



Monthly Editorial Consolidation



1st January to 31st January 2021

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Water, Sanitation & Women's Rights

This article is based on **"Women must be centre-stage in water and sanitation"** which was published in *The Hindustan Times* on 31/12/2020. It talks about the interlinkages between water, sanitation & women's rights.

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 2, Role of Women, Issues Related to Women

The right to water and sanitation is recognised as fundamental to attaining all other human rights. However, globally, 2.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water at home, and 2.3 billion do not have basic sanitation and 1 billion still practice open defecation.

Amongst this, women are the most vulnerable section. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to essential water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Women are largely responsible for household water, sanitation and hygiene management; they bear a disproportionate burden when these basic services are lacking, and face health, security and psychological vulnerabilities due to inadequate access and decision-making control.

Therefore, access to water and sanitation, if delivered well, empowers women economically and socially. Done poorly, it may undermine women's position at home and in the community.

Interconnection: Water, Sanitation & Hygiene With Women's Rights

- **Women's Water-Fetching Responsibility:** Women and girls are responsible for fetching water in most households where a drinking water source is off-premises.
 - This practice has implications for women's health, workloads, and caloric expenditure.
 - When girls carry water over long distances, the time available to them to pursue education is reduced.
 - Water-fetching responsibilities also add to the burden of **unpaid domestic work**, decrease time towards other income-generating activities, and affect leisure and nonessential activities.
- **Sanitation Access and Gender-Based Violence:** There is enough evidence of sanitation-related gender-based violence, highlighting a range of vulnerabilities women and girls face who are forced to defecate openly.
 - This leads to the fear of sexual violence that can restrict freedom of movement and affect equal opportunities.

- **Women's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Needs:** Women have an increased need for water for hydration, sanitation and hygiene during menstruation, pregnancy, the postnatal period, and caring for sick family members or young children.
 - When these basic needs are not met, women and girls are unable to participate equally in society.
- **Linkage With SDGs:** The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** make an essential initial step in connecting water, sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6) and gender equality and empowerment (SDG 5) through target 6.2.
 - Target 6.2 of SDG emphasises **'access to equitable sanitation and hygiene and women and girls'** needs.
 - Further, SDG 10 aims to **reduce inequalities within and between countries**. Equal access to clean water and sanitation is critical to reducing overall disparities.

Associated Challenges

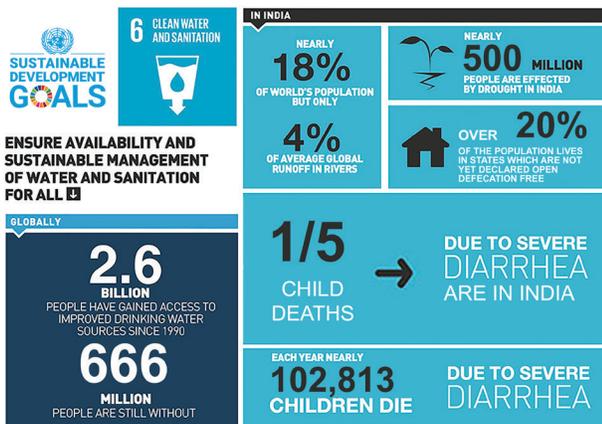
- **Lack of Women's Participation in Decision-making:** The central role of women and girls in the procurement and management of water, sanitation and hygiene at the household level is recognised.
 - However, women's water, sanitation & hygiene governance and household decision-making control over such resources are scarce.
 - For example, women not being consulted in decisions taken on sanitation-related matters such as the building and using toilets. It also fails to take into account the prevalent socio-cultural norms.
- **Lack of Data:** Measurement of the burden placed on women and girls, the opportunity costs of these burdens, and female empowerment related to water, sanitation and hygiene decision-making and autonomy are limited.
- **Lack of Adequate Infrastructure:** In many parts of India (especially in rural India) water, sanitation and hygiene in health-care facilities are far from adequate.
 - In schools, the lack of necessary infrastructure, privacy, spaces, materials and guidance to manage menstruation has been associated with harassment, sexual exploitation, psychosocial impacts, decreased school attendance rates and drop-out for girls.

Way Forward

- **Gender-Neutral Approach:** There is a need for the political imperative to recognise that both women and men's involvement are integral to sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene management.
- **Policy Framework for Women Leadership:** Women's leadership and decision making power in water

and sanitation is critical. Therefore, enabling policy frameworks backed by resources, training and political will, are vital to developing and sustaining women's leadership in the water sector at the local, national and global level.

- In this context, there is a need to invest in developing the next generation of water, sanitation and hygiene leaders, by collaborating with colleges, water utilities and districts, using experiential learning, internships and interacting with experts.
- **Sustained Focus on Swachh Bharat Mission:** The rallying call of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) campaign of "Satyagraha se Swachhagraha" has led to the significant change in sanitation habits in India.
 - The next SBM phase should envisage finding solutions for sustained behaviour change, addressing women and their hygiene needs.
- **Role of Society:** As the women already spend 2.6 times more hours than men on unpaid activities, including caregiving and domestic work.
 - Citizenry as a part of society to ensure their involvement in water and sanitation services does not further contribute to the burden of unpaid work, or decrease the ability to earn an income.
- **Role of SHGs:** There are rapidly increasing examples throughout the country, with women being able to push through reforms through the help of support groups or community-led efforts.
 - Therefore, women SHG should be promoted to take up the cause of water, sanitation and Hygiene.
 - In this context, Jharkhand's example is worth emulating. Trained women masons built over 15 lakh toilets in one year and the state was declared open defecation free (rural) much ahead of the national cut-off date of October 2, 2019.



Conclusion

As countries work to achieve SDG 10, access to clean water and sanitation can be a game-changer for prosperity

and transformation. Policies on water and sanitation need to keep women centre-stage needs and enable them to be agents of change.

This is the time for governments, businesses, NGOs and academic institutions to look at how they are investing in women's leadership in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, from local committees to the international stage.



Melting of the Arctic

This article is based on "*When the Arctic warms, it will affect sea levels and precipitation patterns globally*" which was published in *The Indian Express* on 02/01/2021. It talks about the melting arctic ice and its global impact.

Tags: Biodiversity & Environment, GS Paper - 3, Environmental Pollution & Degradation, Conservation

In the Arctic region, the effects of global warming can be seen most dramatically, as the area is warming up twice as fast as the worldwide average. The ice cap in the Arctic is shrinking fast, and the volume of Arctic sea ice has declined by as much as 75%.

As the Arctic ice melts into the sea, it brings global challenges in nature. On the flip side, it opens up the **Northern Sea Route (NSR)**, connecting the North Atlantic to the North Pacific through a short polar arc. Various earth observation studies predict that this route could be ice-free in summer by 2050, if not earlier.

Over the top



The Economist

However, before fully commercialising the NSR, the global community must assess the critical impact of melting arctic and associated challenges.

Impact of Melting Arctic Ice

- **Global Climate:** The Arctic and Antarctic act like the world's refrigerator. Since they are covered in white snow and ice that reflect heat back into space (**Albedo effect**), they balance out other parts of the world that absorb heat.
 - The loss of ice and the warming waters will affect sea levels, salinity levels, and current and precipitation patterns.
 - Further, less ice means less reflected heat, meaning more intense heat waves worldwide.
 - It will also mean more extreme winters, as the polar jet stream—a high-pressure wind that circles the Arctic region—is destabilised by warmer air, it can dip south, bringing the bitter cold with it.
- **Coastal Communities:** Global average sea level has risen by about 7–8 inches since 1900, and it's getting worse.
 - Rising seas endanger coastal cities and small island nations by exacerbating coastal flooding and storm surge.
 - The Greenland ice sheet's glacial melt is a significant predictor of future sea-level rise; if it melts entirely, global sea levels could rise 20 feet.
- **Food Security:** Polar vortices, increased heat waves, and unpredictability of weather caused by ice loss are already causing significant damage to crops on which global food systems depend.
 - This instability will continue to mean higher prices and a growing crisis for the world's most vulnerable.
- **Permafrost & Global Warming:** Permafrost in the Arctic region (ground that is permanently frozen) stores large amounts of methane, which is a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.
 - When it gets melted, that methane is released, which in turn will increase the rate of global warming.
 - As more quickly the arctic ice is lost, more rapidly permafrost will melt. This will result in a **vicious cycle** that may result in a climate catastrophe.
- **Biodiversity Threat:** Melting of the Arctic ice puts the Arctic region's vibrant biodiversity under serious threat.
 - Habitat loss and degradation, the absence of year-long ice and higher temperatures, are making Arctic marine life's survival, plants and birds difficult while encouraging species from lower latitudes to move north.

- Loss of ice and melting permafrost spells trouble for polar bears, walruses, arctic foxes, snowy owls, reindeer, and many other species.
- The Tundra is already returning to the swamp; the permafrost is thawing, sudden storms are ravaging coastlines, and wildfires are devastating interior Canada and Russia.

Flip-side & NSR

- The opening of the Arctic, through NSR, presents substantial **commercial and economic opportunities**, particularly in shipping, energy, fisheries and mineral resources.
 - The distance from Rotterdam to Yokohama will be cut by 40% compared to the Suez route.
- Oil and natural gas deposits, estimated to be 22% of the world's new resources, mostly in the Arctic ocean, will be open to access and mineral deposits including 25% of the global reserves of rare earth, buried in Greenland.

Associated Challenges

- **NSR, Not So Environmentally & Economically Viable:** Lack of deep-water ports, a need for ice-breakers, shortage of workers trained for polar conditions, and high insurance costs add to the difficulties of exploiting the resources of the Arctic.
 - Further, mining and deep-sea drilling carry massive costs and environmental risks.
- **The Arctic, Not A Global Common:** Unlike Antarctica, the **Arctic is not a global common**, and there is no overarching treaty that governs it, only the **UN Convention of Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.
 - Large parts of it are under the sovereignty of the five littoral states — Russia, Canada, Norway, Denmark (Greenland) and the US — and exploitation of the new resources is well within their rights.
 - Therefore, the **national economic interest may supersede** the global conservation efforts of the Arctic.
- **Great Game Geo-Politics:** Russia, Canada, Norway and Denmark have overlapped claims for extended continental shelves, and the right to sea-bed resources.
 - However, Russia is the dominant power, with the longest Arctic coastline, half the Arctic population, and a full-fledged strategic policy. It claims that the NSR falls within its territorial waters.
 - On the contrary, the US believes the passage lies in international waters.
 - China, playing for economic advantage, has projected the Polar Silk Road as an extension of the

BRI, and has invested heavily in ports, energy, undersea infrastructure and mining projects.

Role of India

- **India's Interest:** India's interests in these developments, though distant, are not peripheral.
 - **India's Climate:** India's extensive coastline makes us vulnerable to the impact of Arctic warming on ocean currents, weather patterns, fisheries and most importantly, monsoon.
 - **Monitoring of Third Pole: Scientific research in Arctic developments,** in which India has a good record, will contribute to the understanding of climatic changes in the Third Pole — the Himalayas.
 - **Strategic Need:** The strategic implications of an active China in the Arctic, and its growing economic and strategic relationship with Russia are self-evident and need close monitoring.
- **Step To Be Taken:** India has **observer status in the Arctic Council**, which is the predominant inter-governmental forum for cooperation on the Arctic environment and development aspects.
 - It is high time that India's presence on the Arctic Council should be underpinned by a strategic policy that encompassed economic, environmental, scientific and political aspects.

Conclusion

The Arctic is an essential system in the global climate system. So just like the Amazon forest is the lungs of the world, the Arctic is like our circulation system and feeds into global climate change everywhere.

Therefore, it is in humanity's interest to treat the Arctic melting as a severe global issue and act accordingly.



Human Development Index

*This article is based on "Three Decades of HDI" which was published in The Economic & Political Weekly on 02/01/2021. It talks about India's **dismal performance in the Human Development Index.***

Tags: Social Justice, Gs paper-2, Government Policies & Interventions, Education, Gender, Health

The **Human Development Index (HDI)**, which combines indicators of **life expectancy, education or access to knowledge and income** or standard of living, captures the level and changes to the quality of life.

The index is the making of two acclaimed economists from Pakistan and India, namely Mahbub ul Haq and

Amartya Sen. It was initially launched as an alternative measure to the gross domestic product, as it stresses the centrality of human development in the growth process.

India has done a seemingly great job in multiplying its economy many folds, but progress on the HDI front has not been very appealing. The last three decades HDI's data indicate that India has raised its **HDI score at an annual average rate of mere 1.42%**.

Therefore, if India has to realise its the aspiration of becoming a superpower, it must invest to reduce the burden of social and economic disadvantage to vulnerable sections of its population.

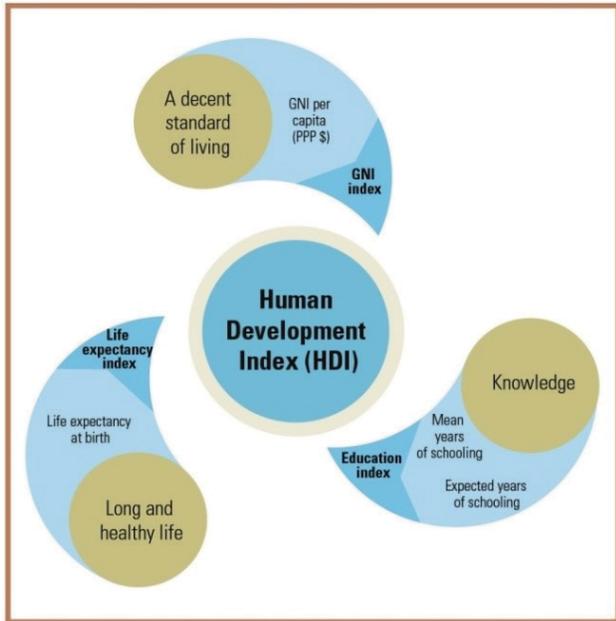
Progress Made by India

- As the **UNDP's HDR Report 2019** notes, India's **gross national income per capita has more than doubled** since 2005, and the number of "multidimensionally poor" people fell by more than 271 million in the decade since 2005-06.
- Additionally, inequalities in "basic areas" of human development have reduced. For instance, historically marginalised groups are catching up with the rest of the population in terms of educational attainment.

Reasons For India's Underperformance on HDI

The 2019 HDI ranks India with a per capita income of \$6,681 in the 131st position, which is a notch lower than its 130th rank in 2018. The malefic effects of deep-rooted societal and economic disadvantages account for a low rank for an economy that is in the global top 6 by size. Following factors can be dubbed as reasons for India's dismal performance in HDI:

- **Increasing Income Inequalities:** Income inequalities amplify failings on other HDI indices of human development. Intergenerational income mobility is lower in countries with high-income inequality.
 - It manifests at birth and determines access to quality healthcare, education, and opportunities.
 - Further, there is an increasing trend in income inequality. In India, the income growth of the bottom 40% between 2000 and 2018 (58%) was significantly below the average income growth for the entire population (122%).
- **Gender Inequality:** Numbers show female per capita income in India was only 21.8% of that of males, while it was more than double at 49% in other developing countries.
 - The meagre per capita income of females in India is mainly because of their exclusion from the labour force.
 - Only 20.5% of the women in the working-age group were in the labour force, pointing to its dismal **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)**.



- **Cumulative Impact:** The cumulative impact of these factors spills over across generations. It is this intergenerational cycle which denies opportunities to those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Way Forward

- **Fair Income Distribution:** While the size of economic resources is a key factor affecting human development, the **distribution and allocation** of these resources also play a major role in determining the level of human development.
 - Many global case studies show that high growth accompanied by more effective income distribution can help enhance human development, even with moderate social expenditures.
 - For Example, South Korea and Taiwan improved income distribution through early land reforms.
- **Investing in Social Infrastructure:** Universalisation of education and health care could have pulled deprived sections out of the poverty trap.
 - Sustaining and improving the quality of life will also depend on policies crafted to handle major emerging challenges such as urbanisation, the housing deficit, access to power, water, education and health care.
- **Streamlining of the Finances:** Streamlining the traditional approach of generating new sources of revenue generation, steps like rationalised targeting of subsidies, judicious use of revenues meant for social sector development etc will probably meet the financial requirements needed for improving HDI.
- **Good Governance Reforms:** Effective performance evaluation of the projects and activities engaged in the social sector development through innovative

methods like outcome budgeting, social auditing and participatory democracy has been known to yield positive results.

- **Gender Empowerment:** Government should invest in Gender equality and women's empowerment, as they are integral to human development.

Conclusion

India's HDI scores can be substantially enhanced if a politically committed government rolls out inclusive policies that strengthen public health, education and nutrition, and end gender discrimination to usher in a more egalitarian order.



Governor: An Agent of the Centre?

This article is based on "Maximum Governor: On Governor's role" which was published in The Hindu on 05/01/2021. It talks about the controversial position of the governor as an agent of the central government.

Tags: Indian Polity, Gs paper-2, Centre-State Relations, Role of Governor

Recently, the **Governor** of Kerala refused to convene a special session of the Kerala Assembly that was intended to discuss the ongoing farmer protest in New Delhi.

This conduct is comparable to the many actions of governors of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, etc., that led to unwarranted interference of centre in states' politics. These states happen to be ruled by the political parties governed by the opposition parties at the centre.

Such instances portray the negative image of the state governors as an **agent of the centre**. The Governor's office's misuse to undermine duly elected State governments undermines democratic processes and compromises one of the Basic Structure doctrine elements, i.e. federalism.

Governor: Acting As Agent of Centre & It's Effect

- **Source:** Article 163 of Indian Constitution states that the Governor should exercise his functions based on the **state's Council of Ministers' aid and advice**, except it is required to exercise his functions at his discretion.
 - Therefore, Article 163 acts as a source of the discretionary power of the governor.
 - As the union government nominates the governor, the combined effect with Article 163 provides the scope centre meddling in the state's affairs.

- **Nature of Intervention:** The present controversies have been around issues like:
 - Selecting the Chief Minister,
 - Determining the timing for proving legislative majority,
 - Demanding information about day-to-day administration,
 - Giving assent to bills or reserving bills for the President,
 - Frequent use of Article 356 for removing state governments run by opposition parties based on the governor's recommendation.
 - Commenting adversely on specific policies of the state government.
- **Effect:** The encroachment upon the legislature's powers and the elected government amounts to an abuse of Governor's authority as a nominal head under the Constitution.
 - Various wrongdoings of the centre through the governor's office damage India's essential federal structure and the democratic process.

Envisaged Role of Governor

- **Taking Clues From Constituent Assembly Debates:** On analysing the constituent assembly debates, it can be inferred that the constituent assembly envisaged creating 'responsible government' in the states as much as at the centre.
 - According to **Dr. Ambedkar**, "I have no doubt in my mind that discretionary power is in no sense a negation of responsible government. It is not a general clause giving the governor power to disregard the advice of his ministers in any matter in which he finds he ought to disregard."
- **Taking Clues From Constitution:** As the states were indeed sovereign within their own domain, the discretionary power, beyond the specific situations mentioned in the constitution, does not enable a governor to override the state government.
 - Therefore, selecting a chief minister of his choice or creating/utilising opportunities for defections to change the party in power cannot be a governor's job.
- **Taking Clues from Various Committees on Centre-States Relation:** In the last few decades, various committees were appointed to understand the governor's role in India's federal democratic setup.
 - These committees made extremely valuable recommendations to make the governor's office the "linchpin of the state's constitutional apparatus."

Note:

- Various Committees on Centre-States Relations
 - The Administrative Reforms Commission of 1968,
 - The Rajamannar Committee of 1969,
 - Committee of Governors of 1971,
 - The Sarkaria commission of 1988,
 - Punchhi Commission, 2007.

Way Forward

- **Governor's Discretion Should Be Only Her Discretion:** For the smooth functioning of a democratic government, it is equally essential that the governor must act judiciously, impartially and efficiently while exercising his discretion and personal judgment.
 - As the Sarkaria Commission put it, the governor's task "**is to see that a government is formed and not to try to form a government**".
- **Strengthening of Federalism:** In order to check misuse of the office of governor, there is a need to strengthen federal setup in India.
 - In this regard, the Inter-State council and the role of Rajya Sabha as the chamber of federalism must be strengthened.
- **Reform the Method of Appointment of Governor:** In order to end the monopoly of the centre in selecting its 'own man' as governor, the appointment can be made from a panel prepared by the state legislature and actual appointing authority should be the Inter-state Council, not the central government.
- **Code of Conduct for Governor:** In order to enable the governor to successfully discharge his functions under the centre and states governments should agree on a 'Code of Conduct'.
 - This 'Code of Conduct' should lay down certain 'norms and principles' which should guide the exercise of the governor's 'discretion' and his powers which he is entitled to use and exercise on his judgment.
 - In this context, the inspiration for such a code can be derived from the various recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission on centre-states relations.

Conclusion

The governor's role is not merely an agent of the centre sitting in state capitals; he is the lynchpin of India's federalism and democracy at the state's level. Therefore, the governor's role is indispensable for the successful working of constitutional democracy, and he must withhold the virtue of impartiality.



Changing World Order, India & UNSC

This article is based on *"India's UNSC opportunity"* which was published in *The Indian Express* on 05/01/2021. It talks about the changing world order and new challenges and how India should leverage its **two-year tenure of Non-Permanent Membership at UNSC**.

Tags: International Relations, Gs paper-2, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

Since the end of the Cold War, India has entered the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** for the third time. However, the current world order is very different from India's earlier stints in UNSC viz. 1991-92 and 2011-12.

The challenge emanating from the current world order is whether a peaceful consensus can bring about the redistribution of power between various superpowers.

In this context, India should leverage this two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of UNSC, to promote national interests and global peace.

Changing World Order in the Recent Times

- **New Cold-War:** With the **collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991**, the world order turned from being bi-polar to unipolar. However, the current world order is without a systemic equilibrium, which is essential to the maintenance of international stability.
 - This is due to the emergence of a **New Cold War** between US & China, which amounts to a struggle for a new distribution of power—political, economic and military.
 - Moreover, the differences between the US, China and Russia have become intractable.
- **Retrenchment of US:** The prominent feature of the current world order is the US's retrenchment from global affairs. This can be reflected by the withdrawal of the US the **Paris Climate deal, JCPOA**, etc.
 - This retrenchment has led to a severe blow to multilateralism and globalisation.
- **Indo-Pacific as a New Sub-System:** The rise of China has been redrawing the balance of power in the South-China Sea. This has led to countries like US, India, Japan, etc., colluding in framing **Indo-Pacific as a new sub-system in international affairs**.
 - Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian and the Pacific Oceans between the east coast of Africa and the American west coast and their several littoral countries.
- **Declining Role of UN:** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the UN's main executive body

responsible for maintaining international peace and security.

- However, the veto powers possessed by the UNSC's five permanent members are used as an instrument to shore up their geopolitical interests, regardless of the disastrous consequences for the victims of armed conflict as can be seen in Syria, Iraq, etc.

Current Challenges For Indian Foreign Policy

- **Aggressive China:** At the end of the Cold War, India ought to strengthen cooperation with China on the multilateral front with a view that it would also help generate the conditions for resolving the boundary dispute and expand the areas of bilateral cooperation.
 - However, this strategy has been proved counter-effective as China now has assumed an aggressive posture towards India. It can be seen in recent Galwan Valley Clashes.
 - Moreover, China protects Pakistan from the international pressures that India has sought to mobilise at various fora.
- **Compromising Non-Alignment:** To counter China, India has colluded with like-minded countries, forming Quad grouping (US, India, Japan, Australia).
 - However, this convergence with the US has tarnished India's image of non-alignment and deteriorated relations with traditional partners like Russia.

Way Forward: Leveraging Non-Permanent Membership

- **Becoming Part of the Great Game:** The UNSC offers room for sustained diplomatic interaction between the major powers, minimising tensions and creating new opportunities for cooperation.
 - Much like the US and USSR that cooperated on nuclear proliferation issues at the height of the Cold War, the US and China could explore potential common ground even amidst their broad-based confrontation.
 - In this context, India can carve out a larger role for itself amid renewed great power rivalry.
 - Further, as India now joins the UNSC amid a continuing military standoff, India can now expose the Chinese aggression in the Ladakh region.
- **UNSC Reforms:** Making the UNSC more "representative" has been one of India's demands since the end of the Cold War.
 - In this context, India should continue its partnership with **G4 (Brazil, Germany and Japan)** countries

to expand the UNSC and become a permanent member.

- **Deepening International Collaboration:** The engagement with peace and security issues at the UNSC will allow India to strengthen its new coalitions such as the Quad.
 - Moreover, India could also use the UNSC tenure to deepen collaboration with its European partners like France and Germany in the security arena.
 - India must also sustain an intensive dialogue with Russia on all international issues, notwithstanding Russia's worsening problems with the West and closer ties to China.
- **Engaging With Global South:** India needs to revitalise its engagement with its traditional partners in the "global south" by articulating their peace and security concerns in the UNSC. In this context, two sub-groups of the global south should be of particular interest.
 - **Small Island States:** The numerous small island states worldwide face existential challenges from global warming and rising sea levels.
 - They also struggle to exercise control over their large maritime estates.
 - Supporting the sovereignty and survivability of the island states is a crucial political task for India.
 - **Africa:** Nearly half of UNSC meetings, 60% of its documents, and 70% of its resolutions are about peace and security in Africa.
 - The continent has three seats in the UNSC (Kenya, Niger and Tunisia) and there is regular consultation between the UNSC and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU).
 - The UNSC tenure is a good moment for India to intensify India's engagement on peace and security issues in Africa at bilateral, regional and global levels.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy approach has also shifted from the reactive to the proactive. That, in turn, should make India's new stint at the UNSC more purposeful and pragmatic.

Purposefulness is about tightly integrating its UNSC engagement with India's broader national goals. Pragmatism demands adapting to the changed conditions at the UNSC and avoiding overly ambitious goals.



Last Mile Challenges To Financial Inclusion

This article is based on "Not by digital alone" which was published in The Indian Express on 06/01/2021. It talks about the last mile challenges to financial inclusion in India.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Inclusive Growth, Government Policies & Interventions

Being a welfare state, one of the prime objectives of government policy in India has been to enable financial inclusion and to reduce abject poverty through interventionist public policies. One such approach is the **Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) initiative**.

Various government programmes such as maternity entitlements, student scholarships, and wages for **MGNREGA** workers fall under the DBT initiative where the money is transferred to the respective beneficiaries' bank accounts.

However, the beneficiaries face many hurdles in accessing their money. For example, in rural areas, beneficiaries have to travel miles and wait for several hours to make one banking transaction.

These hurdles are broadly referred to as "**last mile challenges**". These challenges have widened the distance between the rights holder and their entitlements, which must be urgently resolved.

Last Mile Challenges & Their Impact

- **Digital Exclusions:** A recently published KPMG report found that India's Internet usage is the lowest of the BRICS nations.
 - Similarly, the **Digital Quality of Life (DQL) Index 2020** reflects the dismal performance of India in digital parameters.
 - Moreover, digital illiteracy, innumeracy, and unfamiliarity with technology hinder the digital product's full uptake.
- **Unfamiliarity With DBT:** Beneficiaries of DBT do not know what to do when their payments get rejected, often due to technical reasons such as incorrect account numbers and incorrect Aadhaar mapping with bank accounts.
 - More importantly, the workers/beneficiaries have rarely been consulted regarding their preferred mode of transacting.
- **Breeding of Corruption:** The digital exclusion and unfamiliarity of beneficiaries with DBT, has created new forms of corruption.

- This was evidenced in the massive scholarship scam in Jharkhand, where many poor students were deprived of their scholarships owing to a nexus of intermediaries, government officials, banking correspondents and others.
- **Inadequate Rural Banking:** There are just 14.6 bank branches per 1 lakh adults in India. It is sparser in rural India.
 - Moreover, rural banks are short-staffed and tend to get overcrowded.
 - Accessing banks in rural areas leads to loss of one wage day for the worker. Also, people have to spend money on transportation to access the bank to withdraw their payments/subsidies.
- **Unsuccessful Banking Correspondent Model:** More than a decade after the first regulations on the Business Correspondent (BC) Model were issued in 2006, banks and other financial service providers are struggling to establish a viable and sustainable business case for branchless banking.
- **Accountability Issue:** The lack of accountability and absence of grievance redressal continue to impact all DBT programmes.

Way Forward

- **Expanding Scope of Social Justice:** Understanding social justice should be broadened by including the right to access own money in a timely and transparent manner.
 - Moreover, these rights should be protected through strengthening grievance redressal processes and setting accountability norms for all payment intermediaries.
- **Providing More Choices:** Universalization of Aadhar Enabled Payment System will enable Aadhar Enabled Bank Account holders to carry out seamless financial transactions.
- **Establishing a Code of Conduct for BC Model:** Banks should develop standard rules and formulate a code of conduct to develop effective monitoring and supervision of banking correspondents.
 - Geotagging and GPS mapping of agent locations to search agent points will also enable better monitoring and supervision.
- **Uber Model:** There is a need to explore the possibility to adopt the “Uber” model to handle cash-in/cash-out (CICO), by enabling customers to act as CICO points.
 - It will reduce dependence on agents and allow them to go beyond CICO.
 - On the other hand, customers would be able to transact beyond a stationary and limited agent network.

- **Promoting Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy is the lynchpin of triggering a revolution in India’s financial inclusion and doorstep delivery models.
 - In this context, **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** is a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

There is a clear need for a fresh perspective by re-imagining some key aspects of DBT initiative. It requires that all stakeholders, including the government, regulators, service providers, industry bodies, and others, need to catalyse radical changes in the way the ‘last mile’ functions at present.



Death Penalty For Sexual Offences

This article is based on “The wrong answer” which was published in The Indian Express on 06/01/2021. It talks about the issues related to the award of the death penalty for sexual offences.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Mobilization of resources, Inclusive Growth, Government Policies & Interventions

Sexual offences against women and children are one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. Given this, the public has a real and legitimate interest in addressing such concerns, leading to the death penalty’s demand to deter sexual offences purportedly.

In this context, on **Human Rights Day 2020**, the Maharashtra cabinet approved the Shakti Bill, enlarging the scope of harsher and mandatory sentences — including the death penalty — for non-homicidal rape (excluding **Marital Rape**).

The Shakti Bill comes amid the recent legislative trend to invoke the death penalty for sexual offences. For instance, the Andhra Pradesh government passed the **Disha Bill in 2020** (pending presidential assent), that provides the death penalty for the rape of adult women.

However, introducing the death penalty diverts attention from deep-rooted issues & long-term solutions. It suggests that the reason for such crimes is that the punishment is not severe enough.

Associated Issues With Death Penalty Against Sexual Offences

- **May Do More Harm To Victim:** Women’s right groups have argued that the death penalty is a knee-jerk and populist solution to counter sexual offences.

- Also, Child-right activists insist that introducing capital punishment for non-homicidal rape may lead rapists to kill their victims to erase testimonial evidence.
- **Death Penalty Won't Remove Prejudice:** Introducing harsher penalties does not remove systemic prejudices from the minds of judges and the police.
 - Generally, police might refuse to register complaints or acquit offenders in cases they do not consider "serious" enough to warrant a mandatory minimum.
- **Lower Rate of Conviction:** According to crime data from the **National Crime Records Bureau**, in 93.6% of sexual offences, the perpetrators were known to the victims.
 - Therefore, introducing capital punishment would deter complainants from registering complaints.
- **Delay in Closure of Justice:** The execution of a death sentence comes at the end of multiple stages of appeals and avenues of seeking clemency.
 - This time extended to the defendant to exhaust all legal remedies will delay the judicial process's finality and closure—militating against the competing interest of ensuring speedy justice.
 - It might also see an increase in instances of instant retribution, such as the extrajudicial killing of gang-rape and murder suspects in Hyderabad late in 2019.
- **Regressive Step:** The **Justice Verma Committee Report** that made several recommendations on the laws on sexual offences (after Nirbhya rape case 2012), held that the death penalty's deterrent effect is "a myth".

Other Issues Related to Shakti Bill

- The other anti-women assertion in the bill moves away from the standard of affirmative consent in cases involving adult victims and offenders.
 - Significant advocacy from the women's movement led to introducing an affirmative standard of consent, rooted in unequivocal voluntary agreement by women through words, gestures or any form of verbal or non-verbal communication.
- In a sharp departure, the bill stipulates that valid consent can be presumed from the "conduct of the parties" and the "circumstances surrounding it".
- Rape trials continue to be guided by misogynistic notions, expecting survivors to necessarily resist the act, suffer injuries and appear visibly distressed.
- Therefore, the bill's vaguely worded explanation holds dangerous possibilities of expecting survivors to respond only in a particular manner, thus creating the stereotype of an "ideal" victim.

- The report stated that it would be a regressive step to introduce the death sentence in non-homicidal cases.

Way Forward

- **Plugging Gaps in Justice Delivery:** The most severe gaps in the justice delivery system are reporting a police complaint. Therefore, the focus of the criminal justice system needs to shift from sentencing and punishment to the stages of reporting, investigation, and victim-support mechanisms. In this context, the following measures must be ensured:
 - The victim reports a case without any fear.
 - Police to conduct a sound investigation.
 - Victim protection throughout the trial.
 - Making testification as easy and as quick as possible.
 - Allocation of resources and more robust implementation of the law than is currently evident.
- **Sensitisation At a Broader Level:** Despite the ever-increasing ambit of the death sentence, there has been little effort to address prejudices in society.
 - Addressing the prejudices in the society against sexual offences requires sensitisation of functionaries of the justice system & more importantly society.

Conclusion

Instead of merely enhancing punishment, tackling crimes against women and children requires broader social reforms, sustained governance efforts and strengthening investigative and reporting mechanisms.



Political Crisis in Nepal

This article is based on "**What India should, and shouldn't, do in Nepal**" which was published in *The Hindustan Times* on 08/01/2021. It talks about the recent political crisis in Nepal and what India should do.

Tags: International Relations, GS Paper - 2, India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

Recently, Nepal has drifted into a political crisis following its Prime Minister (PM) KP Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve Parliament. The Nepalese PM has stated that this decision was on the backdrop of infighting within the ruling Nepalese Communist Party (NCP).

As India's role in the mediation of earlier political crises in Nepal has led to the development of anti-Indian sentiment in Nepal, India has done right by not meddling into Nepal's internal matters.

However, India is apprehensive that political instability in Nepal will expand space for China to intervene in Nepali politics and shape a government that is favourable to China.

To counter Chinese influence on Nepal, India must pay attention to Nepal's core economic and strategic interests that in the first place pushed Nepal towards China.

Current Issues in India-Nepal Relations

- **Revision of 1950 Treaty:** Nepal has asked for a revision of the **1950 treaty**, and India has accepted this.
 - However, the issue remains stuck because Nepal does not clarify how to strike a proper balance between India's security concerns and Nepal's developmental aspirations.
- **Recent Border Issue:** The **Kalapani border dispute's** question has spoiled popular perceptions in Nepal about India.
 - Taking advantage of this, Nepal's current leadership has taken a unilateral decision to **draw new maps which show Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura belongs to Nepal**.
 - As India also claims these positions, this border issue has led to the lowest point in **India-Nepal relations history**.
- **Tug of War Between China & India:** Nepal's geo-strategic location (sandwiched between India & China), has created a tug of war between India and China over Nepal.
 - China sees Nepal as a bulwark against the international movement targeting China.
 - For India, Nepal is essential for the region's security, acting as a buffer state.
- **Increasing Chinese Influence:** Sino-Nepali economic ties began to grow in 2015, but in 2018, China's influence in Nepal started to gather momentum.
 - Having played an essential role in the NCP's formation, China came to wield enormous influence over the NCP government.
 - It resulted in China ousting India as Nepal's number one investor.
 - More importantly, Nepal's foreign policy under the NCP government became strongly pro-China.
 - Moreover, this influence can be evidenced by the fact that China has now stepped up its self-assumed role as mediator in the ongoing crisis.

Way Forward

Seeking a friendly regime in the neighbourhood is a recognised norm in the realist world of international

relations. India is no exception. Therefore, India should recalibrate its ties with Nepal. In this context:

- **Demarcating Red Lines:** India can improve ties with Nepal by picking up pending controversial issues such as the 1950 treaty, the Kalapani border dispute, and trade and investment matters.
 - However, India should categorically state its position, drawing red lines (security concerns emanating from China) that Nepal should not cross.
- **Economic Measures:** On trade and investment issues, India needs to be more accommodative. Nepal sells less than \$1 billion worth of products to India while importing nearly \$8 billion.
 - Even though economies govern trade deficits, India can and must move to remove structural and procedural impediments to the entry of genuine Nepali goods into Indian markets.
 - Also, India should encourage Indian investments in such industries, including hydropower production, to boost Nepali exports.
 - Completing big development projects such as the Pancheshwar multipurpose project could also be a breakthrough between the two countries.
- **Cooperation Between Armies:** When it comes to resolving border disputes between the two countries, understanding the armies is vital.
 - In 2015, when India's economic blockade and the political leadership of both countries were at loggerheads, both armies' leadership played a vital role in lifting the talks' blockade and resumption.
 - So, robust army diplomacy between the two countries can substantially contribute to improving bilateral ties.

Conclusion

As no significant development in bilateral relations appears likely during the prevailing uncertainty, India must encourage consolidation of a people-driven polity, and improve its popular profile. This will only help India reclaim its contested strategic space.



Covid-19 Vaccine Policy

This article is based on "Devising a vaccine strategy for India" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 07/01/2021. It talks about the challenges and solutions in the development & distribution of Covid-19 vaccine.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Health, Government Policies & Interventions

Recently, India has approved the Covid-19 vaccines developed by **Astra-Zeneca (Covishield)** and **Bharat Biotech (Covaxin)**. There are several more vaccines that will likely be available later in 2021.

Although India will not need to vaccinate its entire population, it would have to vaccinate at least 30-40% of the people to develop herd immunity fully. Even at a minimum scale, approximately 1 billion doses of **Covid-19 vaccines** will be required, given that most vaccines need a booster dose.

Moreover, other factors, like allocation, distribution, financing, communication, etc., will be impediments to **Covid-19 vaccination** drive. Therefore, deploying a robust vaccine development & distribution policy will be very crucial for India.

Associated Challenges

- **Allocation:** Most nations will vaccinate healthcare workers first. They treat those who are infected with Covid-19 and vaccinate the remaining population. After that, it seems logical to prioritise the elderly, who have a higher infection fatality rate.
 - However, premature death costs a young person more years of life than an older adult. This is a more significant concern for India, as 80% of its population is below 50.
- **Distribution:** Moving vaccines from companies to warehouses will be relatively easy, but moving it from warehouses to distributors to end-users will be tricky, given the difficulties with cold chains and storage facilities.
- **Financing:** In the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe, vaccines are likely to be entirely free and administered publicly.
 - However, given the tight fiscal situation, the Indian government faces the dilemma of whether to finance vaccinations publicly or privately.
- **Human Resource:** Administering 30-40 million immunisations (under regular vaccination drive) a year is very different from vaccinating 600 million people in a year.
 - Sourcing the trained human resources necessary to deliver intramuscular shots, without diverting from existing priorities, will not be easy.
- **Public Confidence:** "Optimism bias," as it is called, makes vaccination seem unnecessary to them. Concerning diseases, a lot of people tend to think that their risk is low.
 - However, this behaviour can prove fatal in battling a pandemic like Covid-19 pandemic.

Way Forward

- **Vaccine Prioritisation:** The protective benefit from vaccination is much lower if one has immunity from a prior infection. Hence, the allocation of the vaccine among the working-age population should consider two factors:
 - It may be prudent to screen people for Covid-19 antibodies and prioritise vaccination of those without antibodies.
 - Areas closest to herd immunity even without suppression require the least number of doses to return to regular economic activity and have higher returns from vaccination.
- **Strengthening Vaccine Supply Chain:** Enhancing **Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)** system will enhance real-time information on vaccine stocks and storage temperatures across all country's cold chain points.
- **Bridging Human Resource Gap:** Engaging medical students, phlebotomists, paramedics and pharmacists can be rapidly and reliably trained to administer vaccines, will bridge the human resource gap.
- **Hybrid Financing Policy:** India will need a hybrid strategy, where the majority of the population (economically challenged) is vaccinated for free publicly while allowing private markets to operate for rich people.
- **Effective Communication:** A good communication strategy that envisages removing myths associated with Covid-19 vaccine should be science-led, involve regular communication, utilise respected community leaders to widen reach, and clamp down on the spread of misinformation.
- **Need For Vaccine Certification:** To resume normalcy and allow free movement of people, every country will need an internal set of protocols regarding proof of vaccination that is interoperable with norms elsewhere.
 - In other words, proof of vaccination in India or Tanzania must be acceptable to Singapore Airlines or Qantas.
 - This will also require multilateral bodies to play an active role in creating frameworks, around which digital platforms can be developed.

Conclusion

India's Covid-19 vaccine drive will be a monumental mission, not just in terms of vaccinating its own population, but also vaccinating a large part of the world thanks to its position as the world's leading vaccine producer.

Addressing the issues associated with the development and distribution of vaccines will augment the effort to efficiently get vaccines to hundreds of millions in the shortest period of time.



Indian Foreign Policy In 2021

This article is based on “*Reframing India’s foreign policy priorities*” which was published in *The Hindu* on 12/01/2021. It talks about the current challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives.

Tags: International Relations, GS Paper - 2, India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India’s Interests

Like any other country, India’s foreign policy envisages to widen its sphere of influence, enhance its role across nations, and make its presence felt like an emerging power. The year 2021 presents a bunch of challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives.

For instance, the rise of China and its influence in India’s neighbourhood is a cause of worry for India. Moreover, concluding the negotiations for an **EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment** debunks the myth of Chinese isolation after **Covid-19 pandemic** and further strengthened China’s position.

Moreover, India’s foreign policy decisions like growing convergence with the US have led to weakening its links with traditional friends like Russia and Iran.

Therefore, in shifting the balance of power in the region, India needs to tackle foreign policy challenges and leverage opportunities carefully.

Challenges in Front of India

- **A Stronger China:** China is the only major country that had a positive growth rate at the end of 2020, and its economy is poised to grow even faster in 2021.
 - Militarily, China has further strengthened itself and now seeks to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its announcement of its third aircraft carrier’s launch in 2021.
 - In this context, any breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations is unlikely to occur, and the confrontation between Indian and Chinese armed forces is expected to continue.
- **Growing Russia-China Axis:** Russia is beginning to display more significant interest in its periphery’s affairs. Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Russia after Crimea’s annexation in 2014 has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of China.
 - This seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.
 - Also, India’s closeness to the U.S. has weakened its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran.
- **Changing Middle East Equations:** The US-brokered rapprochement between Israel and four Arab countries

— the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — reflected the changing landscape in the region.

- However, despite the hype surrounding **Abraham Accords**, the situation remains fluid and has not reduced the risk of a confrontation between Iran and Israel.
- Given the region’s strategic flux, Iran could well be tempted to use its nuclear capability to enhance its position.
- This does pose problems for India since both have relations with it.
- **Self-Imposed Isolation of India:** Currently, India remains isolated from two important supranational bodies of which it used to be a founding member, viz., the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.
 - Moreover, India has opted out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.
 - This self-imposed isolation doesn’t synergise with India’s aspiration of becoming a global power.
- **Weakening Ties with Neighbors:** A more worrying concern for Indian foreign policy is weakening ties with the neighbours.
 - This can be seen from instances like **China’s Cheque Book Diplomacy** vis-a-vis Srilanka, strain in relation with **Bangladesh on NRC issue** and recent **border controversy with Nepal** due to the release of the new map.

Way Forward

- **Neighbourhood First:** Through a series of diplomatic efforts, India should make valiant efforts to improve relations with some of its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka,
 - In this context, as the world emerges from the pandemic, India has a lot to gain from what could be “**vaccine diplomacy**” with neighbours in 2021 — supplying vaccines either free or at affordable costs.
- **External Aid in Adequate Measure:** The current standoff with China has reinforced JL Nehru’s belief in 1963 that India needs “**external aid in adequate measure**”.
 - In this context, India will need continuing support from the US, Japan, Australia, besides European leaders such as France, Germany and the UK.
 - India should appreciate European entry into Indo-pacific narrative, as already, France and Germany have come up with their Indo-Pacific strategy.
- **India at UNSC High Table:** As India enters the **UN Security Council as a non-permanent member** for the

eighth time, India should raise all-important global matters like China's aggressiveness — from Tibet to Taiwan, Iran-Saudi rivalry, refugee crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar, etc.

- India should refrain from a limited focus on isolating Pakistan, as it would distract from India's aspirations of being a global leader.

➤ **Engaging With US:** As the future of **Quad** and the **Indo-Pacific strategy** relies on the new US administration, India will need to build on its deepening strategic and defence ties with the US and resolve trade and visa issues.

Conclusion

In the light of the changing actualities of the international situation, India must cautiously play foreign policy, if it wants to emerge as a global rather than an aspirational player.



Draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy

This article is based on "Building a vibrant science ecosystem" which was published in The Indian Express on 12/01/2021. It talks about the significance of the proposal in the draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020).

Tags: Science & Technology, GS Paper - 3, Indigenization of Technology, Scientific Innovations & Discoveries

Covid-19 pandemic has shown the world that it has to take research in science and technology more seriously than before. In India, the pandemic presented an opportunity for R&D institutions, academia, and industry to work with a shared purpose, synergy, collaboration and cooperation.

With the growing realisation, that science can address many of society's pressing problems, the Government of India has released a draft **National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)**.

The STIP will be guided by the vision of positioning India among the top three scientific superpowers in the decade to come. Apart from it, the policy outlines strategies for strengthening India's STI ecosystem to achieve the larger goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Novel Ideas of the Policy & their Significance

➤ **Open Science Framework & Inclusiveness:** Open

Science fosters more equitable participation in science through increased access to research output, greater transparency and accountability in research.

- Apart from this, it would ensure better resource utilisation through minimal restrictions and a constant exchange of knowledge between the producers and users of knowledge.

- This framework will be largely community-driven and supported with necessary institutional mechanisms and operational modalities.

➤ **One Nation, One Subscription & Democratization:** The STIP envisions free access to all journals, Indian and foreign, for every Indian against a centrally-negotiated payment mechanism.

- In the present mechanisms, consumers of knowledge such as line departments, innovators, industry, the society at large, etc., do not have access to these research journals.

- Hence, the policy seeks to democratise science by providing access to scholarly knowledge to not just researchers but also to every individual in the country.

➤ **Science & Gender Parity:** India has valued women's participation in science and education from ancient times.

- Some of the earliest women scientists, including Leelavati, Gargi, and Khana, made significant contributions to mathematics, natural science, and astronomy.

- Over the last six years, women's participation in S&T has doubled in India; however, women's overall participation in R&D continues to be only about 16%.

- Therefore, the policy has envisaged gender parity by addressing career breaks for women by considering academic age rather than biological/physical age.

- Apart from this, it proposes an inclusive culture that'll be facilitated through the equal opportunity candidates from rural-remote areas, marginalised communities, differently-abled, Divyangjans, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds.

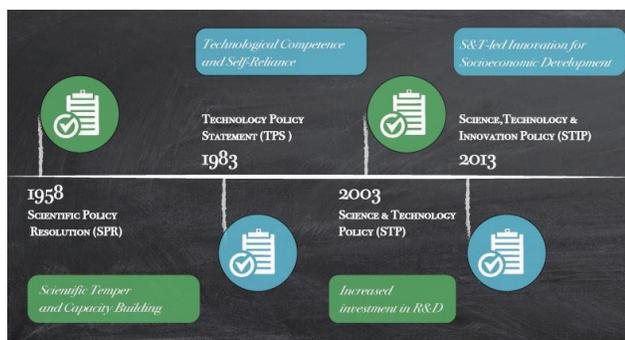
➤ **Traditional Knowledge & Carving Own Niche:** The policy envisages establishing an institutional architecture to integrate Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS) and grassroots innovation into the overall education, research and innovation system.

- This focus on indigenous know-how may help India shine globally, standing on its merit and unique technologies based on timeless ancient wisdom curated/enhanced by modern science and technology.

- **Collaboration & Ease of Doing Research:** The proposed Science Technology Innovation Observatory will have an important governance role in the collaboration networks.
 - The policy proposes creating a National STI Observatory that will act as a central repository for all kinds of data related to and generated from the STI ecosystem.
 - Further, an STI Development Bank will be set up to facilitate a corpus fund for investing in direct long term investments in select strategic areas.

Way Forward

- **Operationalise Clusters:** When the draft policy takes the shape of the actual procedure, it must acknowledge the cluster-based approach and incorporate it.
 - Clusters consist of multiple organisations including suppliers, producers, customers, labour markets, HEIs, financial intermediaries, professional and industry associations, regulatory institutions and government departments.
 - They nurture strong science and technology research capabilities in a specific domain and help translate these capabilities into applications.
 - An example of an electronics hardware cluster is in Silicon Valley.
- **Increasing Funding For Research:** At 0.6% of GDP, India's gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) is relatively low compared to other major economies with a GERD-to-GDP ratio of 1.5% to 3%.
 - One way to increase R&D spend in the country is to make it attractive for companies to invest.
 - In this regard, reformed bureaucracy, tax benefits and market access for the infant companies should also be considered.
- **Enabling Research in Disruptive technology:** Technologies that are collectively called Industrial revolution 4.0 are undoubtedly the future of science and technology landscape.
 - India must take advantage of these disruptive and impactful technologies.



- More research on these associated technologies may positively impact many industries such as defence, education, health etc.
- **Science Diplomacy:** India should indulge in international S&T engagement and STIP diplomacy.
 - This will help in achieving collective and inclusive global development through international engagement by maximising the scope of indigenisation and sustainability for national advancement and promotion of global commons.

Conclusion

India's STI growth trajectory over recent years has been impressive. Our entry into the club of the top 50 countries in the global innovation Index with a rank of 48 (a massive improvement from 81st place in 2015) speaks volumes for our potential.

To continue this feat, the draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy contains progressive proposals that could be game-changers for the scientific research community and the way ordinary Indians interact with Science.



SAARC Revival

This article is based on *"Reclaiming SAARC from the ashes of 2020"* which was published in *The Hindu* on 13/01/2021. It talks about the need for the revival of SAARC.

Tags: International Relations, GS Paper - 2, India and its Neighbourhood, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

The year 2020 marked the sixth year since the leaders of the eight nations that make up the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** were able to meet.

India's problems with Pakistan on terrorism, territorial claims, and its role in blocking SAARC initiatives on connectivity and trade are the main reasons that even after thirty-six years of its formation, SAARC appears to be a defunct body.

However, if India aspires to become a global power, it must keep its neighbourhood peaceful, prosperous and supportive. In this context, reviving SAARC becomes very important.

Need For Reviving SAARC

- **Regional Disconnect:** Over the past year, India-Pakistan issues have impacted other meetings of SAARC. This makes it easier for member countries and international

agencies, to deal with South Asia as a fragmented group rather than a collective one.

- No other regional power is as disconnected from its immediate neighbourhood as India.
- This disconnect is a challenge to India's economic and security interests.
- **Impact of Covid-19:** The impact of Covid-19, is a growing distaste for 'globalisation' and growing preference for nativism, self-dependence and localising supply chains.
 - While it will be impossible for countries to entirely cut themselves off from the global market, regional initiatives will become the golden mean between globalisation and hyper-nationalism.
 - Moreover, reviving SAARC is crucial to countering the common challenges brought about by the pandemic.
 - According to a World Bank report, the South Asian countries are expected to lose nearly about 10.77 million jobs and \$52.32 billion in GDP alone from the impact of the pandemic.
- **Dealing With China:** It is clear that tensions with Pakistan and Nepal amplify the threat perception from China, while other SAARC members (minus Bhutan), all of whom are **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** partners of China will be hard placed to help individually.
 - Also, in the current pandemic, China is sending medicines, personal protective equipment kits, and promising vaccines to most SAARC countries as part of its "**Health Silk Road**" initiative.
 - Therefore, in dealing with China's challenge, both at India's borders and in its neighbourhood, a unified South Asian platform remains India's most potent countermeasure.

Way Forward

- **Engaging With Pakistan:** China's incursions in Ladakh doesn't stop India to attend meetings with the Chinese leadership at the SCO, the Russia-India-China trilateral, the G-20.
 - Therefore, it is misplaced that India applies the same logic, for not engaging with Pakistan. India must understand that engagement with Pakistan is very crucial for the revival of SAARC.
- **Application of Gujral Doctrine:** India's conduct of foreign relations with immediate neighbours should be guided by the **Gujral Doctrine**.
 - In this present context of Covid-19 pandemic, India can apply Gujral doctrine by pursuing Vaccine diplomacy with SAARC countries, whereby India can supply vaccines either free or at affordable costs and counter future pandemics.

- **All-of South Asia Approach:** South Asian countries need to work as a collective to set common standards and promote a more intra-regional, transnational approach towards health security, food security, and job security.
 - In this context, India can follow the European model of regional integration.
 - Moreover, India can strengthen its position as an education hub for students from its neighbourhood. This will help to form closer political ties and spread its cultural influence and values to the surrounding region.
- **Regional Development:** Being the biggest economy in South Asia, India can carry out infrastructure projects to improve connectivity, including the laying of new pipelines, building electricity networks, upgrading port, rail, and airport infrastructure, and reinvigorating people-to-people exchanges.

Conclusion

India must find its prism to view its South Asian neighbourhood having a shared future and acting as a force-multiplier for India's ambitions on the global stage.



Avian Flu Crisis

This article is based on "Handling the avian flu crisis" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 12/01/2021. It talks about the frequent occurrence of bird flu and its impact.

Tags: Science & Technology, GS Paper - 3, Economics of Animal-Rearing

Just three months after India declared itself free of the **avian influenza outbreak (Bird Flu)**, the year 2021 started with an unprecedented bird flu epidemic. The recent occurrence of bird flu has caused the death of thousands of wild and poultry birds in 10 states.

Avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu, is a highly contagious viral disease affecting a variety of birds. The most common strain of the virus that causes severe respiratory disease in birds is H5N1. However, other strains, such as H7N1, H8N1, or H5N8, also cause bird flu.

The frequent occurrences of bird flu cause a high degree of mortality in birds and subsequent economic loss to the fast-growing poultry industry. Moreover, there are risks associated with the mutation of the virus and infection to the human.

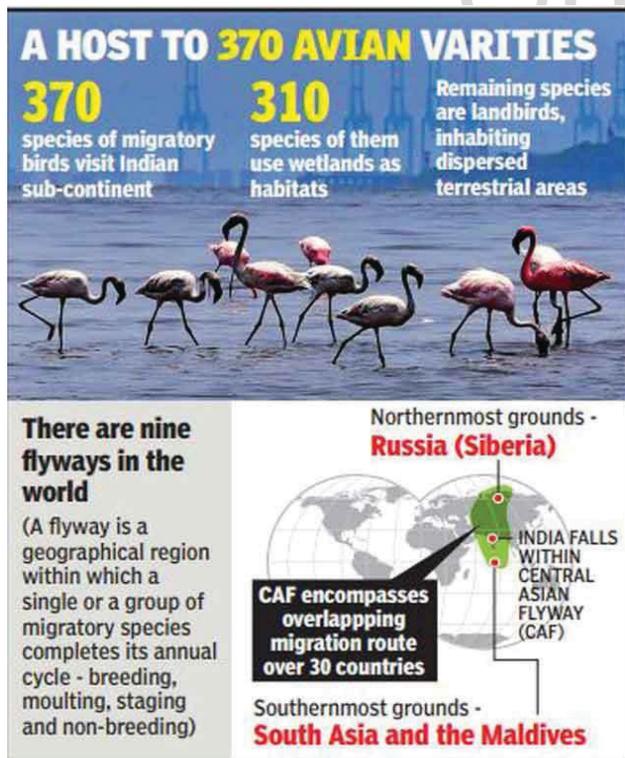
Given the disruption caused by Covid-19, it is important that any viral outbreak must be handled with adequate preventive and curative steps.

Reason For Frequent Occurrence of Bird Flu

- **Source:** Wild birds are considered the natural reservoirs of the bird flu viruses, and it is typical of an outbreak to coincide with the season of arrival of migratory birds.
- **Migration of Virus:** Migratory birds from faraway countries in the northern hemisphere such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan are said to have brought the virus to India.
 - The bird flu spreads through their droppings, contaminating the water bodies they visit.
- **Destination:** According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, more than half of the world's bird flu incidents take place in the **Central Asian Flyway (CAF)**, which covers almost the entire Indian subcontinent.
- **Man-Made Reason:** Further, WHO believes that continuous growth in poultry farming under poor sanitary conditions was sustaining the virus, with multiple susceptible species living in the same area.

Threats Emanating From Bird Flu

- **Threat to Humans:** The viral strain, H5N1 has a history of spreading over to humans from birds, but the instances of bird flu among humans have been uncommon.
 - However, according to WHO, human cases of bird flu occur "occasionally," but the mortality rate is about 60% when it happens.
 - It further states that there is a possibility of the H5N1 mutating and posing a pandemic threat among humans.



- **Economic Impact:** The response to a bird flu outbreak is a containment strategy, which is primarily centered around removing the diseased birds through culling. Such mass destruction causes a severe impact on farmers.
 - According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, India's poultry sector is worth ₹80,000 crores. The organized sector represents 80%, and the rest is distributed among unorganized sectors, including backyard poultry-keeping which is crucial for income and nutritional security.
 - Also, India exports processed poultry products such as egg powder, yolk powder, chicken products, and also pharmaceutical ingredients from the poultry sector worth hundreds of crores every year.

Way Forward

- **Preventive Measures:** It is very difficult to eradicate influenza viruses because they persist in a vast reservoir of aquatic birds. However, the spread of bird flu can be contained if there is early sharing of information between the 29 CAF countries.
 - In this context, the United Nations and WHO should work with countries in the CAF region for disease surveillance of the migratory birds.
 - In India, the Central government requires veterinary staff to conduct inspections periodically under the Prevention and Control of Infectious and Contagious Diseases in Animals Act, 2009, to catch any signs of disease among birds and other animals early.
- **Curative Measures:** In India, the Centre has the right thing by asking the state governments to follow the **National Action Plan for Prevention, Control, and Containment of Avian Influenza 2021**.
 - The plan emphasizes the practice of building a biosafety bubble around poultry farms to mitigate the chances of wild birds coming in close contact with reared birds.
 - Also, where birds' culling is undertaken to combat bird flu, the National Action Plan prescribes compensation to farmers at fixed rates.
 - However, the farmers complain that compensations do not cover the profit they could have earned from regular business. Given the economic slowdown amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the governments must do needful help from the farmers.
- **Need For Research:** Experts say preventing bird flu is very difficult as little research has been done on the virus-carrying capability of migratory birds in CAF.
 - Therefore, it is also important to undertake genome sequencing of virus samples to track the virus's evolution.

- **Measure to be Taken by Farmers:** The measures, which have general relevance to farmers everywhere, include cleansing and disinfecting, reduction of people's movement in the farm bird areas to reduce contamination, reducing contact between captive and wild birds.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic showed the world how a micro-organism could bring the whole world to a standstill. Therefore, it is imperative to treat the viral outbreak with utmost urgency and adopt sustainable ways of living.



Indian Diaspora

This article is based on "**The diaspora dilemma**" which was published in *The Hindustan Times* on 10/01/2021. It talks about the Importance and issues associated with the Indian Diaspora.

Tags: International Relations, GS Paper - 2, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Indian Diaspora

Recently, India celebrated the **16th annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas**. It is an occasion to reach out to India's vast diaspora, celebrate their achievements, connect them to their roots, and provide a framework for the diaspora's engagement with India's development story.

The diaspora's ability to spread Indian soft power, lobby for India's national interests, and contribute economically to India's rise is now well-recognized.

However, in order to leverage this **diaspora dividend**, India needs to conduct diplomacy keeping in mind the sensitivities involved.

Importance of Indian Diaspora

- **Enhancing India's Soft Power:** Indian diaspora is one of the richest minorities in many developed countries. Their advantage is evident in "diaspora diplomacy", whereby they act as "bridge-builders" between their home and adopted countries.
 - For example, **Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal** is a case in point, as ethnic Indians in the United States successfully lobbied for the signing of the Nuclear Deal.
 - Further, the Indian diaspora is not just a part of India's soft power, but a fully transferable political vote bank as well.
 - Also, many people of Indian origin hold top political positions in many countries, which enhances India's political clout at multilateral institutions like the United Nations.

- **Economic Contribution:** Remittances sent by the Indian diaspora have positive systemic effects on the balance of payments, which help to bridge a wider trade deficit. Also, India is the highest receiver of remittances in the world.
 - The migration of less-skilled labor (especially to West Asia) has helped in bringing down disguised unemployment in India.
 - Further, the migrant workers facilitated the flow of tacit information, commercial and business ideas, and technologies into India.

Issues Related to Indian Diaspora

- **Role of Diaspora in Indian Democracy:** Indian diaspora is a non-homogeneous group and it has different demands from the Indian Government. This also leads to negative campaigning and foreign funding.
 - It is due to this, these demands are in conflict with the policies of the Indian government. This can be seen in the recent demonstration in support of farmers' protests.
 - In the past, many groups of the Indian diaspora demanded nullification of Article 370 in Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- **Impact of Covid-19:** Covid-19 has triggered an anti-globalization wave, whereby many migrant workers had to return to India and now facing restrictions regarding emigration.
 - This has led to economic hardship for both the Indian diaspora and the Indian economy.
- **Turmoil In West Asia:** Despite the hype surrounding the peace deal with Israel & the four Gulf countries (**Abraham Accords**), the situation in West Asia remains fluid due to prevailing tensions between Saudi-Arabia & Iran.
 - The event of any war will lead to a massive return of Indian nationals, curtailing remittances, and making demands on the job market.
- **Regulatory Cholesterol:** There are many inadequacies of the Indian system for the diaspora to collaborate with India or to invest in the country.
 - For example, grievances like red tape, multiple clearances, distrust of government are acting as hindrances in fulfilling opportunities presented by the Indian Diaspora.

Way Forward

- **Transparency in Policy Matters:** Social media tools have made it easy and inexpensive for the Indian Diaspora to stay in touch with family and friends back home, and their link to India has never been stronger.

- It is time that the Indian government leveraged this strong bond for the greater good of the nation, by following utmost transparency in all policy decisions.
- **Need For Evacuation Policy:** There is a need for a strategic diaspora evacuation policy from conflict zones in a world where crises materialize without warnings and give very little reaction time for governments.
- **Improving Ease of Doing Business:** Improvement in **ease of doing business** will go a long way in enabling investments from the Indian diaspora.
 - India's foreign policy aims to translate partnerships to benefits for key projects like Swachh Bharat, Clean Ganga, Make In India, Digital India, and Skill India, the diaspora has plenty of scope to contribute.

Conclusion

The institutionalization of "diaspora diplomacy" is a distinct indication of the fact that the Indian diaspora community has become considerably more important as a subject of interest for foreign policy and associated government activities.



New Whatsapp Policy & Privacy

This article is based on "**Update debate: On WhatsApp and privacy**" which was published in *The Hindu* on 18/01/2021. It talks about the issues emanating from the new Whatsapp privacy policy and the need for data protection law in India.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, IT & Computers, Government Policies & Interventions

Recently, **WhatsApp has updated its policy**, which states that it may share information of any of its users with its family of companies (Facebook). This new update has caused a lot of concern over the privacy of the people that use this application.

Privacy experts and antitrust bodies have also raised the alarm at this new privacy policy of WhatsApp. Moreover, Indian users are more vulnerable due to the absence of any data protection law.

As the Supreme court in **K. Puttaswamy's judgment** held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right, the Whatsapp new policy is yet another reason why India needs data protection law.

Issues Related to New Whatsapp Policy

- **Whatsapp As the Owner of Data:** The information that WhatsApp automatically collects and will be

sharing with Facebook includes the mobile phone number, user activity, and other basic information of the WhatsApp account.

- WhatsApp's recent privacy policy to share commercial user data with Facebook establishes that it is the owner of the data rather than an intermediary.
- The policy essentially takes away the choice users had until now to not share their data with other Facebook-owned and third-party apps.

Note: Intermediaries

- The basic definition of intermediaries is that they do not own content and are mere platforms where third-party entities place content.
- This particular status prevents them from liability in case anything unlawful is noticed on their platforms.
 - In such instances, the government directs the intermediary concerned to remove the unlawful content within a specified period.
- If Whatsapp automatically shares the data, it can not be considered as an intermediary.
- In such a scenario it may lose the immunity it has with regard to any objectionable content found on its platform at any given point in time.

➤ **Against the Recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee Report:** The new Whatsapp policy contradicts the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee report, which forms the basis of the **Data Protection Bill 2019**. **For Example:**

- The principle of Data Localisation, which aims to put curbs on the transfer of personal data outside the country, may come in conflict with WhatsApp's new privacy policy.
- The report stated that using the information for purposes that are reasonably linked to the purpose for which the information was given. However, the updated privacy policy of WhatsApp can be seen as a move to ensure subtle forms of commercial exploitation and micro-targeting by political campaigns (**Cambridge Analytica scandal**).
- **Sharing of Metadata:** WhatsApp held that the end-to-end encryption clause remains intact, which will ensure that it can't see your messages or share them with anyone.
 - However, with the updated privacy policy, WhatsApp can now share one's metadata, essentially everything beyond the conversation's actual text.
- **Take it or Leave it' Policy:** If users disagree with the messaging platform's updated privacy policy, they will have to quit WhatsApp when the new terms of service are set to come into effect.

Metadata

- It virtually gives a 360-degree profile into a person's online activity.
- This level of insight into a person's private and personal activities is done without any government oversight at present or regulatory supervision.

Way Forward

- **Expediting Data Protection Law:** India's data protection law has been languishing for two years now. If India had a data protection law in place, WhatsApp would not have been able to go ahead with this update in the first place.
 - For instance, WhatsApp's updated privacy policy guidelines won't be applicable if you live in the European Region thanks to the data protection law (GDPR) in place there.
 - Therefore, India must expedite the process of finalizing the data protection law.
 - Further, India should use the current Whatsapp issue to update the already under process intermediary guidelines.
- **Public Awareness:** According to many experts, WhatsApp users in India will not care too much about this issue, what with privacy policies being generally difficult to be understood by the public.
 - Therefore, the government and civil society must engage in awareness programs to make the public aware of the importance of digital privacy.

Conclusion

The privacy of a billion citizens is too important a thing to be left just to the practices of a commercial enterprise. It will be reassuring if a strong law guarantees it.

**Sustainable Mining**

This article is based on "**Mining in India equals selling the family gold**" which was published in *The Hindu* on 19/01/2021. It talks about the issues related to the present state of mining practices and the need to adopt sustainable mining.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Environmental Pollution & Degradation, Conservation

India's National Mineral Policy 2019 states that "natural resources, including minerals, are a shared inheritance where the state is the trustee on behalf of the people to ensure that future generations receive the benefit of inheritance."

However, mining is the act of removing and consuming a limited resource. Moreover, the Government of India and state governments treat the mineral sale proceeds as revenue or income. This leaves neither the minerals nor their value for future generations to inherit.

Further, as the mined materials support roughly 45% of the world's economic activities, this large-scale mining also has a social and environmental impact.

In this context, there is a need to adhere to the principle of Intergenerational Equity, which makes it imperative to ensure future generations inherit at least as much as that of the current generation.

Issues Associated with Unsustainable Mining

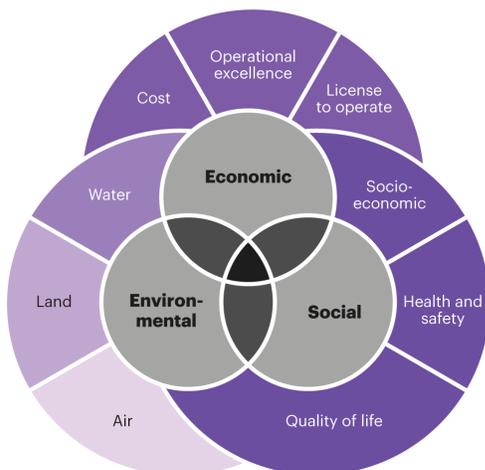
- **Going Beyond Carrying Capacity:** In many cases, mining operations have been carried out without concern for the 'carrying capacity' of the environment and other infrastructural limitations.
 - This has put avoidable pressure on the environment and caused inconveniences to the people living in the mining areas.
- **Loss of Public Revenue:** Driven by lobbying, political donations, and corruption, minerals are often sold at prices significantly lower than what they are worth.
 - Illegal mining, in many cases, has a similar effect while additionally causing loss of public revenues.
 - According to the International Monetary Fund, due to unsustainable mining, many governments of resource-rich nations face declining public sector net worth.
- **Large Number of Small Mines:** In India, many small mines (including quarries for extracting minor minerals) operate in most states.
 - These present difficult challenges for sustainable development as their financial, technical, and managerial limitations restrict their ability to take adequate corrective measures.
- **Growing Inequality & Loss of Natural Wealth:** Naturally, the extractors are keen to extract as quickly as possible and move on. This deepens inequalities, as a few extractors acquire wealth without proper redistribution to the people.
 - It also results in the loss of natural wealth. For example, it is estimated from the annual reports of Vedanta that over eight years (2004-2012), the State of Goa lost more than 95% of the value of its minerals.

Way Forward

- **Life-Cycle Approach:** There is a need to apply sustainability principles to all stages of the mine life cycle – exploration, mine planning, construction,

mineral extraction, mine closure, and post-closure reclamation and rehabilitation. These principles include elements such as:

- Intra And Inter-generational Equity,
 - The Precautionary Principle,
 - Scientific Mining,
 - Management of Environmental and Socioeconomic Impacts.
- **Creation of Future Generation Fund:** Like Norway, the entire mineral sale proceeds must be saved in a Future Generations Fund.
- Also, in 2014 the Supreme Court set up a global judicial precedent by ordering the creation of a Goa Iron Ore Permanent Fund. This model is worth emulating in all the major mining areas.
- **Adherence to Zero-Loss Principle:** If we extract and sell our mineral wealth, the explicit objective must be to achieve zero loss in value.
- The state as trustee must capture the full economic rent (sale price minus the cost of extraction, cost including reasonable profit for extractor).
- **Consortia of Small Mining Enterprises:** In order to alleviate the limitations of small mines in carrying out sustainable development activities, consortia of small mining enterprises in a region should be promoted.
- Also, technical advisory services should be made available to them in the relevant areas.
- **Environmental Footprint Framework:** A common sustainable mining framework should be focused on reducing the environmental impacts of mining.
- Strategies for assessing mining operations' sustainability include measuring, monitoring, and improving various environmental performance metrics. These are used to determine whether a mining operation is sustainable.
 - The key metrics for environmental sustainability in mining relate to efficiencies in resource con-



sumption, minimizing land disturbance, pollution reduction, as well as closure and reclamation of exhausted mine lands.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** Preparation of a socio-economic assessment report for a mining project should be made a part of the permitting process for the grant and administration of mineral concession to a mining enterprise.
- Mining enterprises should preferably execute local socio-economic development works rather than government and semi-government agencies to avoid the problems of inadequate capacity, political manipulation, and corruption.

Conclusion

Since minerals are a shared inheritance held in trust for the people and future generations, it is essential that as a nation, we change our paradigm to understand minerals as a “shared inheritance,” not a source of “windfall revenue.”



Tourism Sector In India

This article is based on “In our past lies our future ... Indian tourism hasn’t marketed the precious assets embedded in our heritage to full potential” which was published in The Times of India on 19/01/2021. It talks about the constraints & opportunities associated with the tourism sector in India.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Employment, Issues Relating to Development

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic last year has brought almost all areas of the business to a standstill. Arguably, the worst affected has been the **tourism and hospitality industry**, which had to bear the brunt of lockdowns and social distancing.

According to the **UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**, this is by far the worst crisis international tourism has faced since records began in 1950.

Now as the vaccines are available, life will return back to normalcy. Given this, India should seek to actively support the tourism sector, as the sector contributes an estimated 10% to the Indian economy and is our biggest ambassador to the world.

Further, India has inherent competitive advantages as it offers a diverse portfolio of niche tourism products - cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism. This competitive advantage will help India become a tourism hub in the world.

Constraints in Tourism Sector

- **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Deficiencies in infrastructure and inadequate connectivity hamper tourist visits to some heritage sites.
 - Also, India has various tourist destinations but few circuits or segments such as the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur).
- **Promotion and Marketing:** Although it has been increasing, online marketing/branding remains limited and campaigns are not coordinated.
 - Tourist information centers are poorly managed, making it difficult for domestic and foreign tourists to access information with ease.
- **Lack of Skills:** The number of adequately trained individuals for the tourism and hospitality sector is a key challenge to giving visitors a world-class experience.
 - A limited number of multilingual trained guides, and the limited local awareness and understanding of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourist growth act as constraints on the sector's growth.
- **Underutilization of Tourism Potential:** Out of 140 countries, India ranked 8th on cultural resources and business travel, 13th on price competitiveness, and 14th on natural resources in **World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019**.
 - Despite these superb rankings, India's overall tourism competitiveness ranking at 34 reveals that India has not monetized or marketed the precious assets embedded in its heritage to their full potential, as other countries do.

Way Forward

- **One India One Tourism' Approach:** Tourism encompasses multiple ministries and takes place in and within states.
 - It thus requires a National Tourism Council, an empowered legislative body that will enable fast-tracking of Centre-state level tourism matters and will create a 'One India One Tourism' approach.
- **Tourism Should be Declared as Infrastructure:** Tourism infrastructure projects, viz., hotels, resorts, equipment, parks, etc., having a project cost more than Rs. 1 crore should be notified as 'infrastructure' to enable promoters to avail loans on a priority basis.
- **Skill Development:** There is a need to connect local communities to tourism by encouraging them to set up small enterprises to supply the tourism industry.
 - Employment opportunities can be expanded by ensuring that investors and operators in the organized sector are encouraged to hire staff locally.

- **Conservation of Heritage Sites:** Conservation and development of all heritage sites should be undertaken and completed through either government funding or through NGOs/**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** activities.
 - The Ministry of Tourism's **Swadesh Darshan and National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD)** schemes are already undertaking the development or maintenance of heritage sites.
- **Promoting Ease of Tourism:** To truly ensure a seamless tourist transportation experience we need to standardize all interstate road taxes and make them payable at a single point which will facilitate the ease of doing business.
- **Incredible India 2.0:** Given the diversity of tourism in India, there is a need to actively promote and market niche tourism like Buddhist circuit, Swadesh Darshan, Adventure tourism in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
 - In this context, the Government of India can launch the Incredible India 2.0 campaign, which will promote tourism in 100 Smart & Swachh Tourist Destination Sites.



Conclusion

Given opportunities in the Tourism sector, it can act as an engine to revive growth and showcases brand India to the world.



Female Labor Force Participation In India

This article is based on "**Enhancing women's employment is key to economic recovery**" which was published in *The Hindustan Times* on 19/01/2021. It talks about constraints and solutions regarding declining Female Labor Force Participation in India.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper-2, Issues Related to Women, Gender, Employment, Issues Relating to Development

India continues to struggle to provide its women with equal opportunity. In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic,

female labor force participation in India was 23.5%, according to ILO estimates.

The pandemic has made this situation worse. It has hit women disproportionately — because they work in sectors that have been the hardest hit; work more than men do in the informal economy; or because they are the primary caregivers at home.

As the recovery of the Indian economy requires a concerted effort of both government and citizenry, women can become a critical part of the economic recovery. Thus, there is a need to ameliorate long-standing issues that hamper female labor force participation in India.

Constraints In Female Labor Force Participation

- **Stereotyping In Society:** India's societal norms are such that women are expected to take the responsibility of family care and childcare. This stereotype is a critical barrier to women's labor force participation.
 - Due to this, women are in constant conflict over allotment of time for work and life is a war of attrition for them.
- **Digital Divide:** In India in 2019, internet users were 67% male and 33% female, and this gap is even bigger in rural areas.
 - This divide can become a barrier for women to access critical education, health, and financial services, or to achieve success in activities or sectors that are becoming more digitized.
- **Technological Disruption:** Women hold most of the administrative and data-processing roles that artificial intelligence and other technologies threaten to usurp.
 - As routine jobs become automated, the pressure on women will intensify and they will experience higher unemployment rates.
- **Lack of Gender-Related Data:** Globally, major gaps in gendered data and the lack of trend data make it hard to monitor progress.
 - In India, too, significant gaps in data on the girl child prevent a systematic longitudinal assessment of the lives of girls.
- **Impact of Covid-19:** Owing to Covid-19, global female employment is 19% more at risk than male employment (ILO estimates).
 - For India, several estimates show that, compared to men, women were 9.5% less likely to be employed in August 2020 compared to August 2019.
 - In the **World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index** (which measures gaps that exist in the economic participation of women), India slipped to 112th place this year, simply because over 70 lakh Indian women have dropped out of work.

Way Forward

As a report by McKinsey Global Institute suggests that if women participated in the Indian economy at the level men do, annual GDP could be increased by 60% above its projected GDP by 2025. Given this, governments at all levels, civil society, and citizenry should take adequate measures to ensure gender equality.

- **Full-Time Child Care:** The Integrated Child Development Scheme provides some support, but it is not a full-time child care solution.
 - However, the "Sangini Centres" of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) provide full-day child care for 0-5-year-olds, including nutrition, health, and child care.
 - Thus, similar centers should be significantly expanded.
- **Bridging Digital Divide:** To address this, partnerships between the public and private sectors will be most effective.
 - Actions will need to address affordability of phones and computers, female digital literacy and its social context, and inadequate technical content dedicated to women and girls.
- **Flexible Working:** The pandemic-induced remote working scenario has taught the corporate world that seamless work-life integration is possible not only for women but for male professionals as well.
 - Even as India Industries adds more diversity and inclusion initiatives such as increased maternity leave, mandatory paternity leave, the right to and choice of work for women depends greatly on organizations continuing the practice of flexible working.
- **Fiscal Incentives:** Women have a higher elasticity of labor supply than men (their labor supply is more responsive to their take-home wages) — lower income taxes for women can incentivize their participation.
- **Encouraging Women Entrepreneurship:** Creating job opportunities is the need of the hour. However, encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs will provide a long-term solution.
 - By creating jobs, fuelling innovation, and furthering investment in health and education, entrepreneurship among women could transform India's economy and society.
- **Prioritizing Gender Statistics:** A UN Women Initiative called "Making Every Woman and Girl Count" was launched in 2016 to help prioritize gender data, ensure regular production of quality and comparable gender statistics, and ensure that data are accessible and used to inform policy.

- There is a need to incorporate such an initiative in India as well.

Conclusion

World Bank, noted that “no country can develop and achieve its full potential if half of its population is locked in non-remunerative, less productive and non-economic activities.”

Therefore, in a country where young women’s education is now at par with men’s, ignoring that half of the population isn’t participating equally in the economy means we are missing out on innovation, entrepreneurship, and productivity gains.



Socio-Economic and Caste Census

This article is based on “A new framework around caste and the census” which was published in The Hindu on 23/01/2021. It talks about the comparison between Census and Socio-Economic and Caste Census and their associated concerns.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 1, Population and Associated Issues

Enumerating, describing, and understanding the population of society and what people have access to, and what they are excluded from is important not only for social scientists but also for policy practitioners and the government.

In this regard, the **Census of India**, one of the largest exercises of its kind, enumerates and collects demographic and socio-economic information on the Indian population.

However, the critiques of the exercise of the census consider it as both a data collection effort and a technique of governance, but not quite useful enough for a detailed and comprehensive understanding of a complex society.

In this context, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was conducted in 2011, but it has its own issues.

Census, SECC & Difference

➤ Census

- The origin of the Census in India goes back to the colonial exercise of 1881.
- Census has evolved and been used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, delimitation exercise, etc.
- However, as early as the 1940s, W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941

Census, had pointed out that “the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument unsuited for specialized inquiry.”

➤ SECC

- SECC was conducted for the first time since 1931.
- SECC is meant to canvass every Indian family, both in rural and urban India, and ask about their:
 - Economic status, so as to allow Central and State authorities to come up with a range of indicators of deprivation, permutations, and combinations of which could be used by each authority to define a poor or deprived person.
 - It is also meant to ask every person their specific caste name to allow the government to re-evaluate which caste groups were economically worst off and which were better off.
- SECC has the potential to allow for a mapping of inequalities at a broader level.

➤ Difference Between Census & SECC

- The Census provides a portrait of the Indian population, while the SECC is a tool to identify beneficiaries of state support.
- Since the Census falls under the Census Act of 1948, all data are considered confidential, whereas according to the SECC website, “all the personal information given in the SECC is open for use by Government departments to grant and/or restrict benefits to households.”

Associated Concerns With SECC

- **Repercussions of a Caste Census:** Caste has an emotive element and thus there exist the political and social repercussions of a caste census.
 - There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities.
 - Due to these repercussions, nearly a decade after the SECC, a sizeable amount of its data remains unreleased or released only in parts.
- **Caste Is Context-specific:** Caste has never been a proxy for class or deprivation in India; it constitutes a distinct kind of embedded discrimination that often transcends class. For example:
 - People with Dalit last names are less likely to be called for job interviews even when their qualifications are better than that of an upper-caste candidate.
 - They are also less likely to be accepted as tenants by landlords. Thus difficult to measure.
 - Marriage to a well- educated, well-off Dalit man still sparks violent reprisals among the families of upper-caste women every day across the country.

Way Forward

- **Utilizing Existing Data:** As SECC has its own concerns, linking and syncing aggregated Census data to other large datasets such as the National Sample Surveys may help the governments realize the intended benefits of SECC.
 - National Sample Surveys cover issues that the Census exercises do not, such as maternal health, information of land and asset ownership, consumption expenditure, nature of employment, which would be significant for a more comprehensive analysis.
- **Digital Alternatives:** Statisticians such as Atanu Biswas point out that Census operations across the world are going through significant changes, employing digital methods that are precise, faster, and cost-effective.
 - However, care must be taken to ensure that digital alternatives and linking of data sources involving Census operations are inclusive and non-discriminatory, especially given the sensitive nature of the data being collected.

Conclusion

While the Census authorities present documents on methodology as part of a policy of transparency, there needs to be a closer and continuous engagement between functionaries of the Census and SECC, along with academics and other stakeholders concerned, since the Census and the SECC are projects of governance as well as of academic interest.



Shadow Entrepreneurship

This article is based on "Rise of shadow entrepreneurship" which was published in The Hindu on 18/01/2021. It talks about the benefits and issues associated with the Shadow Entrepreneurship.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Employment, Issues Relating to Development

Recently, a business school professor allegedly misused his faculty position to provide fake certificates to students. This is one of the many cases whereby people across the globe get cheated, owing to the unregulated nature of online activities.

The abovesaid case highlights the ill-effects of the global rise of shadow entrepreneurship. Shadow entrepreneurs manage a business that sells legitimate goods and services but they do not register their businesses. Shadow entrepreneurship is a key factor affecting economic development, both in a positive and negative sense.

Moreover, India has one of the highest numbers of shadow entrepreneurs in the world and with a rising gig economy, understanding shadow entrepreneurship becomes incredibly important.

Positives of Shadow Entrepreneurship

- **Providing Employment:** Presently, India's manufacturing sector is unable to provide adequate formal employment opportunities to the youth. Moreover, there is a mismatch between education and job skills in the market.
 - In this context, the phenomenon of shadow entrepreneurship is seen as a potential driver of job growth and economic development.
- **Bridging Market Gap:** Shadow entrepreneurs can help release the associated distortions and frictions in the market.
 - They can offer complementary services that traditional service providers may be constrained to offer or consumers might not be able to access.
- **Augmenting Social Services:** Shadow entrepreneurialism may extend welfare support of government schemes, as they can address the accessibility, availability, or affordability issues.

Associated Concerns

With Shadow Entrepreneurship

- **Extension of Informal Labour:** As Shadow Entrepreneurship is largely unregulated, it provides little job security and few benefits to its workers like social security, insurance, etc.
 - Therefore, it is an extension of India's informal labor, which has been prevalent for a long time and has remained unregulated.
- **Hampering Economic Growth:** Shadow Entrepreneurship results in loss of tax revenue, the unfair competition to registered businesses, and also poor productivity - factors that hinder economic development.
 - Further, as the Shadow Entrepreneurship businesses are not registered, it takes them beyond the reach of the law and makes shadow economy entrepreneurs vulnerable to corrupt government officials.
- **National Security Implications:** Shadow Entrepreneurship may also have cross-border and national security implications. For instance, the recently reported suspicious loans being provided by Chinese instant loan providers online.
- **Increase in Scams:** It will also mean that unscrupulous individuals who are not entrepreneurs per se but are complementary service providers will potentially take more advantage of these post-pandemic market constraints, extracting money from consumers by means such as document forgery.

Way Forward

- **Formalization:** Informal sector entrepreneurship, poverty, and inequality are conditioned by a country's economic and political institutions. Therefore, Government policies could play a big role in helping shadow economy entrepreneurs transition to the formal economy.
 - Moreover, with proper economic and political frameworks in place, individuals are more likely to become 'formal' entrepreneurs and register their businesses.
- **Harmonization:** There is a need for associated harmonization of activities between competition authorities of governments (in India's case the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in regulating shadow entrepreneurship and government departments in healthcare, education, or finance).
- **Legislation:** Given the magnitude of shadow entrepreneurship in India, it is not possible to formalize it in a short span of time. Therefore, the need of the hour is enabling legislation that regulates and provides social security benefits also.
 - In this context, the recent **Code on Social Security Bill, 2020**, is a step in the right direction. For the first time, it acknowledges platform workers and **gig workers** as new occupational categories.

Conclusion

Shadow entrepreneurship may temporarily tackle issues like the unemployment crisis or market gap but given monitoring needs of public goods distribution for the developing world, without regulation, the situation could spiral out of control.



Digital Services Tax

This article is based on "Digital Services Tax: Not about India vs US" which was published in The Indian Express on 25/01/2021. It talks about the rationale and concerns associated with the digital services tax.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, IT & Computers

Recently, the **United States Trade Representative (USTR)** published a report concluding that the **2% digital services tax (DST)** introduced by the Indian government (by the 2020 Finance Act) discriminates against US businesses and contravenes settled principles of international tax law.

The DST is aimed at ensuring that non-resident, digital service providers pay their fair share of tax on revenues

generated in the Indian digital market. India's 2% DST is levied on revenues generated from digital services offered in India, including digital platform services, digital content sales, and data-related services.

As the digital economy is increasingly becoming a separate sector of the economy itself, developed countries like the US (where the majority of digital service providers come from) must understand that it would be now difficult to ring-fence the digital economy from the rest of the economy for tax purposes.

Note:

- India was one of the first countries in the world to introduce a **6% equalization levy** in 2016, but the levy was restricted to online advertisement services (commonly known as "digital advertising taxes" or "DATs").
- In March 2020, it expanded the scope of the existing equalization levy to a range of digital services that includes e-commerce platforms. Any payment made by non-residents in connection with an Indian user will now attract a 2% levy.

Concerns Raised by USTR & Counterclaim

- The USTR conducted an investigation under section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974, which authorizes it to appropriately respond to a foreign country's action that is discriminatory and negatively affects US commerce.
- The USTR report found the DST to be discriminatory on **two counts**.
 - First, it states that the DST discriminates against US digital businesses because it specifically **excludes from its ambit domestic (Indian) digital businesses**.
 - Second, according to the report, the DST does not extend to identical services provided by non-digital service providers.
- However, India clarified that the DST itself in no way discriminates based on the size of operations or nationality.
 - It may predominantly appear that DST is applicable to US companies because the market for digital services is dominated by US-based firms.
 - Further, any company that has a permanent residence in India is excluded since it is already subject to tax in India.

Rationale of DST

- **Prolonged International Tax Law Negotiation:** The agenda to reform international tax law so that digital companies are taxed where economic activities are carried out was formally framed within the **OECD's base erosion and profit shifting program**.

- However, seven years since its inception, it is still a work in progress.
- Due to this, countries are worried that they might cede their right to tax incomes. Therefore, many countries have either proposed or implemented a digital services tax.

Note:

- Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) refers to tax avoidance strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations.
- **Changing International Economic Order:** The proliferation of digital service taxes (DSTs) is a symptom of the changing international economic order.
 - Countries such as India which provide large markets for digital corporations seek a greater right to tax incomes.
- **Asymmetrical Digital Power:** The taxation of the digitalized economy turned out to be a relatively contentious issue because there is a huge asymmetry in digital service providers and consumers.
 - Further, a redistribution of taxing rights can have significant revenue implications for countries like India and the US. This makes a consensus-based solution harder to achieve.
 - Thus, countries claim that the exponential increase of the digital economy and the digitalization of the traditional economy require the adoption of new tax rules.

Associated Concerns With DST

- **Eventually Burdening Digital Consumers:** Experts suggest that DST can be passed on to consumers. While the Indian customer may not pay this as a tax, this could mean higher prices, contrary to the claim that it taxes the company.
- **Retaliatory Tariffs:** The USTR investigations could pose a threat of retaliatory tariffs, as similar tariffs were imposed by the US on France.
 - Further, it could turn into a **digital trade war-like scenario** and could harm India's Information and communication technology industry.
- **Double Taxation:** This was severely criticized by many countries as a unilateral measure that would result in double taxation.

Way Forward

- **New Model of Digital Taxation:** The core problem that the international tax reform seeks to address is that digital corporations, unlike their brick-and-mortar counterparts, can operate in a market without a physical presence.

- Therefore, taxing in a particular jurisdiction may not augur well with the growth of the digital economy.
- To overcome this challenge, countries suggested that a new basis to tax, say, the number of users in a country, could address the challenge to some extent.
- The EU and India were among the advocates of this approach.
- **Expediting Multilateral Negotiations:** While the digital economy and its implications continue to evolve, the multilateral solution at the level of the OECD must be expedited.
 - Moreover, it would also require political consensus on multiple issues, including sensitive matters such as setting up of an alternative dispute resolution process comparable to arbitration.

Conclusion

As countries calibrate their response to competing demands for sovereignty to tax, DST is an interim alternative outside tax treaties. It possesses the advantage of taxing incomes that currently escape tax and creates space to negotiate a final, overarching solution to this conundrum.

**Increasing Inequalities**

This article is based on "Troubling trends: On widening inequality" which was published in The Hindu on 26/01/2021. It talks about the increasing inequalities in the world.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Liberalization, Investment Models, Inclusive Growth

The world economy is slowly recovering from the devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the recovery is uneven among countries and within countries. It is an emerging universal truth that, in the post-pandemic world, economic inequality is rising sharply in all countries.

This can be reflected in a new report by Oxfam, which has revealed that the 1,000 wealthiest people worldwide recovered their losses from the pandemic within nine months as opposed to the world's poorest, who might take a decade to limp back to their pre-pandemic standing.

In this context, the World Economic Forum has proposed '**the Great Reset of Capitalism,**' which says it is a "commitment to jointly and urgently build the foundations of our economic and social system for a more fair, sustainable and resilient future."

In the past, many such slogans were raised. However, it is the perils of the **neo-liberal economic order** that continues to grow inequalities worldwide.

Note:

- The current world economic order can be termed neo-capitalism or neo-liberalism, which focuses on Laissez-faire (market freedom), globalization, intellectual property rights, free movement of goods, services investment, and ideas.

Inequalities in India

Inequality was alarmingly high and destabilizing social and political order in much of the world even before the pandemic struck. Inequality is widening across the world, and India is no exception.

- According to the recent Oxfam report, Inequality in India has risen to levels last seen when it was colonized.
 - The additional wealth acquired by India's 100 billionaires since March when the lockdown was imposed is enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest ₹94,045.
- An unskilled worker in India would take three years to earn the richest person earned in one second last year.

Concerns Associated with Inequalities

- **Normalization of Inequalities:** Many major economists worldwide try to justify growing inequalities as an inevitable by-product of economic growth that led to the reduction of absolute poverty.
 - Moreover, concerns about inequality could also be easily dismissed as being informed by socialism, which is portrayed as a threat to democracy.
 - Due to this, the distribution of new wealth between capital and labor has become so one-sided that workers are constantly being pushed to penury while the rich are getting richer.
 - Further, the worsening inequality in income and opportunities impacts some sections disproportionately due to discrimination based on gender, caste, and other factors.
- **Creation of Monopolies:** Despite its alleged commitment to market competition, the neoliberal economic agenda instead brought the decline of competition and the rise of close to monopoly power in vast swaths of the economy: pharmaceuticals, telecom, airlines, agriculture, banking, industrials, retail.
- **Unsustainable Economic Growth:** One of the chief characteristics of economic development is the intensification of energy use. There is an unprecedented concentration of high energy density in all economic development strategies.

- The bulk of the energy continues to be generated from non-renewable sources.
- The developed world's primary objective is to capture energy-generating resources from across continents and put them to use to push their GDP growth to greater heights.
- This unsustainable economic growth model is against the concept of sustainability, as it sacrifices the need of future generations for the welfare of present generations.

Way Forward

- **Nordic Economic Model:** To make the current redistribution of wealth more equitable, the current neo-liberal model can be replaced by the 'Nordic Economic Model.'
 - Nordic Economic Model consists of effective welfare safety nets for all, corruption-free governance, the fundamental right to quality education & healthcare, high taxes for the rich, etc.
- **4P Model of Capitalism:** Rather than just rhetoric, the new capitalism model should focus on 4P's viz. 'Profit, People, Planet, Purpose and it should be the government's task to ensure that the corporates adhere to this model.

Conclusion

Unlike in the 20th century, India can and must actively contribute to the framing of new rules to govern global capitalism and the reshaping of international institutions.

Simultaneously, as the Great Reset narrative unfolds, it must also reform its economy and society to make it more equitable, sustainable, and capable of coping with rapid external change.



Monopolistic Practices of Big-Tech Firms

This article is based on "Global antitrust and the challenge of Big Tech" which was published in The Hindu on 29/01/2021. It talks about the concerns associated with monopolistic practices of Big-Tech firms.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Liberalization, Investment Models, Inclusive Growth

With the Internet playing a central role in determining how humans live and work, a few big technology companies have gathered remarkable clout. Big Tech firms, also known as GAFA (Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook),

are the largest and most dominant companies in the information technology industry of the United States.

Many have speculated it may not be possible to live outside of the digital world ecosystem created by these companies. Now, these big tech companies are setting their sights on the Global South, particularly the Indian subcontinent, for the untapped potential it holds.

However, there are many concerns over these Big tech firms' monopolistic practices like slow regulation, unfair competition, privacy, etc. Therefore, given the centrality of digital technologies in the future, a comprehensive regulatory framework must be needed.

How Big Tech Firms Establishes Monopoly?

- **Network effect:** Due to strong network effects, it is not possible to ban or curtail these services.
 - Even if other options are available (such as Signal and Telegram for messaging), the network effects bind customers to their often used platform (WhatsApp), even if it is not their favorite.
- **Brand Loyalty:** The major players have harnessed technologies that permit synchronicity between devices and people in a manner that is often superficially described as "brand loyalty."
- **Tying or Bundling Certain Products:** Big tech firms have pre-loaded certain software with the OS. Due to this, many times, there was no option available to users to use other alternatives.

Concerns Associated with BigTech Firms

- **Unfair Competition:** Innovations and technological advancements have meant that unlikely giants have emerged in an extremely short span of time. To retain their pole position, these firms may resort to anti-competitive behavior. For example:
 - They are erecting entry barriers by refusing to interconnect and interoperate with competing firms.
 - Leveraging their capital base and thereby engaging in predatory pricing, and driving out competitors.
 - Exclusive arrangements and cartelization.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Big tech firms' market power is built at individuals' expense through the unscrupulous collection and processing of user data and forcing certain products on consumers.
 - Further, there is a lack of transparency in how tech companies process user data, which has raised serious and pressing privacy concerns.
- **Slow Regulation:** Due to rapid innovation and advancement by the Big Tech firms, the regulators are only able to react, not be in readiness.

- In India, Big Tech companies are able to operate in a regulatory vacuum.
- Due to this, they can avoid any negative repercussions for their continued violations regarding the adequate compensation of labor, local incorporation, and taxation laws and maintaining reasonable and adequate data protection standards.

Way Forward

- **Prioritizing Personal Data Regulation:** At a point in time where data is the new gold standard, the regulation of how tech companies use consumers' personal data to establish dominance should be a significant preliminary focus point.
- **Ensuring Right to Privacy:** Governments worldwide have introduced stringent laws to ensure users' right to privacy by requiring tech companies to adhere to certain basic and essential data security and privacy measures.
 - In this context, the dedicated data protection law (the **Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill**) must be expedited.
- **Comprehensive Regulatory Framework:** There is an undeniable monopoly that big tech companies enjoy across sectors and regulatory gaps and consumer loyalty has enabled this unique situation to thrive.
 - The consumer will not easily give up the convenience that this offers her; therefore, there is a need to create a network of regulatory measures and safeguards centered around the consumer.
 - Thus, regulation should be mindful of region-specific issues and adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to have the most impact.
- **Monetizing Information:** Big Tech companies must negotiate a fair payment with all the stakeholders for using their content in Facebook's newsfeed and Google's Search.

Conclusion

- Given the size and impact of the Indian market, all regulatory action in India is bound to be closely monitored and can have a far-reaching effect elsewhere in the world.
- Hence, the question before policymakers is how to regulate these Internet firms from abusing their monopoly power while at the same time encouraging the positive externalities and consumer surplus they create.



Youth & Mahatma Gandhi

This article is based on *“Mahatma Gandhi’s core values should inspire youth today”* which was published in *The Indian Express* on 30/01/2021. It talks about what inspiration the youth of India can draw from Mahatma Gandhi.

Tags: Indian History, GS Paper - 1, Salient Features of Indian Society, Important Personalities, Issues Relating to Development

Every year, on the occasion of Martyrs’ Day, people in India and worldwide pay homage to the sacrifices made by **Mahatma Gandhi**. Apart from the commitment to the ideal of non-violence, the need to rise above casteism, communalism, regionalism are core values that Mahatma Gandhi professed.

However, modernization combined with globalization has changed life in general and the lifestyle of youth in particular in the last few decades, leading to change in social institutions and structures.

Besides, the substantive demographic change in terms of population, political decadence, rising unemployment, and eroding value system combined with the excessive market-oriented economy has made life very complicated for the new generation.

In order to make the youth of modern India deal with these issues, the **need is to inculcate Gandhian values among** the youth in earnest to make them more vivacious and active for nation-building.

Issues With Present Day

Youth and Modern Lifestyle

- **Growing Intolerance in Society Leading To Violence:** The youth of today is a victim of intolerance, impatience, and misjudged convictions. These factors combine to lead most of them on to a path of violence.
 - The situation deteriorates further when the expectation bar of lifestyle attainments is raised and cannot deliver accordingly.
- **Materialism Leading To The Hedonistic Lifestyle:** There is a growing materialistic tendency in society, that compels the individual to look for more and more new items of the material world. This attitude leads to hedonism.
 - A hedonist does not go by any logic, rationale, or need-based accrual of items.
- **Education Disparity:** Today’s young generation is a victim of an education that envisages certifying him/her to be worthy of the market.
 - However, this led to a dichotomy between the public and private institutions and subsequently resulted in disparity in education and unemployment among the youth.

- **Employment Scarcity:** It is one of the most serious concerns among the youth in our country. The employment market is unable to keep pace with ever-growing job-seekers.
 - Moreover, the bigger irony is that the current employment market is a systematic waning of rural-based employment, where the majority of job-seekers exist.

What Youth Can Learn From Gandhian Ideals

- **Tackling Intolerance & Violence:** Intolerance & Violence are two sides of the same coin. Mahatma Gandhi successfully weaponized truth, satyagraha, and peace during India’s struggle for independence.
 - These ideals inspired great men across the world, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Their lives stand as a testament to their indomitable will and the courage to practice the ideals.
 - Therefore, the youth of India must draw inspiration and learn how to tackle intolerance & violence peacefully.
- **Selfless Nationalism:** The youth of today must emulate their lives and engage themselves wholeheartedly in serving the nation while scripting the story of India’s success.
 - As Mahatma Gandhi aptly remarked: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
 - With ingenuity and innovation, the nation’s youth should chart the course of India’s development, lending impetus to the concept of vocal for local.
- **Means Over Ends:** The Gandhian maxim of “means are more important than the end” implies that one needs to focus on the means, not merely the achievement of an end at any cost.
 - According to Gandhiji, to accumulate more than is required would be a sort of theft. Therefore, to control hedonism in society, the youth need to be endowed with the Gandhian value of Samthistha.
 - According to Gandhiji Samthistha, it comprises austerity, forbearance, asceticism, spirituality, and the self-effacing spirit of sacrifice.
 - Thus, following Samthistha can help one to dissociate from materialism or hedonism.
- **Gandhian Model of Education:** Gandhiji believed education should be value-based and mass-oriented.
 - He always advocated for true, national education.

True education develops a balanced intellect, which presupposes a harmonious growth of body, mind, and soul.

- This Gandhian principle of education may help resolve this kind of disparity, maybe not entirely, but to a large extent.

➤ **Developing Atma-Nirbharta:** The current unemployment situation warrants a considerable reorientation exercise in the education system and demands entrepreneurs to be hoisted to take care of job requirements both at the national and local levels.

- In this context, Gandhiji insisted on imparting vocational training to youth to become self-reliant with such training, with education linked with practical experience.

- The vocational education will impart necessary skills and help address the unemployment issue, especially in rural areas.
- This would help to make a Bharat that is atmanirbhar or self-reliant.

Conclusion

The youth is very vibrant and energetic, dynamic, and capable of achieving, provided that they remain on the right track. Therefore, India's youth must remember Mahatma Gandhi's words, which stated: **"Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny"**.



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