



Environmental Challenges in Northeast India

For Prelims: [Public Interest Litigation](#), Meghalaya Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Guidelines, 2023, [Garo-Khasi-Jaintia hills](#), [Sixth Schedule of the Constitution](#), North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS).

For Mains: Balance between Development and Environmental Conservation in Northeast India.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Meghalaya High court In the case of *Re: Cleanliness of Umiam Lake versus State of Meghalaya, 2023*, stated that “In the absence of any other employment opportunities the **natural beauty of the State should not be destroyed**”.

- The Ruling shed light on the challenge of promoting tourism, infrastructure development, and construction while **safeguarding the region's natural beauty**.

What is the Background?

- The Meghalaya High Court was hearing a [Public Interest Litigation \(PIL\)](#) on the cleanliness of the **Umiam Lake**.
- The Umiam Lake case brought attention to the adverse impact of unregulated **construction and tourism on the lake and around the waterbody**.
- The court emphasized that economic development shouldn't come at the cost of destroying the region's natural beauty.
- The **Meghalaya Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Guidelines, 2023**, were criticized for inadequately addressing the issue of unchecked construction around water bodies, highlighting the need for more comprehensive regulations.

How does the Biodiversity of Northeast Intersect with its Developmental Challenges?

- **Biodiversity Hotspot:**
 - Northeast India is a **green belt region due to its abundant natural resources** such as oil, natural gas, minerals and freshwater.
 - The [Garo-Khasi-Jaintia hills](#) and the Brahmaputra valley are **some of the most important biodiversity hotspots**.
 - Northeast India is a part of **Indo-Burma hotspot**.
- **Concerns:**
 - Though the northeast is industrially backward, **deforestation, floods, and existing industries are causing serious problems** to the environment in the region.
 - An environmental assessment of the **North East Rural Livelihood Project**

undertaken by the Ministry of Development of the North-eastern Region lays out that “**Northeast India lies within an ecologically fragile**, biologically rich region, highly prone to climatic changes, located in trans-boundary river basins.

- Both flora and fauna of the areas are under threat due to [Deforestation](#), [Mining](#), [Quarrying](#), [Shifting Cultivation](#).

▪ **Legal Framework and Challenges:**

- The [Sixth Schedule of the Constitution](#) grants autonomy to District Councils, limiting state authority over land use.
 - This **autonomy** sometimes results in **inadequate regulations**, as seen in the case of Umiam Lake.
- PILs and judicial activism, under [Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution](#), have played a pivotal role in **enforcing environmental protections**.
- The [National Green Tribunal's](#) imposing fines on states for environmental violations underscores the role of legal mechanisms in safeguarding the environment.

How can Sustainable Growth be Promoted in the North East?

▪ **North East Industrial Development Scheme:**

- The '**Negative List**' within the [North East Industrial Development Scheme \(NEIDS\)](#), 2017, is a commendable step, ensuring that entities adhering to environmental **standards receive incentives**.
- If an entity is not complying with environment standards; not having applicable environmental clearances; does not have consent from the concerned pollution boards, it will not be **eligible for any incentive under the NEIDS** and will be put on the '**negative list**'.

▪ **Act Fast for North East:**

- The 'Act Fast for Northeast' policy should not only include “trade and commerce” but also the **preservation of “environment and ecology”** in the region.

▪ **Uniform and Comprehensive Environmental Legislation:**

- To effectively address environmental issues at all governance levels, a uniform and comprehensive environmental legislation is crucial.
- Such legislation would bridge gaps in regulations, ensuring that economic growth aligns with environmental sustainability.

What are the Key Facts about Umiam Lake?

- Umiam Lake is one of the **biggest artificial lakes** in Meghalaya that is situated about 15 km from Shillong.
- The lake is a reservoir that was **created as part of a dam construction project on the Umiam River** (also known as **Barapani River**).
 - The dam was constructed to generate **hydroelectric power for the region**.



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