



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**RIISING SEAS, SHIFTING LIVES, AND
A TEST OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES**

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RISING SEAS, SHIFTING LIVES, AND A TEST OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Context

- As climate change accelerates sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and coastal erosion in India's coastline affecting its environment, socially and politically.

About India's Coastal Vulnerability

- India's **11,098.81 km**-long coastline is a vital ecological, economic, and cultural asset.
- According to the **National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR)**, nearly 34% of India's coastline is eroding.
- The **District-level Climate Risk Assessment** reveals that over 50 districts face 'very high' flood risk, while 91 districts are at 'very high' drought risk—some facing both simultaneously.

Democratic Values Related To Climate-induced Displacement

- **Territorial Justice:** It focuses on fair distribution of resources and protections across geographic regions.
 - ♦ It argues that states need to prioritize policies that offer urgent short-term improvements while enabling long-term justice for displaced populations.
- **Deliberative Democracy:** It emphasizes inclusive, participatory decision-making.
 - ♦ It supports grassroots movements and community-led planning as expressions of democratic agency.
- **Pluralist Theory of Climate Displacement:** It rejects the idea of a one-size-fits-all 'climate refugee' status.
 - ♦ It recognizes the complexity and diversity of displacement contexts, and advocates for context-specific responses and burden-sharing across institutions.
- **Global Justice and Cosmopolitanism:** It argues that wealthy nations bear responsibility for climate impacts due to historical emissions.
 - ♦ It supports international burden-sharing and rights-based frameworks for cross-border climate migrants, and calls for global cooperation and ethical migration policies.
- **Human Rights-Based Approaches:** It is grounded in constitutional and international law (e.g., **Article 21** of India's Constitution i.e. **Right to Life**).
 - ♦ It demands recognition of climate migrants' rights to life, dignity, work, and housing.
- **Environmental Democracy:** It links ecological sustainability with democratic governance.
 - ♦ It advocates for transparency, accountability, and public participation in environmental decision-making, and supports movements resisting ecologically harmful development projects.

Related Concerns

- **Industrial Projects and Ecological Erosion:** The Sagarmala port programme, commercial aquaculture, and energy projects have intensified coastal degradation.
 - ♦ Natural protective barriers — mangroves, dunes, wetlands — are systematically cleared, worsening climate vulnerabilities.
 - ♦ Environmental clearances often ignore cumulative climate risks, further endangering communities.
- **Urban Migration and Labour Exploitation:** Displaced populations often end up as informal workers in cities like **Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai** — taking up construction, brick kiln, and domestic work. It is added with systemic exploitations like:
 - ♦ **Debt bondage:** Families locked into unfair wage advances
 - ♦ **Legal exclusion:** Minimal protection under India's labour laws
 - ♦ **Gendered risks:** Women domestic workers face abuse, underpayment, and trafficking.

- **Democratic Values Under Pressure:** Movements like Save Satabhaya (Odisha), Pattuvam Mangrove Protection (Kerala), and protests against Ennore port expansion reflect community resilience.
 - ♦ Environmental defenders face surveillance, intimidation, and criminalization—undermining constitutional rights to protest and association.
- **Coastal Communities in Crisis:** In Odisha's Satabhaya, entire villages have been submerged, leaving residents in resettlement colonies with few means of sustenance.
 - ♦ Patterns of ecological and social displacement mirror across Karnataka's Honnavar taluk, Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam, Gujarat's Kutch, and flood-prone regions in Kerala.

Legal and Policy Gaps

- **No dedicated law:** India lacks a legal framework to address climate-induced migration.
 - ♦ Existing laws like the **Disaster Management Act (2005)** and **Environment Protection Act (1986)** focus on disaster response, not long-term displacement.
- **CRZ Notification 2019:** Criticized for favoring industrial and tourism development over community rights, leading to further marginalization of coastal populations.
- **Labour protections:** India's Labour Codes do not extend specific safeguards to climate migrants, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
- **Legal Precedents, Unrealised Protections:** Supreme Court judgments in 1987 and 1996 affirmed the **link between environment and human rights**.
 - ♦ However, these principles remain poorly translated into community-centric protections.

Key Government Initiatives

- **MISHTI (Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes):** It aims to restore 540 sq km of mangroves across coastal states and UTs.
- **Coastal Flood Warning Systems:** Developed for vulnerable cities like Chennai and Mumbai.
- **Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI):** Maps high-risk zones using satellite and GIS data.

Way Forward

- **Legal Recognition:** Acknowledge **climate migrants** in migration and urban planning frameworks.
- **Labour Protections:** Extend **India's labour codes** to informal and climate-displaced workers.
- **Sustainable Coastal Management:** Reinstate ecological buffers and prioritise community rights.
- **Participatory Resettlement:** Ensure displacement and rehabilitation are carried out with community consent and long-term support.
- India's commitment to **UN's SDG 8.7** — eliminating forced labour and ensuring decent work — hinges on addressing the vulnerabilities created by climate displacement.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] In the context of climate-induced displacement along India's coasts, how do rising sea levels challenge the foundational principles of democracy such as justice, inclusivity, and participatory governance?

