



Felling of Khejri Trees

Why in News?

A significant environmental conflict has emerged in **Rajasthan's Thar Desert**, particularly in Bikaner district, as **solar energy** companies begin **felling centuries-old Khejri trees for land acquisition**.

- This clash between **'greenery'** (the preservation of the environment) and **'green energy'** (solar power development) has led to widespread protests, with local farmers and environmentalists **demanding stricter tree protection laws**.

Key Points

Khejri Trees

- **About:** Khejri or Khejdi (*Prosopis cineraria*), also known as **shami in Rajasthan**, is a hardy, drought-resistant tree that has been a symbol of survival in the harsh desert.
 - Khejri trees that are hundreds of years old are **easily found in the fields of the western districts of Rajasthan**.
 - The Khejri leaves, locally called luk, are used as nutritious feed for domestic animals such as camels, goats, sheep, etc.
 - The **fruit Sangri** is an important part of Rajasthani food.
- **Recognition:** Khejri was officially declared Rajasthan's state tree in 1983.
 - Under this status, the state government imposed restrictions to protect the tree, including **prohibiting felling it under the Rajasthan Tenancy Act, 1965, and the Rajasthan Forest Act, 1953**.
- **Cultural & Spiritual Importance:** In 1730 AD, a small village located 26 km southeast of Jodhpur in Rajasthan became the site of one of the first and most intense environmental protection movements in India.
 - The **'martyrs' (notably Amrita Devi)** of this movement were members of the **Bishnoi community**, who gave their lives to protect the Khejri trees.
 - In the 1970s, this sacrifice became the **inspiration behind the Chipko Movement**.
- **Alternative Strategies for Preservation:**
 - Environmentalists argue that solar power can be generated through alternatives that do not require large-scale deforestation.
 - For **example**, **solar panels can be installed on rooftops, government buildings**, or even on long canals (similar to successful projects in Punjab).
 - While these methods **may be more expensive**, they would **safeguard the region's biodiversity**.