

EDITORIALS - 3RD OCT 2026

1. Rescue act (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial 'Rescue act' was published in **The Hindu** on 3rd Oct 2026, highlights the need to prevent ecological degradation and involve **communities** in **wildlife conservation** rather than rely on reactive **tiger reintroduction**.

Reintroduction and Ecological Constraints

- After the **National Tiger Conservation Authority** found no tigers in Buxa, Dampa and Palamau by **2018**, a Bengal Forest Department–Wildlife Institute of India programme arranged a Bihar tigress's release in Buxa, first of seven relocations over two years.
- Buxa's settlements, revenue villages and tea estates cause **habitat fragmentation**, including migration corridors; existing railways, a proposed restored route to Jainti and Bhutan–West Bengal road traffic compound **wildlife threats**.
- **Closed forest canopies** suppress grasses and reduce herbivores; low chital density creates **prey scarcity**, with goats, macaques and cattle increasingly replacing preferred ungulates in tiger diets.
- Since 2018, interventions have included **chital reintroduction**, canopy opening to revive grasses and **village relocation** from the reserve's core to mitigate human–wildlife conflicts.

Conservation Approach and Community Costs

- Conservation since **1973** protected source populations, habitats, prey bases and corridors; Buxa follows a **reactive approach**, also seen in Sariska and Panna, where intervention followed tiger population crashes.
- **Tiger reintroduction** demonstrates technical capacity but is expensive and heavy-handed; Project Tiger's **inviolable core** principle has been used to override Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities' rights and disrupt ecotourism incomes.

Conditions for Lasting Recovery

- Buxa forms an **international wildlife corridor** contiguous with Phibsoo in Bhutan and Manas in Assam; higher prey density or fewer disturbances elsewhere could cause **tiger dispersal**.

- **Reintroduction success** requires territorial establishment, cub production, survival and subsequent breeding, while **natural immigration** sustains genetic diversity.
- **Preventive conservation** requires monitoring ecological deterioration before tigers disappear and involving local communities in **conflict prevention** and livelihood protection.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Legal Safeguards for Forest-Dwelling Communities

- **Livelihood rights:** The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 recognises eligible communities' resource rights; Maharashtra's Mendha-Lekha secured community forest rights in 2009 and subsequently exercised bamboo harvesting and sale rights.
- **Protection from eviction:** Section 4(5) generally bars eviction before forest-rights recognition and verification are complete, a safeguard reiterated by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in July 2025.
- **Gram Sabha authority:** In the Niyamgiri judgment of 2013, the Supreme Court entrusted Gram Sabhas with determining affected tribal religious rights, reinforcing community participation in decisions affecting customary forest use.
- **Scientific justification:** Section 4(2) requires evidence of irreversible wildlife damage and the unavailability of reasonable alternatives, including coexistence, before relocating rights holders from critical wildlife habitats.
- **Informed consent:** Relocation under Section 4(2) requires written, free informed consent of concerned Gram Sabhas to both resettlement and its package, protecting communities against unilateral displacement.
- **Rehabilitation security:** Section 4(2) requires secure livelihoods and completion of promised facilities and land allocation before relocation; vacated critical wildlife habitats cannot subsequently be diverted to other uses.
- **Accessible remedies:** Sections 6(2) and 6(4) provide petitions to Sub-Divisional and District Level Committees against forest-rights decisions, enabling communities to challenge adverse claim determinations.

2. El Niño calls for wider tracking of climate stress (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial 'El Niño calls for wider tracking of climate stress' was published in **The Indian Express** on 3rd Oct 2026, highlights the need for **coordinated**, ecosystem-wide **monitoring** to **detect** local ecological stress and strengthen climate resilience.

Climate Stress and Ecological Vulnerability

- Following a **12.6% rainfall deficit** during the southwest monsoon, the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** forecasts extremely dry conditions across most of India for the remaining year.
- Strengthening **El Niño** can reduce river and wetland water availability and stress farms, forests and oceans, creating **cascading impacts** on lives and livelihoods.
- Similar rainfall deficits produce different ecosystem responses depending on soil moisture, vegetation, groundwater and human pressure; **Super El Niño** can push already stressed systems beyond thresholds, making **micro-monitoring** crucial for identifying resilience and directing scarce resources.

Monitoring Priorities and Institutional Coordination

- **Satellite observations**, which improved weather forecasting and disaster response, need field-level support; Uttarakhand's planned sensors at Vasundhara Tal will connect water-level, snow-depth and other glacial-lake changes with **early-warning mechanisms**.
- Tracking **soil moisture**, vegetation stress and animal movement can identify dry forest patches early; warmer winters, erratic western disturbances and declining Himalayan snow cover alter moisture cycles, increasing **forest-fire vulnerability** before spring.
- Monitoring **coral thermal distress** can reveal marine ecosystem health and support **shoreline protection** against waves and erosion.
- Nearly **200 ecologists** appealed last month for an emergency ecosystem-wide monitoring network; fragmented monitoring across research institutions, departments, universities and citizen groups requires a **coordination framework**, as the current El Niño likely exceeds any single institution's tracking capacity.

Beyond Editorial

Climate-Proofing Indian Agriculture

- **Drought-tolerant crops:** Resilient varieties can protect production during rainfall shortages; Sahbhagi Dhan rice exhibits drought tolerance without a yield penalty under normal conditions compared with similar-duration varieties.
- **Crop diversification:** Suitable, less water-demanding crops can reduce irrigation pressure; Pusa JG 16 chickpea was developed for drought-prone parts of central India facing terminal drought.

- **Efficient irrigation:** Drip and sprinkler systems improve farm-level water-use efficiency; the Per Drop More Crop scheme promotes these technologies to help farmers manage limited irrigation supplies.
- **Rainwater harvesting:** Stored runoff supports irrigation during dry spells; Jalkund interventions under National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) supported winter vegetable cultivation in Sikkim.
- **Moisture conservation:** In-situ moisture conservation and conservation agriculture help crops withstand rainfall breaks; NICRA demonstrations include these practices alongside green manuring and alternative rice cultivation methods.
- **Contingency planning:** District Agriculture Contingency Plans prepared for 651 districts recommend location-specific crops, varieties and management practices, translating weather risks into practical agricultural responses.
- **Income protection:** Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme cover specified crop losses, helping farmers absorb financial shocks from adverse weather.

3. A captain's courage, and a question for aviation (GS Paper III Security)

This editorial 'A captain's courage, and a question for aviation' was published in **The Indian Express** on 3rd Oct 2026, highlights the need to address **insider threats** within aircraft cockpits while preserving **crew trust** and **operational autonomy**.

Insider Threats and Security Gaps

- Captain Smit Machchhar helped save **174 passengers and eight crew members** aboard **Flydubai FZ1073** after his co-pilot stabbed him in an apparent attempt to down the aircraft; opening the cockpit enabled others to overpower the attacker and onboard pilots to take control.
- **Post-9/11 safeguards**, including locked cockpit doors and restricted access, deter external hijacking but can obstruct rescue when an **insider threat** emerges.
- The **UAE investigation** is examining a possible terrorist connection; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alleged radical indoctrination and bypassed airline restrictions, but these claims require **thorough investigation**.

Security Reassessment

- Rigorous **crew screening**, improved risk identification and **rapid-response protocols** could address threats posed by cockpit or cabin personnel.

- Institutionalised safeguards must preserve **crew trust** and **operational autonomy**, both essential for flying aircraft.
- The incident is likely to revive debate over **cockpit access** and **video recorders**, alongside continuous vetting and procedures for threats originating within the flight deck.

BEYOND EDITORIAL

Mental Health Support in Aviation

- **Confidential assistance:** Accessible support encourages early help-seeking; European Union rules require proactive, non-punitive programmes for flight crew facing problems that could impair safe performance.
- **Peer support:** Trained colleagues can connect distressed pilots with professional help; British Airways' Speedbird Pilot Assistance Network illustrates an established pilot peer-support programme.
- **Preventive assessment:** Following the Germanwings Flight 9525 crash, European reforms introduced psychological assessment before pilot employment, embedding preventive evaluation within aviation safety arrangements.
- **Stigma-free reporting:** Encouraging self-assessment supports timely disclosure; the Air Line Pilots Association's "Are You in the Green?" campaign helps pilots evaluate fitness and access assistance.
- **Fatigue management:** Rosters, rest arrangements and training should address fatigue-related impairment; European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) guidance includes recognising fatigue symptoms and evaluating crew mental and physical condition.
- **Monitored recovery:** Individual clinical evaluation should guide medical certification; the United States Federal Aviation Administration uses specially trained examiners to evaluate and monitor specified substance-related or mental health conditions.
- **Privacy safeguards:** Protecting personal information strengthens confidence in support services; EASA guidance requires confidential, non-stigmatising handling of data concerning flight crew referred to support programmes.