



THE HINDU



# GS Paper 2-Governance

## *The panchayati raj movement is in distress*

**T**he special discussion in Parliament on the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution has long passed. While several salient aspects of the Constitution and policy directions adopted by previous governments were highlighted, one heard very little on a vital aspect of governance in India.

The 73rd amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1992, is one of the landmarks of India's journey as a constitutional republic, establishing the panchayati raj system. However, the momentum towards deepening local governance in India has stalled. Big shifts in both technology and society are threatening to make panchayats irrelevant, unless we are prepared to rethink their role. The 73rd amendment initiated the process of institutionalising decentralisation in rural India. The three-tier system, at the village, block, and district levels, with a regular cycle of local elections and 50% reservation for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, kicked off a movement that took democracy to the grassroots, thus emphasising the importance of local representation and inclusion in political leadership.

### **There is one bright spot**

Panchayati raj elections are now keenly contested in many parts of the country. There have been many success stories – possibly the most notable of them being the scale of women's participation in leadership (nearly 14 lakh elected women representatives). The Constitution also mandated State Finance Commissions to recommend the quantum of funds that should flow to local



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is an international development professional with experience across Africa and South Asia, and has a specific interest in decentralised governance

panchayati raj movement in India. Panchayats now operate in a very different development paradigm from when they were originally introduced, and there is now a real risk that the spirit of the panchayati raj movement will die.

### **A decline, the big shifts**

Let us look at four such big shifts.

First, administrative decentralisation has plateaued. In order to function effectively, State governments need to devolve staff to local governments and cede administrative control. Similarly, the flow of untied grants that flow to local governments needs to increase to enhance autonomy in local decision-making. Having made an initial set of reforms, the sense one gets is that there is no momentum. A report in 2022 by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj showed that less than 20% of States have devolved all 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Second, in practical terms, panchayats have been forced to cede fiscal autonomy over recent years. Direct transfers to panchayats increased from ₹1.45 lakh crore under the Thirteenth Finance Commission (2010-15) to ₹2.36 lakh crore under the Fifteenth Finance Commission (2021-26). At the same time, there has been a significant reduction in untied grants, from 85% in the Thirteenth Finance Commission to 60% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission. Further, these direct transfers are being used by the central government to marginalise State governments in the name of efficiency, while the tied grants give them more control through central government functionaries and central scheme guidelines.

Third, the larger reason is a reimagination of

seen in recent decades. In 1990, nearly three-quarters of India lived in rural areas. This has now decreased to around 60%, and is going down steadily. The consistent trend of urbanisation has meant that the policy focus of development has shifted to India's cities and towns. Municipal reforms, both of governance and financing, is the main priority of today.

### **Ways to revive the system**

As highlighted, it is evident that over the last decade, the view from the top is increasingly one that treats panchayats merely as last-mile delivery instruments for social sector schemes in rural India. This view of local governance is not conducive to a revival of panchayats in the country.

Of course, electoral politics at the panchayat level and the representation and the power that comes from winning will not allow panchayats to wither away very soon. But local governance in rural India needs to be revived in substantive terms as 94 crore Indians still live in villages. Over 45% of the population is still engaged in agriculture. Rural India – call it Bharat if you will – cannot be overlooked.

With advancements in technology, citizen engagement in local planning, decision-making and accountability processes will deepen. A networked panchayati raj system could play a vital role in bridging the rural-urban divide, for instance, by supporting safe and dignified internal migration, and also supporting both migrants and their families that stay behind.

Another area towards which the role of panchayats could be focused is to play a role in



## KEY POINTS

- 73rd Amendment (1992): Established panchayati raj, promoting local governance, democracy, and inclusion.
- Current Issues: Decline in public participation, overdependence on central schemes, and politicization threaten panchayats' effectiveness.



- **Challenges:** Plateaued administrative decentralization. Reduced fiscal autonomy due to central control. Cash transfer reliance, bypassing panchayats. Shift towards urban-focused policies due to rapid urbanization.
- **Revival Suggestions:**
  - Enhance citizen engagement and local decision-making.
  - Reclaim panchayats' role in water conservation, renewable energy, and disaster management





# GS Paper 2-IR



# How have Big Tech companies backtracked on their DEI goals?

Sahana Venugopal

### The story so far:

## Why do people oppose DEI?

inclusion training programs, we will build programs that focus on how to apply fair and consistent practices that mitigate bias for all, no matter your background,” said Meta’s memo, per Axios.

inclusive so we can build products, services, and a workforce that empowers the world. The business case for D&I is not only constant but stronger than ever," wrote Microsoft's Chief Diversity Officer



## KEY POINTS

- Tech companies are revising or rolling back Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, with some, like Amazon and Meta, cutting back or halting such programs. Critics argue DEI can discriminate against majority groups, while supporters believe it's vital for fairness.
- Companies like Apple, Microsoft, and McKinsey continue backing DEI. DEI policies offer benefits such as inclusive workspaces but may also face challenges like bias or failing to address all forms of discrimination.







THE HINDU



## GS Paper 2-Governance

# DMK MP's Bill revives debate on quota in judicial appointments

**D. Suresh Kumar**  
CHENNAI

The debate on the need for introducing reservation in the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts has been revived by the recent introduction of the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, 2024 by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Rajya Sabha



P. Wilson

must be made keeping in mind social diversity within the institution.

In the Bill, he has sought



## KEY POINTS

The Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced by P. Wilson, proposes reservation in judicial appointments for SCs, STs, OBCs, women, and minorities. It aims to ensure transparency, set timelines, and involve state governments in the process, along with creating a Memorandum of Procedure for selecting judges.







## GS Paper 2-IR

### Cook Islands signs agreement for closer relations with China

Agence France-Presse  
WELLINGTON

The Cook Islands says it has signed a deal to expand relations with China, stressing that the accord does not impinge on ties with former colonial power New Zealand.

Prime Minister Mark Brown said he signed an "action plan for the comprehensive strategic partnership" with Chinese Premier Li Qiang in the northern city of Harbin



Mark Brown

Islands, a country of 17,000 people, has a "free association" relationship with New Zealand, which





## KEY POINTS

The Cook Islands, located in the South Pacific Ocean between American Samoa and French Polynesia, comprises 15 islands spread over 2.2 million square kilometers. The capital is Avarua, on Rarotonga island. The country has a "free association" with New Zealand, which provides support in budget, foreign affairs, and defense.





# *The Indian* **EXPRESS**

## GS Paper 3-Economy

### What are India's sovereign green bonds, and why is demand for such bonds weak?

**AGGAMWALIA**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

LIKE SEVERAL emerging markets, India also turned to sovereign green bonds to help fund its transition to a low-carbon economy, but investor demand remains weak. While green bonds help governments raise capital for clean energy and infrastructure, India's issues have struggled to secure a meaningful 'greenium'—lower borrowing costs typically associated with such bonds.

As a result, planned allocations for key schemes, including grid-scale solar, have been slashed. With muted investor interest, India is relying on general revenue to bridge funding gaps. Addressing liquidity issues, im-

#### DEBT INSTRUMENTS

**GREEN BONDS** are debt instruments issued by governments, corporations, and multilateral banks to raise funds for projects that reduce emissions or enhance climate resilience

**ISSUERS TYPICALLY** offer green bonds at lower yields than conventional bonds, assuring investors that the proceeds will be used exclusively for green investments

those that encourage energy efficiency in resource utilisation, reduce carbon emissions, promote climate resilience, and improve natural ecosystems.

Since 2022-23, India has issued SGrBs eight times and raised almost Rs 53,000 crore. Each year, the government uses roughly 50 per cent of proceeds from SGrBs

raise adequate proceeds from SGrBs impacts funding for schemes eligible under it and increases pressure on general revenue to meet the shortfall.

Initially, the estimated funding requirement from SGrB proceeds for 2024-25 stood at Rs 32,061 crore. However, after unsuccessful attempts to sell SGrBs



## KEY POINTS

- India's sovereign green bonds (SGrBs) aim to fund low-carbon projects, but investor demand remains weak, limiting the effectiveness of these bonds. Despite issuing Rs 53,000 crore through SGrBs since 2022, India struggles to secure a greenium (lower borrowing cost). This has led to cuts in key projects like grid-scale solar. Liquidity issues and low foreign investor participation are challenges.





# *The Indian* **EXPRESS**

## GS Paper -2-Governance

### PRIME MINISTER DHAN-DHAANYA KRISHI YOJANA: SCHEME'S NEED, AIMS

**HARIKISHAN SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

FINANCE MINISTER Nirmala Sitharaman while presenting the Union Budget on February 1 announced the launch of the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDKY).

Here's all you need to know.

#### On the lines of ADP

"Motivated by the success of the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP), our government will undertake PMDKY in partnership with States," Sitharaman had said while announcing the programme.

ADP was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2018. The programme aimed to quickly and effectively transform 112 of the most under-developed districts across India, based on 3 Cs



One of the parameters PMDKY will consider is crop intensity. File

At the all-India level, the cropping intensity was recorded at 155% in 2021-22, although the figure greatly varied from state to state. Cropping intensity was only 111% in 1950-51.

Sources also said that the ministry has requested the Department of Financial Services and NABARD to share the data



## KEY POINTS

- The Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDKY), announced in the 2025 Union Budget, aims to transform 100 underdeveloped districts by improving agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable practices, enhancing post-harvest storage, expanding irrigation, and ensuring credit access for farmers. The scheme, inspired by the Aspirational Districts Programme
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# PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

## GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



## GS Paper 3-Defence



Ministry of Defence

### INDIAN NAVY PLATFORMS ARRIVE IN INDONESIA TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW 25, AND THE MULTILATERAL NAVAL EXERCISE KOMODO

Posted On: 16 FEB 2025 6:25PM by PIB Delhi



## KEY POINTS

1. The Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK), held biennially since 2014 by the Indonesian Navy, focuses on enhancing cooperation and interoperability among Asia-Pacific navies in humanitarian operations, disaster management, and maritime security. The 2025 exercise, taking place from February 14–22 at Benoa Harbor, will involve 58 countries,

