal Empire led by Emperor Muhammad Shah**.
- Outcome: Mughal forces were defeated** and Emperor Muhammad Shah was taken captive by Nadir Shah, marking a significant blow to the Mughal Empire's authority and prestige.
 - Nadir Shah sacked **Agra and Delhi** and carried the **Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor** to Persia.
- Significance:** Highlighted the **growing influence of external powers** and the weakening grip of the Mughals over their dominions.
 - It also laid the **groundwork for further invasions and foreign interventions in India**.

Red color of Mars

A study published in **Nature Communications** challenges the long-held belief about Mars' red color.

Findings of the New study about Red Color of Mars (The Red Planet)

- Previous studies attributed Mars' red color to **anhydrous hematite formed through recent weathering**.
- New study finds **poorly crystalline ferrihydrite (Fe₃O₄H · nH₂O)** is the main iron oxide in Martian dust.
 - It is formed during a **cold, wet period on early Mars under oxidative conditions**. It suggests Mars underwent aqueous alteration before becoming the dry desert seen today.

Personality in News | **NEWS** | **Veer Narayan Singh (1795-1858)**

Eminent Freedom Fighter during 1857 Revolt **Veer Narayan Singh** was remembered on his punyatithi (February 25).

About Veer Narayan Singh

- He was a landlord from **Sonakhan, Chhattisgarh**.
- His ancestors were from the **Gond tribe** and were residing in Sarangarh. **Later on, they changed their affiliation from the Gond to the Binjhar tribe** and moved to Raipur district.

Key Contributions

- During the severe famine of 1856**, he took out grains from the grain warehouse and distributed them among the poor to save them from hunger.
 - British arrested him in 1856 for looting a trader's grain stocks.
- In 1857, he escaped from prison and **formed an army of 500 men at Sonakhan**.
- He spearheaded the 1857 Revolt** in Chhattisgarh and is considered as "**1st Chhattisgarhi freedom fighter**".



Ethical Values: Patriotism, Leadership, Courage, Empathy, etc.

