



# Monthly Editorial Consolidation



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## Evolving India-Bangladesh Relations

This article is based on “**Good neighbours: On India-Bangladesh ties**” which was published in *The Hindu* on 31/03/2021. It talks about the new trends in India-Bangladesh ties.

**Tags:** International Relations, GS Paper - 2, India and its neighbourhood, bilateral groupings and agreements

Recently, the Prime Minister of India visited Bangladesh to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war of liberation and the centenary year of **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.

Historically, India's has played a critical role in the creation of Bangladesh. India's political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh's Liberation War played an important role towards Bangladesh's independence.

This is the first foreign visit since the outbreak of the **Covid-19 pandemic** of the Indian Prime Minister and it conveys that India attaches **great importance to the relationship with its eastern neighbour**.

Further, the recent events highlight a deeper understanding on both sides of the India-Bangladesh relationship. However, there are few challenges that need to be resolved for a win-win relationship.

### New Trends in India-Bangladesh Ties

In the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence. This can be reflected in the following events:

- **Military Cooperation:** The Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has **uprooted anti-India insurgency elements** from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful.
  - This has allowed India to make a massive redeployment of military resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere.
  - Further, Bangladesh handed over many of India's “most wanted” criminals.
  - India has also accepted an **international tribunal verdict** in favour of Bangladesh that resolved a **40-year-old maritime dispute** and built confidence as well.
- **Land Boundary Agreement:** Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues

peacefully by ratifying the historic **Land Boundary Agreement in 2015**.

- In that agreement, enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh.
- **Trade Relations:** Bangladesh today is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at \$9.21 billion and imports at \$1.04 billion.
  - Also, India has offered duty free access to multiple Bangladeshi products.
- **Development Sector:** On the development front, cooperation has deepened, with India extending three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to \$8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.
- **Improved Connectivity:** Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved.
  - A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala runs a route distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km if it ran through the Chicken's Neck to remain within India.
  - Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram (Chittagong) seaports carried by road, rail, and water ways to Agartala.
- **News Areas of Engagement:** Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India, outnumbering all tourists arriving from western Europe in 2017, with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi.
  - Bangladesh accounts for more than **35% of India's international medical patients** and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

### Challenges in India-Bangladesh Ties

- **Teesta River Dispute:** Despite the remarkable progress, the unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large.
- **Illegal Migration:** The problem of Bangladeshi civilians being killed at the border has dented relations. The year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force.
  - These shootings occur as many Bangladeshi people try to illegally migrate into India.
- **NRC & CAA:** Indian government's proposal to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) across the whole of India and impetus for the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA), reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations.
- **China Factor:** Despite its ‘Neighbourhood First Policy’, India has been losing its influence in the region to China.
  - Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, once considered traditional Indian allies, are increasingly tilting

towards China due to the Asian giant's massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments in these countries.

- China, in lieu of its cheque-book diplomacy, is well-entrenched in South Asia, including Bangladesh, with which it enjoys significant economic and defence relations.

### Way Forward

- **India's Learning From Bangladesh:** Bangladesh is the region's fastest growing economy, with social indicators that other countries, including India, can learn.
  - This is the vital link with which India can realise the full potential of either the economic or strategic underpinnings of its Act East policy.
- **Water Sharing:** While all countries desire to be recognised as equal, they also want bigger countries to take more responsibility for protecting this equality. This, India must "play a pioneering role in India-Bangladesh relations.
  - Therefore, as the larger country, the onus is on India to be generous enough to let the water flow and resolve the dispute over Teesta water and six other rivers.
- **Balancing Trade:** Trade could be more balanced if non-tariff barriers from the Indian side could be removed.

### Conclusion

As Bangladesh celebrates its 50 years of independence, India continues to be one of its most important neighbours and strategic partners. To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the three Cs — cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation.



## India's Maritime Doctrine

*This article is based on "It is time to reimagine the Indian Ocean" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 30/03/2021. It talks about the challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine.*

**Tags:** International Relations, GS Paper - 2, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

Recently, soon after Joe Biden became the president of the US, the new US secretary of defense visited India. The interesting takeaway of this visit was the specific mention to pursue enhanced cooperation between the Indian armed forces and the US maritime forces.

This underlined the strategic importance of India in US foreign policy, especially Indo-Pacific engagements.

Since Independence, India has enjoyed an advantageous position in the Indian Ocean, primarily accorded through its geography.

Moreover, the lack of direct competition after the end of the Cold War allowed India to continue with its limited maritime approach while retaining the role of a key Indian Ocean player. However, there are many challenges in India's maritime policy.

### Challenges in India's Maritime Doctrine

- **Silos Approach in the Indian Ocean:** India's political class has divided the Indian ocean into many sub-regions.
  - Traditionally, India draws a line with Mauritius and Seychelles as its areas of strategic collaboration in the Indian Ocean.
  - In terms of sub-regions, the priority is in the northern (Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal), and eastern Indian Ocean (the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca).
  - Due to this, the western Indian Ocean and the eastern coast of Africa still continue to be in the maritime periphery in India's foreign policy.
- **Lesser Hold on Strategic Chokepoint:** China's first overseas military base was set up in the western Indian Ocean, in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.
  - Russia too recently acquired a base in Sudan, on the Red Sea coast, between the Suez Canal and Bab-el-Mandeb — a strategic chokepoint in the Indian Ocean.
  - However, beyond the anti-piracy mission, India's presence and maritime engagements with the African coast have been largely ad hoc.
- **Increasing Chinese Assertiveness:** Through the Maritime Silk Road, China engages with littorals and islands across the Ocean.
  - China has consistently aimed to improve its diplomatic, political, and military engagements in the region from Sri Lanka to Comoros, spanning the Indian Ocean in its entirety.
- **Continental Bias:** India's reorientation toward the maritime domain has not been easy, with generations of foreign and defense service officials focusing and training on continental issues.
  - Further, the Indian Navy is allotted approximately 14% of the defense budget speaks clearly to the defense establishment's priorities.

### Way Forward

- **Synchronizing Foreign & Defense Policies:** With the establishment of the Indian Ocean division

in the ministry of external affairs (MEA) in 2016, MEA appears to be undertaking a more active approach.

- However, the defense establishment has to match foreign policy engagements.
- **Holistic View of Indian Ocean:** The Indian Ocean as China is emerging as the key competitor to India's interests in the Indian Ocean Region.
  - Thus, there is a need to view the Indian Ocean as one continuous space and understand regional dynamics better.
- **Collaborating With Important Players:** India should supplement its partnership with the US with a network of multilateral groups with other middle powers, such as the India-Australia-Japan forum and the trilateral dialogue with France and Australia.

### Conclusion

While this is not to discount India's continental troubles, seen in recent crises such as Doklam and Ladakh, there is a need to understand the importance of maritime geography and its link to India's strategic interests and growing competition in the region.



## National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights

*This article is based on "Would cats bell themselves? The wait for the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights" which was published in The Down to Earth on 31/03/2021. It talks about the prospects of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.*

**Tags:** Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Issues Relating to Development, Government Policies & Interventions

India endorsed the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGP) on Business and Human Rights more than a decade ago. Accordingly, it has to evolve a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) detailing actions to ensure businesses do not violate human rights.

In this pursuit, the Indian government formally announced that it would develop a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in India at the Business and Human Rights Forum in Geneva in November 2018.

In February 2019, India published a draft NAP on Business and Human Rights, known as the 'Zero Draft', and also committed to publishing the final NAP in 2020. However, the final NAP is still not framed yet.

### National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights & Its Need

- **Goal:** National Action Plan will provide an overview of India's legal framework setting out the State's duty to protect human rights, set the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and access remedy against business-related human rights violations.
- **Inspiration:** The vision of India's NAP stems from the Gandhian principle of trusteeship that defines that the purpose of business is to serve all stakeholders.
- **Need:** Experts claim that the Covid-19 pandemic is a litmus test for the concept of stakeholder capitalism.
  - The NAP becomes more relevant in the wake of Covid-19 in that the pandemic has exposed several systemic vulnerabilities in how businesses operate.
  - The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that, due to Covid-19, 400 million Indian workers are at risk of sinking even deeper into poverty.
- **International Commitment:** The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (of which India is a signatory) envisages the Protect-Respect-Remedy principle while the role of the State is to ensure that all three pillars of the principle are working effectively in reality.
  - Further, the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8) focuses upon the realization of human rights in the business sector.

### Cases of Business & Human Rights

#### Concurrence:

Several plants were shut down in the last two decades on charges of violating human rights and environmental rights:

- Coca Cola Co's plants in Plachimada (2004), Mehdiganj (2013), and Hapur (2016)
- Hindustan Unilever Ltd's (Mercury) factory in Kodaikanal (2001)
- Sterlite Copper plant in Thoothukudi (2018)

#### Divergence:

- There is a law that prevents companies from advertising tobacco near school premises. But tobacco giant ITC Ltd's notebooks, complete with its logo, are available right inside classrooms. Again, seemingly, there is nothing illegal about it.
- More than a million people die in India each year due to consuming tobacco. However, one of the investors of a tobacco company is Life Insurance Corp (LIC), owned by the Government of India.

- When children are glued to games like PUBG, the young ones and their parents are blamed.
  - But in a class suit in Canada, parents alleged: “companies hire psychologists, who dig into the human brain and they really made the efforts to make the game as addictive as possible”.

### Challenges in Implementation of NAP

- **Extreme Informalization:** India faces an issue of extreme informalisation, low-skilled and low-paying jobs, gender wage gap, the prevalence of child labor, and forced/ bonded labor.
  - Social protection, occupational health and safety, unionization, and collective bargaining remain a challenge in general but particularly for informal workers.
- **High Levels of Dispossession:** The dispossession of communities from their right to access and control over land, water, and other natural resources necessary for their lives and livelihoods, is also a critical issue that the NAP must address.
- **Lack of Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** Access to remedy poses a major challenge in the effective implementation of NAP.
  - The lack of operational-level grievance mechanisms could be another stumbling block for the rights holders to access remedy mechanisms.

### Way Forward

- **Strengthening CAG:** There is a need to encourage CAG to evolve auditing standards that seek to ensure human-rights compliance and extend the same to all public-private partnerships.
  - This should ensure respect for human rights in all cases of public procurement and of public investment.
- **Strengthening CEC:** The Central Election Commissions should be mandated to regulate corporate funding of political parties, including directing mandatory disclosures of donations as well as of any conflict of interests by both businesses and political parties.
- **Strengthening NHRC and SHRCs:** There is a need to expand the powers of the Human Rights Commissions to issue notices to businesses and to create business and human rights ombudsperson to monitor human rights situation in businesses.
- **Strengthening MSME:** India has a significantly large number of micro, small, and medium (MSME) enterprises. The success of India’s NAP rests on the ability of the MSME sector to adopt it.

- The government as well as large companies have a crucial role in building the capacity of the MSME sector through training, awareness, and providing incentives.
- **Synchronizing Education:** Business managers will see human rights only as a risk — not as intrinsic to the business. Thus, there is a need for a proactive attempt to make Business and Human Rights a core part of the management curriculum.
  - So that every business manager groomed should be a human rights defender.
- **Embedding Accountability:** The rising influence and dominance of technology on the future of work, privacy, and inequality is a growing area of concern in India.
  - The NAP should take steps to embed accountability of technology companies on human rights issues beginning with the rights of workers in the gig economy.

### Conclusion

The NAP process is an opportunity for India to demonstrate leadership in achieving sustainable and inclusive growth and position itself as the world’s largest sustainable and responsible economy. The NAP can serve as an important tool to guide Indian businesses to redefine their purpose and emerge out of this pandemic more humane.



## Decentralizing Climate Assistance

*This article is based on “The role of MGNREGA in the climate crisis” which was published in The Hindustan Times on 03/04/2021. It talks about how can MGNREGA help in tackling climate change.*

**Tags:** Biodiversity & Environment, GS Paper - 3, Government Policies & Interventions, Conservation

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) has made immense contributions towards livelihood security and the creation of durable assets in rural areas.

While MGNREGA has been a valuable employment tool and safety net, as seen in the migrant crisis, its role in building ecosystems resilient to the climate crisis is being increasingly recognized.

A climate-smart MGNREGA can lower the risks posed by the climate crisis while providing legally mandated demand-driven employment to resource-poor households.

Hence, there is a need to bring upfront the scheme's potential in addressing matters of lives and livelihoods while combating the climate emergency.

### **MGNREGA & Climate Change**

- Although the MGNREGA was not designed specifically as a climate program, it incorporates three key elements with the potential to advance pro-poor climate assistance objectives:
  - Social protection through the provision of minimum wage labor;
  - The development of small-scale, natural resource-focused infrastructure; and
  - A decentralized, 'community-based planning architecture.
- MGNREGS is a well-established mechanism for planning, delivering, and monitoring expenditure.
  - It can deliver climate finance at scale into the hands of poor rural households — particularly the most vulnerable groups including women and scheduled castes and tribes — based on their priorities

### **How Can MGNREGA Help in Tackling Climate Change?**

- **Natural Resource Management:** In 2020-21, of the total expenditure spent on MGNREGA, about two-thirds were on works related to natural resource management (NRM).
  - The mammoth scale of the NRM component in MGNREGA provides a major boost to improving the productive capacity of the land, water, and forest resources.
- **Reducing Vulnerability to Climate Risk:** This will help reduce the vulnerability to climate risk as groundwater availability increases, soil fertility improves, tree cover is enhanced, drought- and flood-proofing measures are put in place.
- **Augmenting Climate Change Adaptation:** A recent study by the Centre for Science and Environment concludes that MGNREGA is the "world's biggest adaptation program as it harnesses the labor of people to invest in building the wherewithal to fight drought and build resilience".
- **Achieving INDC:** As part of its efforts to tackle climate change, India has to meet three key targets: building capacity for 40% electric power from non-fossil fuel, cut in emissions by 33-35% from the 2005 level, and create carbon sinks of about 2.5 to 3 billion tons.
  - India is on its way to meet the first two targets but lagging on the third one. Going by present trends, target achievement will prove to be a major challenge.

- In the Report submitted by the Union government to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the MGNREGA's contribution to sequester carbon was assessed at 62 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent in 2017-18.
- This performance needs to be enhanced.

### **Way Forward**

To strengthen MGNREGA and dealing with Climate change linkage, the following needs to be done:

- **Augmenting Financial Resources:** Topping up administrative or convergence funds to strengthen MGNREGA functionaries and workers' skills to build and benefit from climate-resilient and low-carbon assets.
  - This will make it truly demand-driven and engage more people to work for climate change remediation.
- **Deepening the Scope of Convergence:** There is a need to deepen the scope of convergence by proactively linking farm assets with climate-smart agriculture technologies and practices.
  - In this context, robust methodologies for measurement and accounting of environmental services can be developed.
- **Strengthening MGNREGA Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** More independent studies and surveys can be conducted that can quantify the scheme's adaptation and mitigation capacity to climate risks.
  - Also, there is a need for the feedback proformas not just the numerical count of works being undertaken but also the environmental services provided.
- **Anticipatory Wage Employment:** Building climate risk information (weather, climate hazards, and climate vulnerabilities), services, and skills to support anticipatory wage employment.

### **Conclusion**

It is time to acknowledge MGNREGA as a climate-smart green employment generation program. In a world that will continue to warm, the rural poor will suffer its worst consequences. As a public intervention, Climate-smart MGNREGA appears to be a step in the right direction.



## **Should India Join NATO?**

*This article is based on "Why India must not say 'no' to NATO" which was published in The Indian Express on 06/04/2021. It talks about the pros and cons of India becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).*

**Tags:** International Relations, GS Paper - 3, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

In the last few years, European countries have asserted to play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific region. India too knows that no single power can produce stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.

Moreover, China's meteoric rise has dramatically heightened India's need for closer security relationships with politically reliable, like-minded states. In order to tackle this geopolitical challenge, India will have to undertake more deliberate efforts to counter-balance the juggernaut of Chinese power.

One such arrangement, which has been recently floated by many western countries, is extending NATO's membership to India. Although NATO's membership in India will have positive implications, it will have serious ramifications too.

### **Arguments for India Becoming NATO's Member**

- **End of Cold War:** During the Cold War, India's refusal to join any of the Military bloc (NATO or Warsaw pact led by the USSR) was premised on its non-alignment.
  - That argument had little justification once the Cold War ended during 1989-91. Since then, NATO has built partnerships with many neutral and non-aligned
- **Creation of Deterrence:** Article 5 of the NATO treaty held that an attack against a member nation of the NATO would be considered to be an attack against all the members of the alliance and would call for joint military action against the aggressor.
  - This would create deterrence for China and Pakistan to attack India.
- **Military-Strategic Benefits:** An India-NATO dialogue would simply mean having regular contact with a military alliance, most of whose members are well-established partners of India.
  - Further, India has military exchanges with many members of NATO — including the US, Britain, and France — in bilateral and multilateral formats.
  - Therefore, in the longer term, India would derive military-strategic benefits from a partnership with the world's most powerful alliance.
- **Era of Multi-Alignment:** India might align with China and developing nations against the US in World Trade Organisation (WTO) but militarily oppose China while contemplating a "Quad" with the USA, Japan, and Australia.
  - Also, Egypt and Israel are both NATO partners who maintain defense relationships with Russia.

- Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, and Austria are all NATO partners with long-standing neutralist traditions.

- **Convergence on Many Issues:** A sustained dialogue between India and NATO could facilitate productive exchanges in a range of areas, including terrorism, changing geopolitics; the evolving nature of military conflict, the role of emerging military technologies, and new military doctrines.

### **Argument Against India Becoming NATO's Member**

- **Conflict Within NATO:** NATO members have conflicting opinions on how to share the military burden and strike the right balance between NATO and the EU's quest for an independent military role.
  - Further, NATO members disagree on policy related to Russia, the Middle East, and China.
- **Deteriorate Relations With Russia:** By becoming a NATO member, India's long-standing and strong ties with Russia will get frayed.
  - Russia has shown displeasure on account of India's growing strategic convergence with the US.
  - Moreover, this could further strengthen the already deepening relation between China and Russia.
  - Considering that India still is heavily dependent on the Russian military equipment, joining NATO seems like an eminently bad idea.
- **Issue of Sovereignty:** Another issue would be the establishment of NATO bases on India's territory.
  - This might invite widespread protests in the country and may even be considered an infringement of our sovereignty.
- **Dragging Down Into Various Conflicts:** The downside of joining NATO is that India would get dragged into various conflicts around the globe.
  - This would result in a lot of Indian soldiers dying in various conflicts in which we have no reason at all to be involved in.

### **Conclusion**

The bureaucratization of the engagement between India and western countries has prevented India from taking full advantage of re-emerging geopolitics of the Atlantic. However, India's recent proactive approach has certainly sought to end this prolonged political neglect.

Given this, a pragmatic engagement with NATO countries must be an important part of India's foreign policy but it must refrain from becoming a formal member of NATO.





## Food Wastage Issue

*This article is based on "India has a food wastage problem. Here's how individuals can make a difference" which was published in The Indian Express on 07/04/2021. It talks about the food wastage issue in India.*

**Tags:** Social justice, GS Paper - 2, Government Policies & Interventions, Health

Despite adequate food production, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has reported that about 190 million Indians remain undernourished. Moreover, it states that every third malnourished child is Indian.

Ironically, the same report highlights that around 40% of the food produced in India is either lost or wasted. It is further estimated that the value of food wastage in India is around ₹92,000 crores per annum.

This food wastage, however, isn't limited to one level alone but perforates through every stage; from harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting to the end stage of consumption.

Though food wastage is a global problem, India stands a chance to convert this into an opportunity, if it can address it properly.

### Case Study: SAFAL Outlet

- On average, 18.7 kgs of food was disposed off by one Safal outlet daily.
- This suggests that an estimated 7.5 tonnes of food are discarded daily across the 400 Safal outlets in Delhi.
- Approximately 84.7% of the total food waste recorded was thrown in the bin, while the rest was either fed to the poor or some animals.
- A significant portion of the food waste bin was still in edible condition.
- If the edible food waste generated by Safal is diverted, an estimated 2000 people could be fed daily.

### Challenge of Food Wastage

- **Pre-Consumption Losses:** Nearly 40% of the food produced in India is wasted every year due to fragmented food systems and inefficient supply chains.
  - This is the loss that occurs even before the food reaches the consumer.
- **Food Wastage At Households:** There is also a significant amount of food waste generated in our homes. As per the Food Waste Index Report 2021, a staggering 50 kg of food is thrown away per person every year in Indian homes.
- **Greenhouse Gases Emission:** This excess food waste usually ends up in landfills, creating potent greenhouse gases which have dire environmental implications.

- **Impact of The Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic not only exposed the problems of food waste but also compounded them.
  - In the wake of the lockdown imposed last year, surplus stocks of grain — pegged at 65 lakh tonnes in the first four months of 2020 — continued to rot in godowns across India.
  - Access to food became extremely scarce for the poor, especially daily-wage laborers.
- **Supply-Chain Management Issues:** Some problems in the Indian food supply chain include inefficiency of government programs, lack of transparency in revenue generation, insufficient storage facilities, and lack of comprehensive and accurate inventories.

### Way Forward

- **Behavioral Change:** According to various reports food waste attributed to households and their irresponsible consumption patterns means that change needs to begin in our own homes.
  - Calculated purchasing when buying groceries, minimizing single-use packaging wherever possible, ordering consciously from restaurants, and reconsidering extravagant buffet spreads at weddings can go a long way.
- **Food Bank Concept:** Edible food should be made available every day, for free, at the latest in the last opening hour, so it can be picked up and consumed by those in need.
  - The option of distribution through food banks can also be explored, as can tie-ups with private actors so that food can reach hunger hotspots.
  - At the community level, one can identify and get involved with organizations such as Coimbatore-based No Food Waste which aims to redistribute excess food to feed the needy and hungry.
- **International Precedents:** We can look to best practices and laws in countries like France, Norway, Denmark, UK, etc., in order to check spoilage and destruction of edible food waste in India.
  - For example, in France, supermarkets prioritize the reduction, reuse, and recycling of extra food.
- **Technological Investment:** It is important that technology is adopted at every stage of the supply chain to overcome this problem.
  - Planning in the supply chain can improve with technology, reducing transit time in shipping and logistics. In addition, multiple government initiatives are also assisting in building infrastructure for the food industry.

- Investments in the vibrant start-up ecosystem in India can also aid in addressing all the hindrances in the system with the support of the latest logistics and supply chain technologies, blockchain, artificial intelligence, data monitoring, storage, and packaging solutions

### Conclusion

Early awareness about our duty to minimize food waste is critical in changing the way our society addresses hunger and food scarcity. Thus everyone must join hands if we are to work towards a truly sustainable India that does not have millions undernourished despite having adequate food production.



## Left-Wing Extremism

*This article is based on "Lessons from Tekulguda" which was published in The Indian Express on 08/04/2021. It talks about the challenges posed by left-wing extremism (LWE).*

**Tags:** Internal Security, GS Paper - 3, Linkages Between Development & Spread of Extremism, Left Wing Extremism

Recently, a combing operation in the Tekulguda region of Bastar, Chhattisgarh went terribly wrong and resulted in the death of 22 security personnel and many more wounded.

This tragic incident is a major setback to India's internal security (IS) capability at many levels and highlights the challenge that left-wing extremism (LWE) continues to pose.

India has been dealing with three variants of the Internal Security (IS) challenge for decades and each has its own complexities viz. a proxy war and terrorism in Kashmir, sub-national separatist movements in the Northeast, and the Naxal-Maoist insurgency (aka LWE) in the Red Corridor.

The government has reasonably contained the first two challenges, but the Tekulguda incidents reflect that still, a lot needs to be done for eliminating LWE.

### LWE: Background

- **Genesis of LWE:** LWE has its genesis in poor governance, lack of development in the tribal belt, and an oppressive/exploitative hierarchy of the state and society that has pushed the tribal population, the landless, to the margins of survival.
  - Making a beginning in Naxalbari in West Bengal and Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh in the 1970s,

the movement has since spread to many states: Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa.

### Note: Combing Operations

- Combing operations are the joint operations done by allies or multi security agencies for cleansing an area. Example Army and Paramilitary doing combing operations in a particular region.
- It could be undertaken either to search for hiding insurgents or their arms cache.
- It is a deliberately planned operation and there are drills laid out for these operations.
- However, it has tremendous risk, as at any stage from anywhere, someone hidden and cornered, may fire at you and try to get away.
- The operations can be hampered by locals supporting the insurgents by blocking the movements of the Security Forces. The task becomes all the more difficult.

- This region, affected by LWE, is referred to as the **Red corridor.**

➤ **Associated LWE Groups:** The most prominent among the groups that have mushroomed in recent years are the People's War Group (PWG) and the Marxist Communist Centre (MCC).

- **Most Serious Threat:** In November 2005, then PM Manmohan Singh described the LWE challenge as the most serious security threat to India and exhorted the professionals to evolve appropriate responses.

### Issues Related to Dealing With LWE

- **Leadership Issue:** In the current scenario, barring a few exceptions, many of the senior police officers (IPS cadre) who are parachuted into the central police forces at senior ranks have little or no platoon/battalion experience.
  - By training, the police officer is expected to be a competent Superintendent and to maintain law and order.
  - This is not the skill-set that is relevant when an officer has to "command" and lead his men into insurgency operations.
  - This led to armed personnel casualties. In the last three decades, around 15000 people have lost their lives owing to LWE.
- **Recruiting Tribal Youths:** It is not ideology and revolutionary zeal that is driving people who are engaged in LWE. Their main activity is extortion. For many, joining these groups is the only way to survive.

- Further, these organizations hire vulnerable people who have low literacy levels, unemployed or low income, particularly the tribals, building up their cadre.
- This creates a positive feedback loop of recruitment of youth into LWE.
- **Threatening Democracy:** They resort to violence through their guerrilla tactics and attempt to set up their own government in the local villages.
- They threaten the locals before the conduct of elections and prevent them from voting. This violates the principle of participative democracy.

### Way Forward

- **Progressive Works:** Effective steps to reduce ethnic and social inequalities, disparities in educational and employment opportunities, and for creating effective machinery for the redressal of public grievance, are absolutely essential to improve the environment in which extremist violence flourishes.
  - Steps to reduce economic deprivation and improve the delivery of essential services can erode the base of public support on which the extremist movements survive.
- **Para-Military Reforms:** The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) report noted that in wake of Internal security challenges that the country faces, the role and the tasks of the paramilitary forces have to be restructured particularly with reference to command and control and leadership functions.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Given the complexities involved in India's national-security architecture, it is crucial to improve coordination between various federal and state security agencies.
- **Modernizing Police:** States play a vital role in maintaining law and order. So, emphasis should be laid on the capacity-building and modernization of the local police forces. Local forces can efficiently and effectively neutralize the LWE organizations.
- **Marginalization of LWE Groups:** States also need to adopt a focused time-bound approach to completely eliminate LWE groups and ensure all-around development of the affected regions.
  - States should rationalize their surrender policy in order to bring innocent individuals caught in the trap of LWE into the mainstream.
  - Apart from this, the Government needs to ensure two things; the security of the peace-loving people and the development of the Naxalism-affected regions.

### Note: SAMADHAN policy

The Government of India in 2017 announced a new doctrine, SAMADHAN. The doctrine was announced during the Review Meeting of Left Wing Extremism affected States

- S- Smart Leadership,
- A- Aggressive Strategy,
- M- Motivation and Training,
- A- Actionable Intelligence,
- D- Dashboard Based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas),
- H- Harnessing Technology,
- A- Action plan for each Theatre, and
- N- No access to Financing.

### Conclusion

The government has envisaged SAMADHAN policy to deal with the LWE. If implemented effectively, this doctrine can act as the one-stop solution for the LWE problem, as it encompasses the entire strategy of government from short-term policy to long-term policy formulated at different levels.



## Feminist' Foreign Policy

*This article is based on "Why India needs a 'feminist foreign policy'" which was published in The Indian Express on 09/04/2021. It talks about the need for adopting feminist foreign policy for India.*

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

Recently, India has been elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women for a four year term in September 2020, where India commits itself to promote the paradigm of gender equality, development and peace.

Ironically, in the recently released **World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2021**, India had slipped 28 spots to rank 140 out of the 156 countries covered.

If India want its aspirations to become actions, than India should consider adopting a **Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)** framework. The FFP framework is a more formal designed approach that goes beyond a purely development model to wider access, representation and decision making.

### What is Feminist Foreign Policy Framework?

- A feminist foreign policy as a political framework explores this very realm, first introduced and advocated by Sweden in 2014.

- FFP builds on **three central principles** of feminist perspectives on diplomacy and security, which include **broadening the understanding of security, decoding internal power relations, and acknowledging women's political agency.**
- In this sense, FFP is an effort to move beyond the traditional notions of war, peace, and development assistance to incorporate other arenas of foreign policy, including economics, finance, health, and the environment.
- By doing so, the framework looks at security in a more holistic way and incorporates the effects of its policies on **women and marginalized groups.**
- FFP framework is a reaction attributed to the fact that for centuries, men have monopolized the conduct of diplomacy and foreign relations.
- Data indicates that the **inclusion of diverse voices** makes for a better basket of options in decision making.
  - This results into realisation that it is not only necessary to include women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping but the wider gamut of diplomacy, foreign and security policy.
  - In many ways this would translate into a **bottom-up development approach.**
- Since Sweden embarked on this path, several other countries — Canada, France, Germany and, more recently, Mexico — have forged their own, adopting either a feminist foreign policy or a gendered approach to aspects of policy making.

### **Why India Needs a FFP framework?**

- The FFP approach provides steppingstones for India to follow en route to equality, common well-being, and peace.
- The FFP framework can also provide India opportunities to eliminate existing barriers restricting the participation of women and other marginalized groups in India's decision-making processes.
- An emphasis on women in leadership could catalyze an internal shift in India domestically and help subvert strictly defined patriarchal gender roles.
- Empirical research has suggested that gender equality is an important prerequisite for the economic and social development of a nation, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the advancement of national security.
- A FFP framework however must be tailored for the Indian context, which could also be a starting point for an internal shift in focus on gender as well, from a purely development paradigm to wider arenas of access, empowerment and decision making.

- Adopting a FFP could offer India an opportunity to create a conducive environment for peace, eliminate domestic barriers against women, and assist in building stronger bilateral relationships.

### **Policy Initiatives Taken By India Under FFP Framework**

- From 2007 when India deployed the first ever female unit to the UN Mission in Libya to supporting gender empowerment programmes through SAARC, IBSA, IORA and other multilateral fora, India's programmes have been targeted at making women the engines for inclusive and sustainable growth.
- Similarly, many of India's overseas programmes in partner countries have a gender component, as seen in Afghanistan, Lesotho and Cambodia.
- At internal policy level, 2015 saw a gender budget exercise within the MEA towards development assistance.

### **Associated Challenges**

- **Women's Subjugation:** India's historical record on women's rights—or rather, women's subjugation—makes it unlikely to swiftly and effectively adopt a FFP framework.
  - India in some ways reflects this widening gap, where the number of ministers declined from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021. The number of women in Parliament stands low at 14.4 per cent.
- **Patriarchy:** Patriarchal values are so deeply ingrained within Indian society that India has hardly managed to bring about a change in the system of inequity at home.
  - Women have traditionally been excluded from the conduct of foreign policy on the basis that a typical "female approach" would be more inclined to "soft-security" matters—including human rights, women empowerment, migration and trafficking—and distract from a focus on more important hard security issues.

### **Way Forward**

- **Women in Decision Making:** Our gender-based foreign assistance needs to be broadened and deepened and equally matched with lower barriers to participation in politics, diplomacy, the bureaucracy, military and other spaces of decision making.
  - India can make a stronger commitment to include women at the decision-making tables, either through a quota system or simply by ensuring that there is an equal representation of men and women.

- **Greater Representation:** India can move towards a FFP by actively appointing women to posts at various policy levels and involving them directly in the conduct of its foreign relations.
  - This should not mean merely increasing women representation, but to create environments that foster innovative thinking and allow for diverse representation.
- **International Collaboration:** India can collaborate with various international, regional, and national civil society organizations to ensure the proper implementation of the FFP framework.

### Conclusion

Exploring the framework in the Indian context will not only provide fresh perspective to our foreign policy machinery, but also deepen the global understanding on how a developing democratic nation that comes from strong cultures of patriarchy may consider adoption of an FFP Framework.



## India's Refugee Policy

*This article is based on "India does have a refugee problem" which was published in The Hindu on 10/04/2021. It talks about the issues related to India's Refugee Policy.*

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

Recently, there has been an influx of illegal migrants into India after the military coup and subsequent crackdown in Myanmar. The current plight of the Myanmar people has been preceded by that of another group of Myanmar people, the Rohingya.

Historically, India has witnessed an inflow of refugees from many neighboring countries. The refugee issue poses a problem for the state as it puts an economic burden, may trigger demographic changes in the long term, and poses security risks as well.

However, taking care of refugees is the core component of the human rights paradigm. Further, in any case, refugee flows to India are unlikely to end any time soon given the geopolitical, economic, ethnic, and religious contexts of the region.

Hence, there is an urgent need today to clinically address the issue of refugee protection in India and put in place appropriate legal and institutional measures.

### India's Refugee Policy

- India lacks specific legislation to address the problem of refugees, in spite of their increasing inflow.

- The Foreigners Act, 1946, fails to address the peculiar problems faced by refugees as a class. It also gives unbridled power to the Central government to deport any foreign citizen.
- Further, the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) strikingly excludes Muslims from its purview and seeks to provide citizenship only to Hindu, Christian, Jain, Parsi, Sikh, and Buddhist immigrants persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
- Moreover, India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the key legal documents pertaining to refugee protection.
- In spite of not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, India has had a stellar record on the issue of refugee protection. India has a moral tradition for assimilating foreign people and culture.
- Further, the constitution of India also respects the life, liberty, and dignity of human beings.
  - The Supreme Court in the National Human Rights Commission vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996) held that "while all rights are available to citizens, persons including foreign citizens are entitled to the right to equality and the right to life, among others."

### India's Argument for Not Signing the 1951 Refugee Convention

- The definition of refugees in the 1951 convention only pertains to the violation of civil and political rights, but not economic rights, of individuals.
  - For instance, a person, under the definition of the convention, could be considered if he/she is deprived of political rights, but not if he/she is deprived of economic rights.
  - If the violation of economic rights were to be included in the definition of a refugee, it would clearly pose a major burden on the developed world.
- On the other hand, this argument, if used in the South Asian context, could be a problematic proposition for India too.

### Challenges Associated With India's Refugee Policy

- **Refugees vs. Immigrants:** In the recent past, many people from neighboring countries tend to illegally immigrate to India, not because of state persecution but in search of better economic opportunities in India.
  - While the reality is that much of the debate in the country is about illegal immigrants, not refugees, the two categories tend to get bunched together.

- Due to this, policies and remedies to deal with these issues suffer from a lack of clarity as well as policy utility.
- **Ambiguity in the Framework:** The main reason why our policies towards illegal immigrants and refugees are confused is that as per Indian law, both categories of people are viewed as one and the same and are covered under the Foreigners Act, 1946.
- **Ad-hocism:** The absence of such a legal framework also leads to policy ambiguity whereby India's refugee policy is guided primarily by ad hocism.
  - Ad hoc measures enable the government in office to pick and choose 'what kind' of refugees it wants to admit for whatever political or geopolitical reasons.
  - This results in a discriminatory action, which tends to be a violation of human rights.
- **Discriminatory CAA:** The Government of India has passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). CAA envisages providing citizenship to people who are religious minorities in India's neighborhood and persecuted by the state.
  - However, CAA is not the answer to the refugee problem primarily because of its deeply discriminatory nature, as it doesn't include a particular religion under its ambit.
  - Further, many political analysts have dubbed the CAA as an act of refugee avoidance, not refugee protection.

### Conclusion

In spite of not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, India has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world. However, if India had domestic legislation regarding refugees, it could have deterred any oppressive government in the neighborhood to persecute their population and make them flee to India.



## Privatizing PSBs

*This article is based on "The economic rationale of bank nationalisation" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 10/04/2021. It talks about the pros and cons of PSBs remaining nationalized.*

**Tags:** Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Banking Sector & NBFCs, Mobilization of resources

Banking plays a very important role and is the key driving force in any economy. However, in recent years, the Indian banking sector has witnessed multiple Public

Sector Banks (PSBs) getting scammed and faced huge losses due to high Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

Due to this, many economists have suggested the government privatizing PSBs and now the RBI and the government are contemplating privatizing banks in the sector.

However, before taking any decision, the government should actively consider the pros and cons of PSBs remaining nationalized.

### Arguments for Banks Remaining Nationalised

- **Democratization of Banking:** Banks in India were nationalized for the first time in 1969. Before which they had been lending 67% of their funds to industry and virtually nothing to agriculture.
  - Also, the commercial banks couldn't lend money to farmers because they were only present in less than 1% of villages.
  - Farmers were unable to get bank loans just when the Green Revolution was getting underway and they needed credit to buy the expensive inputs required to increase output.
  - Thus, nationalizing banks helped in the democratization of banking services of the masses.
- **Undermining Social Welfare:** Public banks open branches, ATMs, banking facilities, etc even in the non-profitable rural areas of India or the poorer sides where the possibility of getting big deposits or making money is less.
  - However, Private banks are not inclined to do so and they may prefer opening such facilities mostly in megacities or urban areas.
  - If the corporate sector is allowed to dominate banking again, profit will become the prime motive rather than the desire to serve the public.
- **International Precedent:** Most East Asian success stories have been underpinned by financial systems effectively controlled by governments.
  - On the other hand, the governments of western countries, where banking is largely in the hands of the private sector, have had to rescue private banks from bankruptcy.

### Argument Against Banks Remaining Nationalized

Privatization means selling whole or partially a government-owned company to the private sector or it simply means transferring ownership to the private sector. This step was taken as a part of a new economic policy, 1991 to liberalize India's economy from being a relatively closed economy.

However, in recent years, the following factors have been pushing the Government of India to privatize the nationalized banks.

- **Bulk of NPAs:** The banking system is overburdened with the non-performing assets (NPAs) and the majority of which lies in the public sector banks.
- **Lack of Regulatory Oversight:** PSBs are dually controlled by RBI (under the RBI Act, 1934) and Finance Ministry (under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949).
  - Thus, RBI does not have all the powers over PSBs that it has over private sector banks, such as the power to revoke a banking license, merge a bank, shut down a bank, or penalize the board of directors.
- **Lack of Autonomy:** Public sector bank boards are still not adequately professionalized, as the government still has a major say in board appointments.
  - This creates an issue of politicization and interference in the normal functioning of Banks.
  - This results in the practice called telephone banking, whereby the politicians ring bank officials with instructions to lend money to their cronies.
- **Draining of Profits:** Private banks are profit-driven whereas the business of PSBs is disrupted by government schemes like farm loan waivers etc.
  - In general, PSBs have to respond to public demand to finance unproductive projects.

### Way Forward

- **Improving Governance:** In order to improve the governance and management of PSBs, there is a need to implement the recommendations of the PJ Nayak committee.
- **De-Risking Banks:** There is a need to follow prudential norms for lending and effective resolution of NPAs.
  - In this context, the establishment of the bad bank and speedy resolution of NPAs through the Insolvency Bankruptcy Code steps in the right direction.
- **Corporatization of PSBs:** Rather than blind privatization, PSBs can be made into a corporation like Life Insurance Corporation (LIC). While maintaining government ownership, will give more autonomy to PSBs.

### Conclusion

Even though private sector banks have better balance sheets than PSBs, it is very important to consider that Privatization alone would not solve all of the problems faced by the sector. A better solution than privatization may well be giving PSBs autonomy to reform themselves and function free of political interference.



## Data Protection Regime

*This article is based on “Why the Personal Data Protection Bill matters” which was published in The Hindu on 12/04/2021. It talks about how the personal data protection bill, 2019 can help in establishing a strong data protection regime.*

**Tags:** Governance, GS Paper - 3, IT & Computers, Government Policies & Interventions

The pandemic has increased people’s participation in the digital economy. Unfortunately, the number of personal data breaches from major digital service providers has increased worryingly in the same period.

The recent alleged data breach at MobiKwik could stand to be India’s biggest breach with the data of 9.9 crore users at risk. Given the significance of data in this age, robust data protection regimes are necessary to prevent such events and protect users’ interests.

Presently, how different entities collect and process users’ personal data in India is mainly governed by the Information Technology Act, 2000, but this data protection regime falls short of providing effective protection to users and their personal data.

However, the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 (which is now under scrutiny by a Joint Parliamentary Committee) could play a big role in providing robust protections to users and their personal data.

### Associated Issues With IT Act

- **Issue of Consent:** Data aggregator entities could override the protections in the regime by taking users’ consent to process personal data under broad terms and conditions.
  - This is problematic given that users might not understand the terms and conditions or the implications of giving consent.
- **Neglecting Data Privacy:** The frameworks under IT Act emphasize data security but do not place enough emphasis on data privacy.
  - In essence, while entities must employ technical measures to protect personal data, they have weaker obligations to respect users’ preferences in how personal data can be processed.
- **Large Vacuum for Data Protection:** The data protection provisions under the IT Act also do not apply to government agencies. This creates a large vacuum for data protection when governments are collecting and processing large amounts of personal data.
- **Becoming Obsolete:** IT Act was enacted in 2000 and further amended in 2008. However, technology and cross-platform integration have increased exponentially.

- Therefore, the current data protection regime seems to have become inadequate in addressing risks emerging from new developments in data processing technology.

### **How the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 can help?**

The Bill seeks to bring a massive and meaningful change to personal data protection in India through this regime. The proposed regime under the Bill seeks to be different from the existing regime in some prominent ways.

- **Defining the Roles:** The Bill envisages codifying the relationship between individuals and firms/state institutions as one between “data principals” (whose information is collected) and “data fiduciaries” (those processing the data) so that privacy is safeguarded by design.
  - Also, the Bill seeks to apply the data protection regime to both government and private entities across all sectors.
- **Ensuring Data Privacy:** The Bill seeks to emphasize that data principals will have to maintain security safeguards to protect personal data and also have to fulfill a set of data protection obligations and transparency and accountability measures.
  - In nutshell, the provides scrutiny on these entities govern and process personal data to uphold users’ privacy and interests.

#### **Note:**

- The need for a more robust data protection legislation came to the fore in 2017 post the Supreme Court’s landmark judgment in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India established the right to privacy as a fundamental right.
- In the judgment, the Court called for a data protection law that can effectively protect users’ privacy over their personal data.
- Consequently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology formed a Committee of Experts under the Chairmanship of Justice (Retd) B.N. Srikrishna to suggest a draft data protection law.
- **Rights of the Citizens:** The Bill seeks to give users a set of rights over their personal data and means to exercise those rights.
  - For instance, a user will be able to obtain information about the different kinds of personal data that an entity has about them and how the entity is processing that data.
- **Establishing a Regulator:** The Bill seeks to create an independent and powerful regulator known as the Data Protection Authority (DPA).

- The DPA will monitor and regulate data processing activities to ensure their compliance with the regime.
- More importantly, the DPA will give users a channel to seek redress when entities do not comply with their obligations under the regime.

### **Associated Issues With The Bill**

Several provisions in the Bill create cause for concern about the regime’s effectiveness. These provisions could contradict the objectives of the Bill by giving wide exemptions to government agencies and diluting user protection safeguards.

- **Scope for Loopholes:** For instance, under clause 35, the Central government can exempt any government agency from complying with the Bill.
  - Government agencies will then be able to process personal data without following any safeguard under the Bill.
  - This could create severe privacy risks for users.
- **Compromised Concept of Consent:** Similarly, users could find it difficult to enforce various user protection safeguards (such as rights and remedies) in the Bill.
  - For instance, the Bill threatens legal consequences for users who withdraw their consent for a data processing activity.
  - In practice, this could discourage users from withdrawing consent for processing activities they want to opt-out of.
- **Sweeping Mandate of DPA:** DPA will be tasked with regulating the provisions of the bill to frame regulations on issues such as mechanisms for taking consent, limitations on the use of data, and cross-border transfer of data.
  - The supervisory mandate of the DPA is sweeping, given the fact that it has to regulate a wide array of preventive obligations, such as security safeguards and transparency requirements.

### **Conclusion**

In this digital age, data is a valuable resource that should not be left unregulated. In this context, the time is ripe for India to have a robust data protection regime.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee that is scrutinizing the Bill, is expected to submit its final report in the Monsoon Session of Parliament in 2021. This interim period shall be utilized to make some changes in the Bill targeted towards addressing various concerns in it could make a stronger and more effective data protection regime.





## India & BIMSTEC

*This article is based on "BIMSTEC needs to reinvent itself" which was published in The Hindu on 14/04/2021. It talks about the obstacles that limit the BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) in realizing its full potential.*

**Tags:** International Relations, GS Paper - 3, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests, Global Groupings

Recently, the foreign ministers of BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) met in a virtual conference. This is the first ministerial since the globe has been hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

BIMSTEC as a regional organization has achieved a lot in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security, including counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and coastal security cooperation.

However, there are many obstacles that limit the regional body in realizing its full potential.

### Highlights of the Meeting

- The foreign ministers cleared the draft for the BIMSTEC charter, recommending its early adoption.
- They endorsed the rationalization of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest.
- The ministers also conveyed their support for the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which will be adopted at the next summit in Sri Lanka.
- Preparations have been completed for the signing of three agreements relating to mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic academies, and the establishment of a technology transfer facility.

### Evolution of BIMSTEC

- BIMSTEC was established as a grouping of four nations — India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka — through the **Bangkok Declaration of 1997**.
  - BIMSTEC was expanded later to include three more countries — Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan.
- Initially, BIMSTEC didn't hold much geopolitical weight. This can be reflected by only just three summits in the first 20 years of its formation.
- However, BIMSTEC suddenly received special attention as India chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation, as SAARC continues to remain defunct.

- The BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, followed by their Outreach Summit with the BRICS leaders in Goa in October 2016, drew considerable international limelight to the low-profile regional grouping.
- At the second swearing-in of the Indian Prime Minister in May 2019, the leaders of BIMSTEC, not SAARC, were invited as honored guests.
- Soon thereafter, the External Affairs Minister observed that India saw a mix of "energy, mindset and possibility" in BIMSTEC.

### Associated Challenges

- **Unfinished Economic Agenda:** BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, was signed in 2004, but over 20 rounds of negotiations it is still to be operationalized.
- **Internal Tussle:** A strong BIMSTEC presupposes cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states.
  - This has not been the case, given the trajectory of India-Nepal, India-Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar ties in recent years.
  - Moreover, both Nepal and Sri Lanka want the SAARC summit revived. However, India maintains that terror and talks can't go hand in hand.
- **China's Intrusion:** China's decisive intrusion in the South-Southeast Asian space is causing a limiting effect on India's zone of influence.
  - Moreover, a renowned Bangladeshi scholar argued at a recent conference that BIMSTEC would make progress if China is accepted as its principal interlocutor and partner.
- **Myanmar Coup:** The military coup in Myanmar, brutal crackdown of protesters, and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of border management challenges for India.

### Way Forward

- **BIMSTEC FTA:** In 2018, a study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement to be a real game-changer.
  - It should cover trade in goods, services, and investment; promote regulatory harmonization; adopt policies that develop regional value chains, and eliminate non-tariff barriers.
- **Balancing Security & Economy:** India has led through constant focus and follow-up — to the extent that some member-states have complained about the 'over securitization of BIMSTEC.

- Hence, there is a need to ensure maintaining security and forging solid arrangements for economic cooperation.
- **Gujral Doctrine:** India would have to counter the impression that BIMSTEC is an India-dominated bloc, in that context India can follow the Gujral doctrine that intends to chalk out the effect of transactional motive in bilateral relations.

### Conclusion

As BIMSTEC readies itself to celebrate the silver jubilee of its formation next year, it faces a serious challenge: to effect “a paradigm shift in raising the level of our cooperation and regional integration.”



## Legacy of BR Ambedkar

*This article is based on “The Ambedkar we don’t know” which was published in The Indian Express on 14/04/2021. It talks about the role played by BR Ambedkar in nation-building.*

**Tags:** Social justice, GS Paper - 1, Important Personalities

Recently, the nation celebrated the 130<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar. His role as a social reformer, chairman of the draft committee of the Indian Constitution, and first law minister of the country is well-known.

However, there are many lesser-known attributes about B R Ambedkar that helped in nation-building and continues to have a prominent impact on present Indian socio-economic-political setup.

As India is about to celebrate the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to commemorate 75 years of Independence, it is imperative to recognise the role played by BR Ambedkar.

### Role Played by BR Ambedkar

- **Father of Indian Constitution:** BR Ambedkar’s legal expertise and knowledge of the Constitution of different countries was very helpful in the framing of the constitution.
  - He became chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and played an important role in framing the Indian Constitution.
- **Building a Just Society:** As chairman of the Constitution’s drafting committee, he took meticulous measures to build a just society through liberty, equality, and fraternity.
  - According to him, for India, where society is divided on the basis of caste, religion, language,

and other factors, a common moral compass is needed, and the Constitution can play the role of that compass.

- In addition, the Poona Pact assured a fair representation of the depressed classes in the public services while earmarking a portion of the educational grant for their uplift.
- His advocacy for universal adult franchise ensured that women had the right to vote immediately after Independence.
- **Distinguished Economist:** The Reserve Bank of India was conceptualized from the Hilton Young Commission’s recommendation, which considered Ambedkar’s guidelines laid out in **The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution.**
- **Role In Integrated Water Resources Management:** His farsightedness helped in establishing the Central Water Commission and integrated water resources management through the establishment of the river valley projects like the Damodar River Valley Project, the Sone River Valley Project, the Mahanadi (Hirakud Project), etc.
  - The Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956, and the River Board Act, 1956 emanate from his vision.
- **Labour Leader:** Ambedkar was the voice of the Depressed Classes on every platform. As their representative at the Round Table Conference, he championed the cause of labor and improving the condition of peasants.
  - Also, as a member of the Bombay Assembly, Ambedkar opposed the introduction of the Industrial Disputes Bill, 1937, as it removed workers’ right to strike.
  - As a labour member, he advocated for “fair condition of life of labour” instead of securing “fair condition of work” and laid out the basic structure of the government’s labour policy.
- **Vision for India’s Agricultural Problem:** His essay titled ‘Small Holdings in India and their Remedies’ (1918) proposed industrialization as the answer to India’s agricultural problem and is still relevant to contemporary debates.
  - He was the first legislator in the country to introduce a Bill for abolishing the serfdom of agricultural tenants.
- **Role in Ensuring Gender Parity:** He contributed to the reduction of working hours to 48 hours per week, lifting the ban on the employment of women for underground work in coal mines, introducing the provisions of overtime, paid leave, and minimum wage.
  - He also helped to establish the principle of “equal

pay for equal work” irrespective of sex and maternity benefits.

- His advocacy of the Hindu Code Bill was a revolutionary measure towards ameliorating women’s plight by conferring on them the right to adopt and inherit.

### **Relevance of Ambedkar in Present Times**

- **Persisting Caste-Based Inequalities:** Caste-based inequality in India still persists. While Dalits have acquired a political identity through Affirmative action like reservation and forming their own political parties, they lack behind in social dimensions (health and education) and economic dimension.
- **Persisting Communal Problem:** There has been a rise of communal polarization and communalization of politics. It is necessary that Ambedkar’s vision of constitutional morality must supersede religious morality to avoid permanent damage to the Indian Constitution.
  - In Babasaheb Ambedkar’s perspective, Constitutional morality would mean effective coordination between conflicting interests of different people and administrative cooperation.
  - It will help to resolve the conflict amicably without any confrontation amongst the various groups working for the realization of their ends at any cost.
- **Pro-People Policies:** Ambedkar’s thinking and legacy are reflected in the pro-people, pro-poor welfare policies and programmes of the Government of India.
  - For example, the Mudra Scheme for availing loans, Stand-up India for promoting entrepreneurship in the SC and ST community, the Ayushman Bharat scheme, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojna, the simplification of labour laws are among the several measures that display the government’s unwavering commitment to fulfil the dreams of B R Ambedkar.

### **Conclusion**

The development of Panchteerth — Janam Bhumi (Mhow), Shiksha Bhumi (London), Chaitya Bhumi (Mumbai), Diksha Bhumi (Nagpur), Mahaparinirvan Bhumi (Delhi) — are steps towards ensuring an appropriate legacy for Ambedkar, the nationalist reformer.

However, today India is facing many socio-economic challenges such as casteism, communalism, separatism, gender inequality, etc. We need to find the Ambedkar’s spirit within us, so that we can pull ourselves from these challenges.



## **Cleaning Ganga**

*This article is based on “River of life” which was published in The Indian Express on 17/04/2021. It talks about the reason for pollution in the river Ganga and steps taken to deal with it.*

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

Recently, India witnessed the world’s largest religious congregation as millions of pilgrims gathered for a holy dip in the Ganga during the Kumbh Mela. Since time immemorial, the Kumbh Mela has been a melting pot for varied beliefs, practices, philosophies, and ideologies.

Unfortunately, over time, the increase in population, coupled with unregulated industrialization and unsustainable agricultural practices, have led to a significant increase in pollutants in the Ganga river and its tributaries.

However, after the launch of the flagship program called Namami Gange, the pollution in River Ganga has significantly reduced. It has adopted a holistic approach to public policy, technology intervention, and community participation.

### **Reasons for Polluted River Ganga**

- **Urbanization:** Rapid urbanization in India during the recent decades has given rise to a number of environmental problems such as water supply, wastewater generation and its collection, treatment, and disposal.
  - Many towns and cities which came upon the banks of river Ganga have not given proper thought to the problem of wastewater, sewerage, etc.
- **Industries:** Unrestricted flow of sewage and industrial effluents into the Ganga has adversely affected its purity. All these industrial wastes are toxic to life forms that consume this water.
  - The other significant contributors to wastewater are paper mills, steel plants, textile, and sugar industries.
- **Agricultural Runoff and Improper Agricultural Practices:** Traces of fertilizers and pesticides are washed into the nearest water-bodies at the onset of the monsoons or whenever there are heavy rains.
- **Withdrawal of Water:** According to a report of the Ministry of Water Resources on the study of minimum flows in the Ganga, impact on river water quality resulting from discharges of treated or untreated wastewater into the river will depend on the dilution offered by the quantum of flows in the river.

- However, River Ganga gets starved of water when they enter the plain area. For instance, the Upper Ganga Canal and the Lower Ganga Canal have left the Ganga downstream almost dry.
- **Religious and Social Practices:** Religious faith and social practices also add to the pollution of the river Ganga.
  - Dead bodies are cremated on the river banks. Partially burnt bodies are also flung into the river.
  - Mass bathing in a river during religious festivals is another environmentally harmful practice.
  - All this is done as a matter of religious faith and in keeping with ancient rituals. These practices pollute the river water and adversely affect the water quality.

### Steps Taken to Reduce Pollution in River Ganga

- **Public Policy:** In 2016, the government issued a notification to authorize the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) to exercise powers under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
  - NMCG also issued directives regulating mining activities on river banks, prohibiting encroachment, and regulating activities like the immersion of idols.
- **Technology Intervention:** NMCG adopted cutting-edge technologies like satellite imagery, remote sensing, and geospatial solutions which facilitated real-time monitoring of pollutants in Ganga and its tributaries.
  - Scientific forecast models were deployed for designing new sewage treatment infrastructure.
- **Community Participation:** To encourage community participation in cleaning the river, an awareness campaign is regularly carried out in cities, towns, and villages alongside Ganga through a newly-established community force called "Ganga Praharis".
  - Through them, the government seeks to transform "jal chetna" into "jan chetna" and turn it into a "jal aandolan".

### Conclusion

The Constitution of India mandates the central and state governments to provide both a clean and decent environment and clean drinking water for the people (Article 48A, Art. 51 (A) (g), Article 21). Also, the Supreme Court has declared that the right to a decent and clean environment is a fundamental right.

In this context, the Namami Gange project is a step in the right direction to clean the river Ganga and should be emulated to deal with pollution in other rivers of India.



## Is the Election Commission of India Free?

*This article is based on "The Election Commission of India cannot be a super-government" which was published in The Hindu on 19/04/2021. It talks about the issues and ambiguous provisions that affect the functioning of the Election Commission of India.*

**Tags:** Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Representation of People's Act, Constitutional Bodies

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a creation of the Constitution. Article 324 says the superintendence, direction, and control of all elections to Parliament, the State legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President shall be vested in the ECI.

The article has been interpreted by courts and by orders of the ECI from time to time to mean that the power vested in it is plenary in nature. It is seen as unlimited and unconditional in the matter of holding elections.

However, there are many issues and ambiguous provisions that affect the functioning of ECI.

### Source of Power of ECI

- **Constitution:** ECI derives its power and functions from Article 324 of the Constitution.
- **Supreme Court Judgement:** The Supreme Court held in Mohinder Singh Gill vs Chief Election Commissioner 1978 that Article 324 contains plenary powers to ensure free and fair elections and these are vested in the ECI which can take all necessary steps to achieve this constitutional object.
- **Model Code of Conduct:** The model code of conduct issued by the ECI is a set of guidelines meant for political parties, candidates, and governments to adhere to during an election.
  - This code is based on consensus among political parties. Its origin can be traced to a code of conduct for political parties prepared by the Kerala government in 1960 for the Assembly elections.
  - It was adopted and refined and enlarged by the ECI in later years and was enforced strictly from 1991 onwards.
- **Independence of ECI:** The independence of the ECI is preserved by clauses in the Constitution that say the Chief Election Commissioner cannot be removed from office except in the manner provided for the removal of a Supreme Court judge.
  - Also, the conditions of his service cannot be varied to the incumbent's disadvantage after appointment.

### Associated Issues With The ECI

- **Undefined Scope of Powers:** Besides the MCC, the ECI issues from time to time directions, instructions, and clarifications on a host of issues that crop up in the course of an election.
  - The code does not say what the ECI can do; it contains only guidelines for the candidates, political parties, and the governments.
  - Thus, there exists a considerable amount of confusion about the extent and nature of the powers which are available to the ECI in enforcing the code as well as its other decisions in relation to an election.
- **No Legal Backing of MCC:** MCC is framed on the basis of a consensus among political parties, it has not been given any legal backing.
  - However, it does not have statutory value, and it is enforced only by the moral and constitutional authority of the EC.

#### Note:

- Paragraph 16A of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 says that the commission may suspend or withdraw recognition of a recognized political party if it refuses to observe the model code of conduct.
- However, the issue is when the code is legally not enforceable, how can the ECI resort to a punitive action such as withdrawal of recognition.
- **Transfer of Officials:** Another issue that pertains to the functioning of the ECI, is the abrupt transfer of senior officials working under State governments by an order of the commission.
  - In Mohinder Singh Gill's case, the Court had made it clear that the ECI can draw power from Article 324 only when no law exists which governs a particular matter.
  - However, the transfer of officials, etc is governed by rules made under Article 309 of the Constitution which cannot be bypassed by the ECI under the purported exercise of the power conferred by Article 324.
- **Conflict With the Law:** According to the MCC, Ministers cannot announce any financial grants in any form, make any promise of construction of roads, provision of drinking water facilities, etc or make any ad hoc appointments in the government.
  - Section 123 (2)(b) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 says that the declaration of a public policy or the exercise of a legal right will not be regarded as interfering with the free exercise of the electoral right.

- **Lack of Enforceability:** The EC does not have the power to disqualify candidates who commit electoral malpractices. At best, it may direct the registration of a case.
  - That is why, in the 2019 general election, ECI admitted to the Supreme Court that it was "toothless", and did not have enough powers to deal with inflammatory or divisive speeches in the election campaign.

### Conclusion

The role played by the ECI has bestowed a very high level of confidence in the minds of Indian citizens in ensuring the purity of the elected legislative bodies in the country. However, the grey areas in the legal sphere must be rectified, so that ECI can ensure the proper functioning of the democracy via free and fair election.



## Repromulgation of Ordinances

*This article is based on "The ordinance route is bad, repromulgation worse" which was published in The Hindu on 20/04/2021. It talks about the Associated issues with the frequent promulgation and repromulgation of the ordinance route.*

**Tags:** Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Representation of People's Act, Constitutional Bodies

Recently, the central government has repromulgated the Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020. The ordinance establishes a commission for air quality management in the National Capital Region.

This raises questions about the practice of issuing ordinances to make law and that of re-issuing ordinances without getting them ratified by Parliament.

Historically, in the 1950s, central ordinances were issued at an average of 7.1 per year. However, the number peaked in the 1990s at 19.6 per year. The last couple of years has also seen a high spike in ordinance promulgation (16 in 2019, 15 in 2020).

The ordinance was originally conceived as an emergency provision. However, in recent times the frequent use of ordinance route has led to the undermining the role of the legislature and the doctrine of Separation of powers.

### Constitutional Provisions Regarding Ordinances

- The Constitution permits the central and state governments to make laws when Parliament (or the State Legislature) is not in session.

- The Indian Constitution, in Article 123, authorizes the executive to promulgate ordinances if certain conditions are satisfied.
  - Ordinances may be promulgated only if **at least one House of Parliament is not in session**.
  - President is satisfied that **“immediate action”** is necessary.
- The Constitution states that the ordinance will lapse at the end of six weeks from the time Parliament (or the State Legislature) next meets.
- Similar provisions also exist for **state governments under article 213**.

### **Supreme Court’s Judgement on Ordinances**

- **RC Cooper Case 1970:** Supreme Court in RC Cooper vs. Union of India (1970) held that the **President’s decision to promulgate ordinance could be challenged** on the grounds that ‘immediate action’ was not required, and the ordinance had been issued primarily to bypass debate and discussion in the legislature.
- **DC Wadhwa Case 1987:** The issue of frequent promulgation of ordinances was again brought up in the Supreme Court through a writ petition.
  - The petition was regarding the promulgation of 256 ordinances between 1967 and 1981 in Bihar.
  - This included 11 ordinances that were kept alive for more than 10 years and famously dubbed as ordinance raj.
  - The Supreme court held that the legislative power of the executive to promulgate ordinances is to be **used in exceptional circumstances** and not as a substitute for the law-making power of the legislature.
- **Krishna Kumar Singh Case 2017:** Supreme Court in Krishna Kumar Singh v. the State of Bihar held that the authority to issue ordinances is not an absolute entrustment, but is “conditional upon satisfaction that circumstances exist rendering it necessary to take immediate action”.
  - It further stated that the re-promulgation of ordinances is a fraud on the Constitution and a subversion of democratic legislative processes.

### **Associated Issues with the Ordinance Route**

- **Usurpation of Legislative Power:** As lawmaking is a legislative function, this power is provided for urgent requirements, and the law thus made has an automatic expiry date.
  - An ordinance “ceases to operate” six weeks after the two Houses reassemble, except if it is converted into an Act by then. Repromulgation sidesteps this limitation.

- To repromulgate is to effectively extend the life of an ordinance and lead to the usurpation of legislative power by the executive.
- **Undermining the Doctrine of Separation of Powers:** In the Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala case 1973, the Supreme Court listed the **separation of powers as a “basic feature”** of the Constitution.
  - The ordinance mechanism, in effect, is designed to remedy situations of legislative urgency when Parliament is not in session; it is not an alternative to parliamentary legislation.
  - However, article 123 places no numeric limits on ordinances.
  - In this way, the repromulgation undermines the separation of powers, as it effectively allows the executive to make permanent legislation without legislative input or approval.
- **Ignoring Supreme Court’s Judgements:** Even after tough judgments on the use of ordinances, both the Centre and state governments have ignored the Supreme Court’s observations.
  - For example, in 2013 and 2014, the Securities Laws (Amendment) Ordinance was promulgated three times.
  - Similarly, an ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act was issued in December 2014, and repromulgated twice – in April and May 2015.

### **Conclusion**

Indian Constitution has provided for the separation of powers among the legislature, executive, and judiciary where enacting laws is the function of the legislature. The executive must show self-restraint and should use ordinance making power only in unforeseen or urgent matters and not to evade legislative scrutiny and debates.



## **Covid-19 Vaccination**

*This article is based on “Managing an upheaval: On universal vaccination” which was published in The Hindu on 21/04/2021. It talks about the associated issues with the accelerated rollout of the vaccine.*

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

Eight months ago, India had begun a decline in daily Covid-19 infections to the extent that many experts believed that a devastating second wave was unlikely in India. However, the second wave of Covid-19 has brought health infrastructure to a near collapse.

Moreover, India's options for containing the pandemic are narrowing as it can ill-afford another lockdown now. In this context, the combination of panic, public pressure, and the magnitude of the crisis has prompted the Union Government to authorize vaccines to anyone above 18 and give states more control over procurement.

Though these are positive steps, there are many challenges that will act as a roadblock to the universalization or even accelerating the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine in India.

### **Associated Issues with Accelerated Rollout of the Vaccine**

- **Vaccine Shortage:** At the optimistic rate of three million doses a day, it would take at least 260 days from today for every adult to get at least a single shot.
  - Given the shortage of vaccines, India cannot afford to have a single or universal policy and needs to make it more targeted.
- **Under Financing:** It is unclear if merely the policy move of liberalizing vaccine supply will leave States in India with the finances and negotiating power to procure enough stocks of vaccines.
- **Shortage of Raw Material:** The inability of getting the much-needed raw materials from the United States – bags, vials, cell culture media, single-use tubing, specialized chemicals, etc. that have now been banned for export has disrupted the vaccine production in India.
- **Balancing Global Commitments:** Another issue is concerning international obligations. Of the 38 million doses the global alliance program Covax has so far distributed to 84 countries, 28 were from India.
  - Further, under the vaccine diplomacy initiative, India exported 60 million doses, half on commercial terms and 10 million as grants.
  - That obligation may have to be followed up perhaps as they would need for their second dose.

### **Way Forward**

- **Massive Multimedia Campaigns:** If fresh lockdowns are to be avoided, we need to enforce masks by investing in massive multimedia campaigns for information, education, and communication, like it was done for polio and HIV.
- **Supporting Domestic Production:** It should also speed up approvals and financial packages for ramping up domestic production for expanding supply, expanding age bands.
  - Further, as supplies improve and decentralize implementation decisions to states to enable

better efficiencies, and allow export after ensuring at least five months stock.

- Also, there is a need to improve efficiencies in utilization and drastically reduce vaccine wastage
- **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.

### **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.



## **Green Hydrogen For Green Roadmap**

*This article is based on "A fresh push for green hydrogen" which was published in The Hindu on 15/04/2021. It talks about the significance and steps to augment the production of green hydrogen.*

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

Recently, the Government of India has announced to scale up the target of having 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030. In this context, the Union Budget 2021 has proposed the launch of the National Hydrogen Energy Mission.

Hydrogen is one of the most abundant elements on earth for a cleaner alternative fuel option. Therefore, for a clean future aligning hydrogen production needs to be synchronised with broader electricity demand in the economy.

According to an analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), green hydrogen demand could be up to 1 million tonnes in India across application in sectors such as ammonia, steel, methanol, transport and energy storage. However, several challenges in scaling up to commercial-scale operations persist.

### **Significance of Green Hydrogen**

- Green hydrogen energy is vital for India to meet its Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) Targets

and ensure regional and national energy security, access and availability.

- Green Hydrogen can act as an energy storage option, which would be essential to meet intermittencies (of renewable energy) in the future.
- In terms of mobility, for long distance mobilisations for either urban freight movement within cities and states or for passengers, Green Hydrogen can be used in railways, large ships, buses or trucks, etc.
- Hydrogen has the potential to be the key renewable target in supporting infrastructure as well.

Grey hydrogen	Blue hydrogen	Green hydrogen
Split natural gas into hydrogen and CO <sub>2</sub>	Split natural gas into hydrogen and CO <sub>2</sub>	Split water into hydrogen by electrolysis powered by water or wind
CO <sub>2</sub> emitted in the atmosphere	CO <sub>2</sub> stored or reused	No CO <sub>2</sub> emitted

### Associated Issues With Accelerated Rollout of the Vaccine

- **Economic Sustainability:** One of the biggest challenges faced by the industry for using hydrogen commercially is the economic sustainability of extracting green hydrogen.
  - Currently, most renewable energy resources that can produce low-cost electricity are situated far from potential demand centres. If hydrogen were to be shipped, it would significantly erode the economics of it.
  - The technology used in production and use of hydrogen like Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and hydrogen fuel cell technology are at nascent stage and are expensive which in turn increases the cost of production of hydrogen.
- **Legal Hurdle:** The Electricity Act, 2003 has envisioned operationalizing open access power across State boundaries. However, this has not been implemented in letter and spirit.
  - Without the removal this impediment the electricity tariffs could double when supplying open-access.

### Way Forward

- **Decentralised Production:** Decentralised hydrogen production must be promoted through open access of renewable power to an electrolyser (which splits water to form H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> using electricity).
- **Minimising Intermittency:** There is a need for mechanisms to ensure access to round-the-clock renewable power for decentralised hydrogen production.

- To minimise intermittency associated with renewable energy, fuel cells can ensure continuous hydrogen supply.

- **Augmenting Production:** Improving the reliability of hydrogen supply by augmenting green hydrogen with conventionally produced hydrogen will significantly improve the economics of the fuel.
  - In this context, steps like blending green hydrogen in existing processes, especially the industrial sector, can help.
  - This will also help build a technical understanding of the processes involved in handling hydrogen on a large scale.
- **Providing Finance:** Policymakers must facilitate investments in early-stage piloting and the research and development needed to advance the technology for use in India.
  - Public funding will have to lead the way, but the private sector, too, has significant gains to be made by securing its energy future.
- **Boosting Domestic Manufacturing:** India must learn from the experience of the National Solar Mission and focus on domestic manufacturing.
  - Establishing an end-to-end electrolyser manufacturing facility would require measures like existing performance-linked incentive programmes.
  - There is a need for a manufacturing strategy that can leverage the existing strengths and mitigate threats by integrating with the global value chain.

### Conclusion

As the threat of climate change becomes more real and urgent, promotion of Green Hydrogen technologies holds the real promise. Further, this could also be India's opportunity to lead the world in a cutting-edge, growing space and generate employment in manufacturing, and R&D – in line with India's Atma Nirbhar Bharat campaign.



### Micro in MSME

*This article is based on "Micro enterprises need exclusive treatment" which was published in The Hindu business line on 23/04/2021. It talks about the significance and associated issues with the micro-industries in the MSME sector.*

**Tags:** Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Industrial Growth

The micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have been accepted as the engine of economic growth and for promoting equitable development.



The MSMEs constitute over 90% of total enterprises in most of the economies and are credited with generating the highest rates of employment growth and account for a major share of industrial production and exports.

However, micro enterprises represent the most vulnerable segment in the whole MSME sector. These were the major victims of both demonetisation and the sudden lockdown to contain Covid-19.

Further, there exist the huge heterogeneity, characteristics, constraints and other attributes, which are critically important for policy design associated with the micro industries. Thus, the umbrella policy for the MSMEs has little relevance for micro enterprises.

### Significance of Micro Industries in MSME

- Latest available NSSO data show that manufacturing-based micro enterprises constitute 99.7 per cent of the MSMEs while supporting 97.5 percent of employees.
  - Further, the micro units account for 90.1 percent of the MSME output and 91.9 percent of income.
- A craftsman, weaver, food processor, fisherman, carpenter, shoe-maker/cobbler, tutor, tailor, plumber, electrician, street side food shop, ice-cream parlour, beauty salon, motor (repair) garage, transport agency, advertising entity are just a few examples.
- Their presence in high numbers makes them the most diffused segment in our socio-economic system.
- Micro-enterprises are distinct in the variety of activities and characteristics, but low in economic contribution.
  - Nevertheless, these enterprises are hugely consequential for the marginalised sections bypassed by the development process.

### Associated Issues With Micro Industries

- **Heterogeneity:** Heterogeneity in the form of greater use of hired assets under the micro segment.
  - The ability to own capital is low in micro industries. This implies that rental expenses constitute a higher share in total costs.
  - Since, the asset ownership pattern has implications for technology upgradation. The capital loans have little relevance for the micro-enterprises to stimulate growth of the micro industries.
  - It could be the case that a micro-enterprise is unwilling to invest in view of the risks associated with market uncertainties.
- **Fragmented Structure:** Despite supporting a large proportion of the workforce, they lack a lobby to voice their concerns simply because of a fragmented structure.
  - Due to a limited understanding of the procedures and low volumes, these units are disproportionately

disadvantaged when it comes to participating in public procurements.

- **One-Size-Fits-All Approach:** For most part of the policy and stimulus package, the incentives and relief are designed as common across MSMEs bringing them under one umbrella.
  - This tends to bypass micro enterprises even if they are overwhelmingly predominant in the collective group of MSMEs.

### Way Forward

- **Dedicated Policy:** There is a need to acknowledge that serving micro-enterprises and SMEs through a common policy does not meet the needs of micro units.
  - In fact, the RBI expert committee report on MSMEs documents that micro (and small) enterprises have limited bargaining capacity.
  - Thus, there is a need for a focussed approach towards micro-enterprises for gathering and capturing specific information is an inevitable consideration for the New Industrial Policy.
- **Co-operative Model:** More efforts in the form of higher investment in advanced technology, usage of digital and technology enabled platforms, transfer of technology, more investment in human resources, improved access to finance, etc. are required.
  - Promotion of co-operative models (on the lines of farmer producer organisations) can help micro-industries in this regard.

### Conclusion

With a greater role envisioned for MSMEs in the \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25, it is important that the micro segment is not left behind. Their inclusion is contingent upon recognition of the uniqueness for policy design.



## Bangladesh Liberation War 1971

*This article is based on "Endeavour, leadership and the story of a nation" which was published in The Hindu on 26/04/2021. It talks about the significance of the Bangladesh Liberation War 1971.*

**Tags:** International Relation, Gs paper-2, india and its neighbourhood, effects of policies and politics of countries on India's interest, bilateral groupings and agreements

The year 2021 marks the golden jubilee of the Muktijuddho or the Liberation War. Bangladesh's Independence in 1971 not only gave Bangladesh its freedom

from the clutches of oppressive East Pakistan but changed the history and geopolitical scenario of South Asia.

Oppressive military action by the then west Pakistan's military led to a massive refugee and humanitarian crisis. The plight of the ten million refugees did have an impact on the Indian government and prompted it to launch a retaliatory action against Pakistan.

However, India's intervention was not only altruistic in nature, but was primarily based on realpolitik.

### **Bangladesh Liberation War 1971: Background**

- **Political Imbalance:** In the 1950s the centralised Pakistani state was run undemocratically by a military-bureaucratic oligarchy dominated by West Pakistan.
  - Under this system, Bengalis had no political say. But West Pakistan dominance was challenged in 1970 during general elections.
- **Landslide Victory of Awami League:** East Pakistan's Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League had a clear overall majority, enough to become the prime minister.
  - However, west Pakistan was not willing to let a leader from its eastern provincial wing rule the country.
- **Cultural Differences:** The then West Pakistan (present Pakistan), under the leadership of Yahya Khan, started a brutal assault on the people of East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) who were demanding freedom because of the language and cultural differences between the two regions.
  - After political negotiations failed, the Pakistani army under General Yahya Khan decided to start the crackdown.
- **Operation Searchlight:** West Pakistan kicked in operation searchlight across the whole of East Pakistan on March 26, 1971.
  - This resulted in millions of Bangladeshis fleeing to India, mainly West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.
  - West Bengal, in particular, was massively burdened by the onrush of the refugees and the state appealed to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her government for assistance for food and shelter.
- **Indo-Bangla Cooperation:** With the subsequent bravery of the Indian Army coupled with the spirited fight put up by Mukti Bahini — the Bangladeshi guerilla resistance movement consisting of the Bangladeshi military, paramilitary and civilians — defeated the Pakistani forces.
- **Defeat of Pakistani Military:** On December 16, 1971, Lt Gen Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi, the Chief Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan and Commander

of Pakistan Army forces located in East Pakistan signed the Instrument of Surrender.

- Over 93,000 Pakistani troops surrendered to the Indian forces and Bangladesh Liberation forces making it the largest surrender since World War II.
- The intervention brought a conclusion to the war in 13 short days and led to the birth of a new nation.

### **Bangladesh Liberation War 1971: Realpolitik or Altruism?**

- **Diminishing the Two-front War Threat:** The East Pakistan uprising provided India with the opportunity to break up Pakistan and eliminate the threat of a two-front war in any future confrontation.
  - Although the eastern front remained largely inactive in 1965, it tied down substantial military resources that could have been deployed to greater effect in the western theatre.
- **Preventing Side-Lining of Pro-India Awami League:** India recognised that a drawn-out civil war in East Pakistan would radicalise the Bengali population.
  - This could lead to the side-lining of the pro-India Awami League and shift the leadership of the movement to left-wing pro-China parties such as the Bhashani-led National Awami Party and the Communist Party.
- **Negating Internal Security Threat:** The Guerrilla warfare, inspired by Maoist ideology, was the major form of resistance against the Pakistani military.
  - If India wouldn't have intervened in the Bangladesh Liberation War 1971, this could have been detrimental for India's internal security interests, especially in the context of the Naxalite movement which was then raging in eastern India.
- **Negating The Communal Threat:** By July-August 1971, 90% of the refugees were Hindus concentrated in the border districts of West Bengal with large Muslim populations.
  - Consequently, there was danger of serious communal strife if India did not act quickly to ensure their return.
- **Departure from Non-Alignment:** At the diplomatic level, India did not act entirely alone. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's carefully crafted diplomatic dispatches to world leaders had helped create a groundswell of support for the persecuted Bengalis of East Pakistan.
  - The signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty in August 1971 came as a shot-in-the-arm for India, encouraging it to stay the course.
  - The victory defined India's much broader role in foreign politics.

- Many countries in the world, including the United States, realised that the balance of power had shifted to India in South Asia.

### Conclusion

The ultimate accolade for India's role in creating a new nation is that Bangladesh is today a relatively prosperous country, having made steady progress from the category of a Least Developed Country to a developing country.

The creation of Bangladesh — from the ashes of East Pakistan — is presumably India's finest foreign policy triumph till date.



## Women & Financial Inclusion

*This article is based on "Women are key to financial inclusion" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 24/04/2021. It talks about gender-based barriers to financial inclusion.*

**Tags:** Indian Economy, GS Paper - 2, Gender, Issues Related to Women

Increasing access to and use of quality financial products and services is essential to inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. Given this, increasing women's financial inclusion is important as women disproportionately experience poverty, unequal divisions of labor and a lack of control over economic resources.

The effective implementation of Aadhaar-based eKYC collection and authentication lowered barriers of entry to the formal financial system. It has allowed the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity to lay the foundation to bring 230 million unserved and underserved women into the formal financial services ecosystem.

However, despite digital technologies and government initiatives, hurdles to increase the financial inclusion for women have not been eliminated.

### Women & Financial Inclusion Linkage

- **Building Financial Resilience:** Women are decision-makers for spending and savings in most low-income households. They are thus more committed and disciplined savers than men.
  - Many research documents have shown that when given the opportunity, women save and by doing so build financial resilience.
  - Thus, it is economically viable for banks to target women, while contributing to such social good.
- **Increasing Social Capital:** Women's engagement

with financial institutions and their ability to access participation in work and credit from such institutions can increase their social capital.

- Thus, empowering 230 million women Jan Dhan customers financially leads to the potential upliftment of 920 million lives, at an average family of four.
- **Critical For Women's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction:** Providing low-income women with effective and affordable financial tools to save and borrow money, make and receive payments, and manage risk is critical to both women's empowerment and poverty reduction.
- **Gender Gap in Financial Inclusion:** According to the 2017 Global Findex database, 83% of males above 15 years of age in India held accounts at a financial institution in 2017 compared to 77% females.
  - This is attributed to socio-economic factors, including the availability of mobile handset and internet data facility being higher among men than women.

### Gender-Based Barriers to Financial Inclusion

Demand Side Barriers	Supply Side Barriers	Legal & Regulatory Barriers
Lack of bargaining power within the household	Reduced mobility due to time constraints or social norms	Account opening requirements that disadvantage women
Concentration in lower-paying economic activities	Lack of gender-specific policies and practices for product design and marketing	Barriers to obtaining formal identification
Competing demands on women's time related to unpaid domestic work	Inappropriate distribution channels	Legal barriers to owning and inheriting property and other collateral
Lack of assets for collateral	Lower rates of digital inclusion	Lack of gender-inclusive credit reporting systems

### Way Forward

- **Gender-Disaggregated Data:** Financial service providers need to deploy strategies that focus on the Jan Dhan women segment by using sex-disaggregated data.
  - For instance, target and communicate with women and design products and processes to be women-centric.
  - At a policy-level, collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data is vital for the creation of products and services for low-income women.

- **In-design Changes:** The design tweaks that take into account the specific needs and preferences of women can enhance their access to financial products, as well as the impact of those products on women's ability to make investments and smooth consumption in the face of income shocks.
  - Financial Products which allow women greater degrees of control and privacy surrounding their incomes and spending decisions appear to be particularly promising.
- **Enhancing Financial Literacy:** Providing financial literacy remains the key for universalisation of financial inclusion.
  - In this context, the Reserve Bank of India has undertaken a project titled Project Financial Literacy.
  - The objective of the project is to disseminate information regarding the central bank and general banking concepts to various target groups, including, school and college going children, women, rural and urban poor, defence personnel and senior citizens.

### Conclusion

The government's continued focus on women and their inclusion in the financial sector can have a transformative impact in boosting household economic resilience, expanding women's access to credit and work opportunities, aiding empowerment and equity.



## Universal Social Welfare

*This article is based on "Making social welfare universal" which was published in The Hindu on 29/04/2021. It talks about the need for universal social welfare architecture in India.*

**Tags:** Social justice, GS Paper - 2, Health, Government Policies & Interventions

India is one of the largest welfare states in the world and yet, with atrocities caused by Covid-19, the state failed to provide social welfare to most of its vulnerable citizens. Presently owing to the pandemic, India is witnessing multiple crises: a crumbling health infrastructure, mass inter- and intra-migration and food insecurity.

Moreover, the extenuating circumstances brought by the second wave of the pandemic has pushed an estimated 75 million people into poverty and brought even the middle and upper-class citizens to their knees.

The pandemic has thus revealed that leveraging our existing schemes and providing universal social security

is of utmost importance. This will help absorb the impact of external shocks on our vulnerable populations.

### What is the Social Security/Welfare System?

- According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Social Security is a comprehensive approach designed to prevent deprivation, give assurance to the individual of a basic minimum income for himself and his dependents and to protect the individual from any uncertainties.
- It is also comprised of two elements, namely:
  - Right to a Standard of Living adequate for the health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.
  - Right to Income Security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond any person's control.

### Need For Universal Social Welfare

- **Majority of Workforce is in Unorganised Sector:** The organised sector workers constitute less than 10% of all workers in India.
  - This leaves more than 90% of the workforce without job security, labour rights and post-retirement provisions.
  - Also, in a dynamic market-economy, workers will lose jobs at a faster pace with technological changes. Thus, workers need to keep learning to stay productively employed.
  - However, in spite of great attention given to skills development in the last 15 years, the results are not very encouraging.
- **Illness Is Universal, But Healthcare Is Not:** Economic capital, in the absence of social capital, has proven to be insufficient in accessing healthcare facilities.
  - Further, Out-of-pocket health expenses create barriers to seeking healthcare and can push marginal households into poverty, form as much as nearly 90% of private expenditure on health.
  - Also Covid-19 has highlighted the urgency for providing universal free health care. It has demonstrated that private health care can be afforded only by the wealthy.
- **Inadequate Expenditure on Social Security:** India has a broad aim of social protection programs, but the overall public expenditure on social protection (excluding public healthcare) is only approx. 1.5% of the GDP, lower than many middle-income countries across the world.
  - Further, the country has over 500 direct benefit transfer schemes for which various Central, State,

and Line departments are responsible. However, these schemes have not reached those in need.

- Moreover, existing schemes are fractionalised across various departments and sub-schemes. This causes problems beginning with data collection to last-mile delivery.
- **Intended Benefits:** Having a universal system would improve the ease of application by consolidating the data of all eligible beneficiaries under one database.
  - For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) is one scheme that can be strengthened into universal social security.
    - It already consolidates the public distribution system (PDS), the provision of gas cylinders, and wages for the MGNREGS.
  - Having a universal scheme would take away this access/exclusion barrier.
    - For example, PDS can be linked to a universal identification card such as the Aadhaar or voter card, in the absence of a ration card.
    - Making other schemes/welfare provisions like education, maternity benefits, disability benefits etc. also universal would ensure a better standard of living for the people.

#### Case Study: Universal Social Welfare Model

- An example of such a social protection scheme is the Poor Law System in Ireland.
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ireland, a country that was staggering under the weight of poverty and famine, introduced the Poor Law System to provide relief that was financed by local property taxes.
- These laws were notable for not only providing timely assistance but maintaining the dignity and respectability of the poor while doing so.
- They were not designed as hand-outs but as necessary responses to a time of economic crisis.
- Today, the social welfare system in Ireland has evolved into a four-fold apparatus that promises social insurance, social assistance, universal schemes, and extra benefits/supplements.

#### Way Forward

- **Emulating Pulse Polio Universal Immunisation Programme:** We have seen an example of a universal healthcare programme that India ran successfully — the Pulse Polio Universal Immunisation Programme.

- In 2014, India was declared polio-free. It took a dedicated effort over a number of years.
- With the advancements in knowledge and technology, a universal coverage of social welfare is possible in a shorter time frame.
- The implementation can be eased through a focus on data digitisation, data-driven decision-making and collaboration across government departments.
- **Building on Existing Systems:** The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) is one scheme that can be strengthened into universal social security.
  - It already consolidates the public distribution system (PDS), the provision of gas cylinders, and wages for the MGNREGS.
- **Urban MGNREGA:** MGNREGA has proved its utility by providing employment to millions of workers who have reverse migrated.
  - Thus, there is a case for extending this programme to urban areas with municipal bodies being given the responsibility for providing a fixed no of days work to all those seeking it.
  - Municipal bodies have a range of work to get done, such as improving sanitation, minor repairs, in which they could productively use labour.
- **Providing Universal Health Coverage:** There is a need to establish the Ayushman Bharat-National Health Agency at all levels of governance for management of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY).
  - Further, there is a need to review and iron out the challenges with the business model of Jan Aushadhi stores to ensure that they can function as self-sustaining entities and scale up rapidly across the country.

#### Conclusion

International experience also emphasizes the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all model by allowing sub-national governments greater flexibility as political economy, labor markets, demographic attributes and risk profiles vary by location.

Hence, or establishing an universal social protection architecture, India should enable local governments to design, plan and deliver a core basket of benefits within a nationally defined policy framework and budget.

