Monthly Editorial Consolidation

Content

Changing Monsoon & Agriculture

This article is based on "Make a drop count: Southwest monsoon patterns are changing" which was published in The Times of India on 29/06/2021. It talks about the effect of changing southwest monsoon patterns on Indian agriculture.

Tags: Geography, GS Paper - 1, Water Resources, Food Security, Important Geophysical Phenomena, Cropping Patterns

Southwest monsoon is perhaps the most important feature of India's climate, because it is very critical for Indian agriculture. Therefore, long-term trends in the southwest monsoon overlap with economic security.

A recent study by IMD on monsoon variability over a 30-year period (1989-2018) is a wakeup call. UP, Bihar and West Bengal are three of five states that have shown a significant decreasing trend in the southwest monsoon. These states have a large bearing on India's agriculture output.

With around 55% of India's arable land dependent on precipitation, the amount of rainfall during the current monsoon season could sway economic activity in the agriculture sector and industries linked to it.

The shift in monsoon may entail grave consequences for India's economy, food systems and people's well-being. Therefore, remedial measures must be taken before it is too late.

Monsoon & Agriculture Linkage

- The Southwest monsoon plays a crucial role in India's agriculture and affects the livelihood of a fifth of the world's population.
- About 80 per cent of the annual precipitation over India occurs during the summer period, supplying water to crops during the prime agricultural season.
  - Monsoon friendly crops with a high requirement of water like sugarcane, jute and paddy can easily be cultivated during southwest monsoon.
- The agriculture sector in India is both economically and politically important. The industry accounts for around 14% of the country's $2.7 trillion economy and 42% of total employment.
- Further, about one-third of India's manufacturing output — which makes up around 18% of the country's gross domestic product — is linked to turning agricultural products into food.
- Therefore, too much rainfall or too little or a volatile monsoon pattern, can damage crops.

Impact of Changing Monsoon

- **Depletion of Water Table:** In India, a little over 50% of India's net sown area is under rainfed farming and a large part of the irrigated area depends on groundwater extraction through borewells, which needs to be recharged with the groundwater.
  - In the event of a poor monsoon, these aquifers may not get adequately recharged, leading to water crisis.
  - Further, according to a NITI Aayog's report, nearly 21 Indian cities — including New Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai–could run out of groundwater by 2020.
- **Fiscal Burden:** Multiple crop failures may require the government to actively support farmers. Most likely, it may prompt the government to raise minimum support prices for all of the current season's crops to help support farmers' incomes.
  - This will have a diminishing effect on investments into agricultural investments.
- **Impacting Electricity Generation:** Monsoon rains can be harnessed as hydropower, a valuable energy resource. Hydropower currently provides 25% of India's electricity.
  - Reservoirs are filled during the southwest monsoon rains and then the water is gradually released through dams, turning turbines to create electricity year-round.
  - During years when there is little monsoon rainfall, the reservoirs are not replenished, limiting the amount of hydroelectric power produced during the year.
- **Impacting Inflation:** Normal monsoon rains keep a check on food inflation due to availability of food produce. However in a situation of drought, prices soar significantly.
  - Also, if a poor monsoon results in less crop output, the country may need to import.
  - It also impacts as many as a dozen sectors which depend on monsoon either directly or indirectly.

Way Forward

- **Addressing Water Scarcity:** Water availability is a national challenge. We have 18% of the world's population with just 4% of freshwater resources.
  - Thus, the Indian government needs to put a high priority on investing heavily in improved water storage systems for the agricultural sector.
  - It would be worthwhile to give high priority to "more crops per drop" approach, rainwater harvesting, aquifer recharge, revival of water bodies and conservation technologies.

➢ **Addressing Inefficient Water Use:** Water use patterns are awfully inefficient in India, where Indian farmers use two to four times more water to produce a unit of any major food crop.

○ Thus, Indian agriculture needs to adopt newer, less water-intensive technologies faster.

○ In this case, it needs a doubling down on efforts such as the ongoing government of India schemes to incentivise the use of micro irrigation measures that use water more efficiently.

Conclusion

Global climate change is not a new phenomenon. The effect of climate change poses many threats; one of the important consequences is bringing about changes in southwest monsoon and its impact on agriculture.

As India has set a target of halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 [15]. There is an urgent need for coordinated efforts to strengthen the research to assess the impact of climate change on agriculture, forests, animal husbandry, aquatic life and other living beings.

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Skilling India

This article is based on "Holistic skilling'' which was published in The Hindu Business Line on 01/07/2021. It talks about the challenges pertaining to the skill development in India.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Government Policies & Interventions, Employment, Skill Development

The success of any endeavour is an interplay of capital, collaboration, regulatory mechanisms and, most importantly, the scientific and technological know-how, put simply, skills.

In India, many initiatives have been undertaken in the skills sector by governments in the last decade. However, outcomes are still elusive. According to the UNDP's Human Development Report-2020, only 21.1 per cent of the labour force was skilled in the period 2010-2019 in India.

This dismal result is due to lack of cohesion within policy actions, absence of holistic approach and working in silos. Therefore, if India wants to reap the demographic advantage, it needs to fix the challenges pertaining to skill development in India.

Issues in Skill Development

➢ **Piecemeal Approach:** The piecemeal approach to skilling can be seen in this year's Budget which

has allocated ₹3,000 crore to realign the National Apprenticeship Training scheme but has restricted it to only engineering stream and not to other science and arts streams.

➢ **Overburdened Responsibility:** Phase III of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, launched to impart skills development to over 8 lakh persons in 2020-21.

○ However, it suffers from excessive reliance on the District Skills Development Committees, chaired by District Collectors, who would not be able to prioritise this role, given their other assignments.

➢ **Discontinuity in Policy Process:** The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), created in 2013 for resolving the inter-ministerial and inter-departmental issues and eliminating duplicates of efforts of the Centre.

○ However, it has been now subsumed as part of the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT).

○ This reflects not only discontinuity in the policy process, but also some obfuscation among policy makers.

➢ **Humongou s Number of New Entrants:** According to a 2019 study by the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC), 7 crore additional people in the working-age of 15-59 years are expected to enter the labour force by 2023.

○ Given the sheer magnitude of youth to be skilled, it is paramount that the policy efforts are adequate in all respects.

➢ **Employers' Unwillingness:** India's joblessness issue is not only a skills problem, it is representative of the lack of appetite of industrialists and SMEs for recruiting.

○ Due to limited access to credit because of Banks' NPAs, investment rate has declined and thus has a negative impact on job creation.

Way Forward

➢ **Ending Separation Between Education & Skills:** There is a need to end the artificial separation of the education system into formal and vocational shall end with such enabling frameworks allowing seamless integration.

○ In this context, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisaged a right policy as it emphasises on integration of vocational and formal education both at school and higher education levels.

○ The NEP also proposed a pilot 'hub-n-spoke' model with the conceptual framework of ITI becoming a 'Hub' for providing VET related training and exposure to students of adjoining 5-7 schools.

- **Skills survey:** Surveys can be conducted to find the exact skill requirements from the employers.
  - Analysis of such surveys would help in designing course structures of the training programs and thus standardized course curriculum or training delivery systems can be developed.
- **Enhanced Expenditure on Education and Training:** In the long run, Skill India will also not be enough if government expenditures in education remain low and if, therefore, the ground isn't prepared for proper training.
  - In this case, the proposal of NEP to enhance public expenditure on education to 6% of GDP is a step in the right direction.
- **Imbibing International Success Models:** India needs to learn from technical and vocational training/education models in China, Germany, Japan, Brazil, and Singapore, who had similar challenges in the past, along with learning from its own experiences to adopt a comprehensive model that can bridge the skill gaps and ensure employability of youths.

Conclusion

To make Bharat Atmanirbhar, all the skilling efforts need to be brought under one platform to eliminate silos and duplications. A sturdy institutional framework with practical and real pathways to change course between mainstream and vocational programmes needs to be put in place.

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Dowry System in India

This article is based on "Breaking the chain" which was published in The Indian Express on 02/07/2021. It talks about the menace of dowry in India.

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 1,Role of Women, Salient Features of Indian Society

Dowry is a social evil in society that has caused unimaginable tortures and crimes towards women and polluted the Indian marital system. Dowry is payment made in cash or kind to a bride's in-laws at the time of her marriage.

Today the government has come up with many laws (The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961) and reforms, not only to eradicate the dowry system, but also to uplift the status of the girl child by bringing in many schemes.

However, owing to the social nature of this problem, the legislation has failed to produce the desired results in our society.

In order to get rid of this problem, appealing to the social and moral consciousness of the people, providing education and economic independence for women, and effective enforcement of legislation against the dowry system, can help.

Impact of Dowry System

- **Gender Discrimnation:** Due to the dowry system, many a times it has been seen that women are seen as a liability and are often subjected to subjugation and are given second hand treatment may it be in education or other amenities.
- **Affecting Career of Women:** The larger context for the practice of dowry is the poor presence of women in the workforce, and their consequent lack of financial independence.
  - The Poorer sections of society who send their daughters out to work and earn some money, to help them save up for her dowry.
  - The regular middle and upper class backgrounds do send their daughters to school, but don't emphasize career options.
- **Many Women End Up Being Unmarried:** An uncountable number of girls in the country, despite being educated and professionally competent, remain endlessly unmarried because their parents cannot fulfil the demand for pre-marriage dowry.
- **Objectification of Women:** Contemporary dowry is more like an investment by the bride's family for plugging into powerful connections and money making opportunities.
  - This renders women as merely articles of commerce.
- **Crime Against Women:** In some cases, the dowry system leads to crime against women, ranging from emotional abuse and injury to even deaths.

Way Forward

- **Recognizing Limitations of Political Solution to Social Problem:** No law can be enforced without the wholehearted cooperation of the people.
  - Enacting a law no doubt sets a pattern of behaviour, activates social conscience and renders some assistance towards the efforts of social reformers in getting it abolished.
  - However, social evil like dowry cannot eradicate itself unless the people carry the philosophy behind the law much further.
- **Educating Girls:** Education and independence is one powerful and valuable gift that parents can give to their daughter.

- ❍ This will in turn help her to be financially sound and be a contributing member of the family, giving her respect and right status in the family.
- ❍ So providing the daughters with a solid education, and encouraging her to pursue a career of her choice is the best dowry any parent can ever give their daughter.

➤ **Creating Social Stigma Around Dowry:** Accepting dowry should be made a social stigma, and all generations should be addressed. For this, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. In this context:

- ❍ The Union and State governments must take effective steps for stepping up 'anti-dowry literacy' among people through Lok Adalats, radio broadcasts, television and newspapers on a 'continuing' basis.
- ❍ Youths are the only ray of hope to effectively combat the menace of the dowry system. They must be given moral value based education to broaden their minds and widen their outlook.

➤ **Multi Stakeholder Approach:** Dowry is not a standalone problem, thus society should take every step to bring gender parity. In this context,

- ❍ States should look at gender-disaggregated data across the life cycle – birth, early childhood, education, nutrition, livelihood, access to healthcare, etc – to address gender inequality.
- ❍ There is a need to expand childcare and safe public transport, reduce discrimination in hiring, and create affirming workplace environments.
- ❍ At home, men should share domestic work and care responsibilities.

Conclusion

The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, the conscience of society needs to be fully awakened to the evils of the dowry system so that the demand for dowry itself should lead to 'loss of face' in society for those who demand it.

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SpaceCom

This article is based on "Satellite Broadband: A faster way to connect India'' which was published in The Hindu Business Line on 04/07/2021. It talks about the advantages and challenges associated with space communications technologies.

Tags: Science & Technology, GS Paper - 3, Space Technology, IT & Computers

Over the past few months, there has been a sudden rise in the interest of satellite communications in India. Recently, some telcos asked for a share in the 27.5 Ghz – 29.5 Ghz frequency, which globally is earmarked for Space communications (Spacecom).

Space communication is an electronic communication package placed in an orbit. Its prime objective is to initiate or assist through space. It has made a major contribution to the pattern of international communication.

Global companies are striving to build and deploy "mega-constellations" of hundreds or thousands of satellites to bring affordable high-speed internet services to businesses, governments, schools, and individuals.

Realising the potential of spacecom, the government of India released a Draft Spacecom Policy 2020. However, despite India's impressive achievements in the space sector, growth has been at snail's pace.

Advantages of SpaceCom

➤ **Unhindered Connectivity:** Through satellite transmission, coverage over geographical areas is quite large mainly for sparsely populated areas.

- ❍ Wireless and mobile communication applications can be easily established by satellite communication independent of location.

➤ **Cost Advantage:** Satellite broadband provides instantaneous service. To beam into households, commercial establishments including machine to machine and IoT, satellite broadband does not require laying cable.

- ❍ According to a report titled Space India 2.0, the cost to cover one sq km from space varies between $1.5 and $6, vis-a-vis $3,000 to $30,000 required by ground infrastructure to cover the same area.

➤ **Phenomenal Growth in Allied Sector:** It is used in a wide variety of applications such as global mobile communication, private business networks, Long distance telephone transmission, weather forecasting, radio/TV signal broadcasting, gathering intelligence in the military, navigation of ships and air crafts, connecting remote areas, television distribution etc.

➤ **Easy to Deploy:** During critical conditions, each Earth Station may be removed relatively quickly from a location and reinstalled somewhere else.

Associated Challenges

➤ **Conventional Technology:** The Indian satellites are still using the conventional satellites despite the proliferation of high throughput satellites world-over.

- ❍ The use of traditional satellite technology in India makes it infeasible for satellite broadband to be commercially viable.

➢ **Lack of Indignation:** There is a lack of domestic participation for building space infrastructure despite the 'Make in India' mission.

➢ **Overburdened ISRO:** ISRO is over burdened by its regular operations such as launch of satellites, construction of launching vehicles etc which are becoming hurdles in ISRO's way for working in new projects.

➢ **Low Profile:** As per ISRO studies, India currently holds a mere 3 per cent share in the $360-billion global space market.

  ○ Satellite broadband services in India remain primarily for the B2B sector with a market size of roughly $100 million.

Way Forward

➢ **Privatisation:** Advanced space-faring nations have privatised most of spacecom blocks in the value chain.

  ○ SpaceCom experts predict that with the upcoming 'Open Space', satellite broadband services can be a $500 million-plus near-term market opportunity.

  ○ Thus, there is a need for building systems to help nurture the industry and create an extensive ecosystem.

➢ **Preventing the Misuse of Technologies:** The major concern is to make sure that this high precedent technology should not go in the wrong hands.

  ○ The government should make laws regarding the operation of private players in both the commercial as well as the strategic part of the space sector, so that technology can't be misused.

➢ **Judicious Allocation of Orbital Resources:** The allocation of Indian orbital resources would have to be undertaken in a reasonable and non-arbitrary manner and formulated by the jurisprudence under Article 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

  ○ India needs to have conducive regulations and policy along with sufficient spectrum allocation, ease of doing business, dropping capacity prices, etc.

➢ **Single Window Clearance System:** There is a need to consolidate the powers and functions of stakeholder ministries into a single body.

  ○ This would authorise all applications for deploying and operating Spacecom assets and provide assurances for a fair, non arbitrary, predictable and time abound adjudication.

Conclusion

With right policy intervention Spacecom has a tremendous scope to contribute a sizable chunk to the GDP growth, with the potential to open floodgates for greater innovation, R&D, employment, investment and connectivity.

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All India Judicial Service

This article is based on "Will a national judiciary work?" which was published in The Hindu on 06/07/2021. It talks about the arguments in favour and against the establishment of All-India Judicial Service.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Judiciary

The government of India has recently proposed to pass a bill to establish an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS) to recruit officers for subordinate courts through an entrance test.

The provision of an all-India judicial service (AIJS) on the lines of the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service was mooted soon after Independence.

In the present times, the idea of AIJS is being proposed in the backdrop of judicial reforms, especially to check persisting vacancies in judiciary and pendency of cases. The establishment of AIJS is a positive step, but faces many constitutional and legal hurdles.

Constitutional Perspective To AIJS

➢ The AIJS was first proposed by the 14thh report of the Law Commission in 1958.

➢ The 42nd Constitutional amendment in 1976 amended Article 312 (1) empowering Parliament to make laws for the creation of one or more All-India Services, including an AIJS, common to the Union and the States.

➢ Under Article 312, Rajya Sabha is required to pass a resolution supported by not less than two-thirds of its members present and voting. Thereafter, Parliament has to enact a law creating the AIJS.

  ○ This means no constitutional amendment will be required for establishment of AIJS.

➢ The Supreme Court of India also endorsed the same in the All India Judges Association vs. Union of India' case (1993) laying down that AIJS should be set up.

Advantages of AIJS

➢ **Addressing Judges To Population Ratio:** A Law Commission report (1987) recommended that India should have 50 judges per million population as against 10.50 judges (then).

  ○ Now, the figure has crossed 20 judges in terms of the sanctioned strength, but it's nothing compared to the US or the UK — 107 and 51 judges per million people, respectively.

○ Thus, AIJS envisages to bridge the underlying gap in judicial vaccines.

➢ **Higher Representation of Marginalised Sections of Society:** According to the Government, the AIJS to be an ideal solution for equal representation of the marginalised and deprived sections of society.

➢ **Attracting Talent Pool:** The government believes that if such a service comes up, it would help create a pool of talented people who could later become a part of the higher judiciary

➢ **Bottoms-Up Approach:** The bottoms-up approach in the recruitment would also address issues like corruption and nepotism in the lower judiciary. It will improve the quality of justice dispensation in the lower levels of society.

Associated Challenges

➢ **Dichotomy Betwwen Articles 233 and 312:** As per Article 233, recruitment to subordinate judiciary is the prerogative of the State.

○ Due to this, many states and high courts have opposed the idea on the ground that it would go against federalism.

○ If the fundamental power of the States to make such rules and govern the appointment of district judges is taken away, it may be against the principle of federalism and the basic structure doctrine.

Note:

➢ Article 233(1) of the Constitution lays down that "appointments of persons to be, and the posting and promotion of, district judges in any State shall be made by the Governor of the State in consultation with the High Court exercising jurisdiction in relation to such State".

➢ **Language Barrier:** Since cases in lower courts are argued in local languages, there have been apprehensions as to how a person from north India can hold hearings in a southern state.

○ Thus, another fundamental concern regarding AIJS is the language barrier.

➢ **Constitutional Limitation:** Clause 3 of Article 312 places a restriction that AIJS shall not include a post inferior to that of a district judge.

○ Thus, appointment of subordinate judiciary through AIJS, may face a constitutional barrier.

➢ **Dilution of Adminstarrtive Control of High Court:** Creation of AIJS would lead to an erosion of control of the High Courts over the subordinate judiciary, which might affect the judiciary's independence.

Conclusion

The insurmountable number of pending cases calls for establishment of a recruitment system that recruits efficient judges in large numbers for speedy dispensation of cases. However, before AIJS gets into the legislative framework, there is a need to build consensus and take a decisive step towards the AIJS.

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Strengthening FPOs

This article is based on "Reimagining FPOs to transform lives of marginal farmers" which was published in The Hindu Business Line on 06/07/2021. It talks about the advantages, challenges pertaining to the establishment of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs).

Tags: Agriculture, GS Paper - 3, Cropping Patterns, Agricultural Marketing

Indian Agriculture is facing many challenges like increasing input costs, changing pattern of southwest monsoon, poor economies of scale, etc

Possible solutions to these challenges include increasing the price the farmer receives, improved practices to reduce inputs, value addition at farm gate, insurance, and credit models that are farmer-friendly.

However, there is one issue that underlies all these solutions and that is of reach. The establishment of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) can help immensely in this regard. An FPO helps grow the farmer base, provide inputs, buy output, give them advice on crops, give them credit and insurance, facilitate post processing, etc.

Despite many government schemes supporting FPOs, over 7,500 FPOs have been registered so far, only 15 percent of these are active.

Advantages of FPOs

➢ **Advantage Of Economies of Scale:** Cost of production can be reduced by procuring all necessary inputs in bulk at wholesale rates.

○ Aggregation of produce and bulk transport reduces marketing cost, thus, enhancing net income of the producer.

○ Access to modern technologies, facilitation of capacity building, extension and training on production technologies and ensuring traceability of agriculture produce.

➢ **Reduced Losses:** Post-harvest losses can be minimized through value addition and efficient management of the value chain.

○ Regular supply of produce and quality control is possible through proper planning and management.

➢ **Easy Access to Finance:** Access to financial resources against the stock, without collaterals.

➢ **Improved Bargaining Power:** Collectivisation through FPOs also gives them more 'bargaining' power as a group and helps in social capital building.

Associated Challenges

➢ **Lack of Professional Management:** FPOs are required to be efficiently managed by experienced, trained and professionally qualified CEO and other personnel for supervision and control.

○ However, such trained manpower is presently not available in the rural space to manage FPO business professionally.

➢ **Weak Finances:** FPOs are mostly represented by small and marginal farmers with poor resource base and hence, initially they are not financially strong enough to deliver vibrant products and services to their members and build confidence.

➢ **Inadequate Access to Credit:** Lack of access to affordable credit for want of collaterals and credit history is one of the major constraints the FPOs are facing today.

➢ **Lack of Risk Mitigation Mechanism**: Presently, while the risks related to production at farmers' level are partly covered under the existing crop / livestock / other insurance schemes, there is no provision to cover business risks of FPOs.

➢ **Inadequate Access to Infrastructure:** The producers' collectives have inadequate access to basic infrastructure required for aggregation like transport facilities, storage, value addition and processing, brand building and marketing.

Way Forward

➢ **Division of Work:** An alternative model is to have the FPO focus solely on farmer engagement and an FPO Support Unit (FPOSU) set up to help with non-farming activities.

○ The FPOSU will be set up to work with numerous FPOs and can aggregate demand from millions of farmers to get larger discounts, negotiate with large buyers, source appropriate advisory, credit, insurance and other products and services.

➢ **Enabling Marketing:** Marketing of produce at remunerative prices is the most critical requirement for the success of FPOs.

○ The linkage with Industry/ other market players, large retailers, etc. is necessary for long term sustainability of FPOs.

○ Also, there is a need to treat the FPO as a place of Gramin Agri Market (GRAM) and build up the required marketing infrastructure to be owned and managed by the FPO.

➢ **UBER/OLA Model:** Convergence of resources for creation of farm level infrastructure at FPO level for cleaning, grading, sorting, assaying, processing, branding & transportation.

○ This can be done by establishment of custom hiring centres based on the UBER/OLA model for the benefit of shareholder members.

➢ **Nudging the Strengthening of FPOs:** The concerned Ministries/ departments may be mandated to implement all "Farmercentric Schemes" through the FPOs for efficient delivery of services and improved outcomes.

○ Further, there can be an appropriate provision in the Food Grain Procurement policy of the Government of India requiring procurement of agricultural commodities directly through FPOs under MSP scheme.

➢ **Education Related to FPOs:** Private Institutions/ Agricultural Universities may introduce special courses on FPO promotion and agribusiness management, with focus on rural youths including women so as to create large pool of professionals in rural areas for managing FPO activities

Conclusion

Since the FPO has been considered to be the way forward for enhancing farmers' income and boosting agricultural growth, future strategies for scaling up of FPO promotion by various stakeholders should focus on mass awareness building, institution development, forging linkages with the ecosystem, and digital monitoring.

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New Challenges to Federalism

This article is based on "Fresh stirrings on federalism as a new politics" which was published in The Hindu on 07/07/2021. It talks about the new emerging challenges to federalism in India.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Federalism, Centre-State Relations

Federalism believes in shared sovereignty and territoriality between multiple constituent units of governance. In India, Federalism is a device to accommodate India's multiple linguistic, religious, and ethnic identities.

Presently, in different parts of the world, the federal system of government is facing some of its biggest trials

yet, from the Covid-19 pandemic. However, much before the pandemic, the federal principles in India have been under pressure, to co-produce a political culture of flexible federalism.

Today, the union and states often share a conflicting stance on issues like vaccines, Goods and Services Tax (GST), appointment of Chief Secretary, and much more. This growing tension can also be seen in a possibility of re-emergence of the Third front Government (Union government formed by coalition of several regional parties).

However, Federalism in India, like always has its own political relevance that needs to be protected.

New Challenges to India's Federalism

➢ **Federalism & Development Challenge:** To accelerate progress, the Indian have proposed several schemes and visions which may undermine the federal principle.

  ❍ For example, developmental narratives like 'one nation, one market', 'one nation, one ration card', 'one nation, one grid'.

➢ **Undermining States:** The downgrading of a full-fledged State in Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory in 2019, or more recently, the notification of the NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021, reflected the centralising tendencies of the Union government.

  ❍ Similarly, the union government had invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act and the Disaster Management Act, centralising the powers to deal with the pandemic.

  ❍ However, state consultation is a legislative mandate cast upon the centre under these acts and binding Covid-19 guidelines are being issued by the Centre to the States.

➢ **Increasing Inter-State Divergence:** Growing divergence between richer (southern & western) and poorer States (northern & eastern), remains an important source of tension in inter-State relations that can become a real impediment to collective action amongst States.

  ❍ This has created a context where collective action amongst States becomes difficult as poorer regions of India contribute far less to the economy but require greater fiscal resources to overcome their economic fragilities.

➢ **Silent Fiscal Crisis:** The realities of India's macro-fiscal position risk increasing the fragility of State finances.

  ❍ Weak fiscal management has brought the Union government on the brink of what economist Rathin Roy has called a silent fiscal crisis.

  ❍ The Union's response has been to squeeze revenue from States by increasing cesses.

Way Forward

➢ **Inter-State Platform:** An inter-State platform that brings States together in a routine dialogue on matters of fiscal federalism could be the starting point for building trust and a common agenda.

  ❍ In this context, the Inter-state council can be revived.

  ❍ Economic growth trajectories since liberalisation have been characterised by growing spatial divergence.

➢ **Relaxing FRBM Norms:** The relaxation of limits imposed by the FRBM Act, regarding the market borrowings by the states, is a step in the right direction.

  ❍ However, these borrowings can be backed by sovereign guarantee by the Union Government.

  ❍ Moreover, the Union government can provide money to states so that they can take necessary action to deal with the crisis at the state level.

➢ **Political Will:** Upholding federalism requires political maturity and a commitment to the federal principle. A politics for deepening federalism will need to overcome a nationalist rhetoric that pits federalism against nationalism and development.

Conclusion

The most fundamental lesson from India's experience with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, is that managing a grave national crisis requires healthy cooperation between the Centre and states.

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Democracy of the Collegium System

This article is based upon "The Judicious Choice" which was published in the Indian Express on 09/07/2021. It talks about the significance of an independent and transparent collegium system in a democratic country like India.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper 2, Judiciary, Judicial Review

Amongst the constitutional institutions designed to protect democracy, the pride of place is enjoyed by the Indian judiciary. The nation, citizens and the judiciary must guard against the dilution of its independence.

To ensure democracy in the **judicial system**, a novel mechanism of the **Collegium System** was established in 1993.

The purpose of the collegium system is to ensure that the opinion of the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** is not his individual opinion, but the one formed collectively by a body of judges of the highest integrity in the judiciary.

However, the efficiency of the collegium system has been challenged time to time in terms of its independence and transparency of judicial appointments and other decisions.

For maintaining the faith of citizens in the judiciary, the collegium must shield itself from further erosion of its independence by scrupulously following the law.

The Collegium System

➢ **Collegium System:** It is the system of appointment and transfer of judges that has evolved through judgments of the SC, and not by an Act of **Parliament** or by a provision of the Constitution.
  ○ The SC collegium is headed by the CJI and comprises four other senior most judges of the court.
  ○ A HC collegium is led by its Chief Justice and four other senior most judges of that court

➢ **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 124(2) of the Indian Constitution provides that the Judges of the **Supreme Court** are appointed by the President after consultation with such a number of the Judges of the Supreme Court and of the High Courts in the States as the President may deem necessary for the purpose.
  ○ As per Article 217, the Judge of a High Court shall be appointed by the President in consultation with the CJI and the State **Governor**, and, in the case of appointment of a Judge other than the Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of the High Court.

➢ **Role of Government:** The government's role is limited to getting an inquiry conducted by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) if a lawyer is to be elevated as a judge in a High Court or the Supreme Court.
  ○ It can also raise objections and seek clarifications regarding the collegium's choices, but if the collegium reiterates the same names, the government is bound, under Constitution Bench judgments, to appoint them as judges.

Issues Associated with Collegium System

➢ **Lack of Transparency:** The lack of a written manual for functioning, the **absence of selection criteria**, the **arbitrary reversal of decisions** already taken, the selective publication of records of meetings prove the **opaqueness of the collegium system.**
  ○ No one knows how judges are selected, and the appointments made raise the concerns of propriety, self-selection and nepotism.
  ○ The system often **overlooks several talented junior judges and advocates.**

➢ **NJAC, A Missed Opportunity:** The **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)** could guarantee the independence of the system from inappropriate politicization, strengthen the quality of appointments and rebuild public confidence in the system.
  ○ The decision was struck down by the SC in 2015 on the ground that it posed a threat to the independence of the judiciary.

➢ **Lack of Consensus among Members:** The collegium members often face the issue of mutual consent regarding appointment of judges.
  ○ The shadow of **mistrust between the members of the collegium** exposes the fault lines within the judiciary.
  ○ For instance, recently retired CJI Sharad A. Bobde was perhaps the first chief justice to have not made even a single recommendation for appointment as SC judge due to lack of consensus among the collegium members.

➢ **Unequal Representation:** The other area of concern is the composition of the higher judiciary. While data regarding caste is not available, **women are fairly underrepresented** in the higher judiciary.

➢ **Delay in Judicial Appointments:** The process of judicial appointment is delayed due to **delay in recommendations by the collegium** for the higher judiciary.

Way Forward

➢ **Preserving the Independence of Judiciary:** Filling up of vacancies is a continuous and collaborative process involving the executive and the judiciary.
  ○ However, it is time to think of a permanent, independent body to institutionalize the process with adequate safeguards to preserve the judiciary's independence guaranteeing judicial primacy but not judicial exclusivity.
    • It should ensure independence, reflect diversity, demonstrate professional competence and integrity.

➢ **Changing the Procedure of Recommendation:** Instead of selecting the number of judges required against a certain number of vacancies, the collegium must provide a panel of possible names to the President to appoint in order of preference and other valid criteria.

➢ **Reconsidering the Establishment of NJAC:** The Supreme Court may amend the NJAC Act to have safeguards that would make it constitutionally valid and reorganize the NJAC to ensure that the judiciary retains majority control in its decisions.

➢ **Ensuring Transparency:** The collegium members have to make a fresh start and engage with each other.
  ○ A transparent process adds accountability that is much needed to resolve the deadlock.

○ Individual disagreements over certain names will continue to take place, but care must be taken that the institutional imperative of dispensation of justice does not suffer.

Conclusion

➢ It is of the utmost importance that the Judiciary, which is the main bulwark of civil liberties, should be completely independent and separated from direct and indirect influence of the Executive.

➢ Identifying and selecting the judges of the highest integrity for appointment to the highest courts of the land is the least that can be done to ensure independence of the judicial system of India.

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Sustainable Sugarcane Industry

This article is based on "Is the sugar industry finally coming of age?" which was published in The Hindu Business Line on 08/07/2021. It talks about the associated challenges and solutions for the sugarcane industry.

Tags: Agriculture, GS Paper - 3, Cropping Patterns, Agricultural Marketing

Sugarcane cultivation in India has expanded in the last few decades. Factors like policies that incentivize production, including a minimum price, guaranteed sales of sugarcane and public distribution of sugar, have helped India become the second-largest producer of sugar worldwide.

However, factors like rainfall deficit, depleting groundwater table, delayed payment to cane farmers, lower net income (for the farmer) compared to other crops, labour shortage and increasing cost of labour, followed by Covid-19 pandemic are paralysing the entire sugar sector.

As sugarcane is a cash crop, rectifying issues that grapple the sugarcane industry remains critical for Indian agriculture and doubling farmer's income.

Associated Challenges With Sugarcane Industry

➢ **Pricing Controls:** In order to plug the demand-supply mismatch, the union & state governments have been controlling sugar prices through various policy interventions like export duty, imposition of stock limit on sugar mills, change in meteorology rule etc.

○ However, the government control of pricing is populist in nature and this often leads to price distortion.

○ This has triggered that sugar cycle oscillating between massive surplus and severe shortage.

➢ **High Input and Low Output Cost:** The falling/stagnant price of sugar in recent years in the backdrop of continuous rise in sugarcane prices is the main source of troubles faced by the sugar industry in the last few years.

○ Due to this, the government grappled with large cane arrears while the industry survived on periodic government funded bail-outs and subsidies.

○ It is because of the unviability of the business, no new private investments are being done in the sugar industry.

➢ **Unviability Sugar Exports:** Indian exports are unviability as the cost of producing sugar (thanks to high cane price) is way above the international sugar price.

○ The government sought to bridge the price gap by providing export subsidies, but this was promptly contested by other countries in the WTO.

○ Further, India under WTO's agreement on agriculture has been allowed to continue with the subsidies till December 2023. The fear is what will happen post-2023.

➢ **Dismal Performance of India's Ethanol Programme:** Blending ethanol with petrol for use as auto fuel, was first announced in 2003, but the problem never took off.

○ The poor pricing of ethanol supplied for blending, periodic shortages of sugar and competing demand from the potable alcohol sector.

Way Forward

➢ **Sugarcane Mapping:** Despite the importance of sugarcane in the water, food and energy sectors in India, there are no reliable sugarcane maps for recent years and in time series.

○ Thus, there is a need to deploy remote sensing technologies to map sugarcane areas.

➢ **Innovation:** Research and development in sugarcane can help address the issues like low yield and low sugar recovery rates.

○ For example, in 2016-17, a new variety of sugarcane (CO 238) was developed for use in Uttar Pradesh.

○ Considering that UP produces bulk of India's sugarcane, its share in the country's sugar output rose to 40 per cent from 25 per cent.

○ This singular development effectively broke the sugar cycle and made India a consistently surplus sugar producer.

➢ **Freeing-up Cane Pricing:** The government of India has taken various measures to help the sugarcane

sector, but reforms in the sugarcane sector will start to manifest when price discovery will happen with economic sense.

❍ In this context, the Rangarajan Committee has suggested a Revenue Sharing Formula formula to fix cane price factoring in the price of sugar and other by-products.

❍ Further, in case the cane price, arrived at by the formula, drops below what the government considers as a reasonable payment, it can bridge the gap from a dedicated fund created for the purpose and a cess can be levied to build up the fund.

➢ **Supporting Biofuel Production:** Government should encourage ethanol production. It will bring down the country's oil import bill and help in diversion of sucrose to ethanol and to balance out the excess production of sugar.

❍ For this, the government should allow ethanol making directly from sugarcane juice, which is presently restricted to molasses only.

Conclusion

The sugar industry is a source of livelihood for 50 million farmers and their families. It provides direct employment to over 5 lakh skilled laborers but also to semi-skilled laborers in sugar mills and allied industries across the nation.

Considering the importance of the sugar industry, the crisis faced by sugarcane farmers needs to be resolved promptly through centre and state policy initiatives.

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Tapping Potential of Youth

*This article is based on **Tapping on the potential of the youth** which was published in The Hindu on 12/07/2021. It talks about realising the potential of Indian youth in order to take advantage of India's Demographic Dividend window.*

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 1, Population and Associated Issues, Government Policies & Interventions

In India over 62% of the population is aged between 15 and 59 years, and the median age of the population is less than 30 years. This means India is going through the stage of **'demographic dividend'** representing the potential for economic growth based on the age structure of the population.

However, transforming this potential into reality requires adolescents and the youth to be healthy and well-educated.

A study on demographic dividend in India by **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** said the window of demographic dividend opportunity in India is available for five decades from 2005-06 to 2055-56.

Therefore, more than the fears of a **'population explosion',** it is critical that India focus attention on safeguarding young people's well-being because India's welfare hinges on them.

Demographic Dividend: Definition

➢ According to **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**, demographic dividend means, "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the **share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age** share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older)".

Challenges In Realising Youth Potential

➢ **Lack of Education and Skill:** India's underfunded education system is inadequately equipped to provide the skills young people need to take advantage of emerging employment opportunities.

❍ According to the World Bank, public expenditure on education constituted only 3.4% of GDP in 2020.

❍ Another report revealed that India stands 62nd in terms of public expenditure per student, and fares badly in quality of education measures such as student-teacher ratios.

➢ **Impact of the Pandemic:** Various studies show that school closures have a serious impact on the learning, lives and mental well-being of children.

❍ A survey by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** reveals that 65% of adolescents worldwide reported having learnt less during the pandemic.

➢ **Issues of Young Women:** Child marriage, gender-based violence, their vulnerability to abuse and trafficking, especially if primary caregivers fall ill or die. All these issues restrict young women to achieve their full potential.

➢ **Jobless Growth:** The main contributor in India's GDP is the service sector which is not labour intensive and thus adds to jobless growth.

❍ Further about 50% of India's population is still dependent on agriculture which is notorious for underemployment and disguised unemployment.

➢ **Low Social Capital:** Further high levels of hunger, malnutrition, stunting among children, high levels of anaemia among adolescent girls, poor sanitation etc., have reduced the productivity of India's youth in realising their potential.

Way Forward

➢ **Inter-sectoral Collaboration**: It is imperative to have in place mechanisms for better inter-sectoral collaboration to safeguard the futures of the young generation. Coordination across departments can enable better solutions and greater efficiencies in tackling any crisis.

 ❍ **Eg.: Mid-day meals scheme** not only provides an incentive for parents to send their children to school but also provides the calorie intake required to stay alert in the classroom.

➢ **Skill Development** to increase employability of the young population. India's labour force needs to be empowered with the right skills for the modern economy.

 ❍ Government has established the **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** with the overall target of skilling/ up-skilling 500 million people in India by 2022.

➢ **Improving Social Infrastructure:** If India wants to leverage the economic potential of its youth bulge, then it must invest in improving social infrastructure viz. good health, quality education, and endeavour to provide decent employment to their entire population.

➢ **Maintaining Basic Hygiene:** As school closures have impacted access to schemes such as the **delivery of menstrual hygiene products** to adolescents, teachers can work as volunteers for collaborating with frontline health workers to distribute sanitary napkins to girls.

➢ **Helpline For Youth:** To address the mental health of adolescents, the Health and Education Ministries should strengthen outreach via existing helplines and by enabling conversations on critical issues regarding their reproductive and sexual health.

➢ **Immediate Steps After Pandemic:** It is important for policymakers to balance the risks of transmission through children with the harm of prolonged school closures.

 ❍ By prioritising the vaccination of teachers and school support staff and also allowing a decentralised approach where district-level officials may reopen schools based on local Covid-19 transmission rates, schools could be opened in a safe and phased manner.

Conclusion

➢ Improving the lives of youth in mission mode would lift their lives, generate a virtuous cycle with healthier and educated young adults contributing substantially to securing India's future.

➢ The policies for empowerment of youth and their effective implementation will ensure that demographic

dividend, which is a time-limited opportunity, becomes a boon for India.

Period of demographic dividend in large economies

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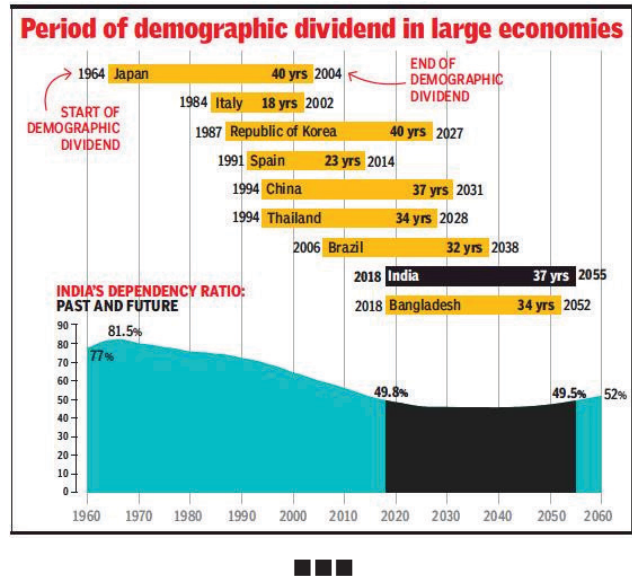
US Withdrawal And Regional Dynamics

This article is based on Regional powers and the Afghanistan question which was published in The Indian Express on 13/07/2021. It talks about the scenarios emerging in Afghanistan and the region after withdrawal of American troops.

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

The speedy **withdrawal of US troops** from Afghanistan has been matched by the swift advance of the Taliban across the nation. While the US has confirmed that 90% of the withdrawal is done, the Taliban has claimed that it is in control of 85% of Afghanistan territory.

These developments have moved **Afghanistan into the court of regional powers** that now have the burden of managing the military vacuum created by the US retreat.

The idea of a regional solution to Afghanistan has always had much political appeal. But **divergent regional strategic perspectives** limit the prospects for a sustainable consensus on Afghanistan.

US Withdrawal and Regional Powers

➢ **Taliban:** Taliban itself remains a major variable. If the Taliban does not accommodate the interests of all Afghans, it simply sets the stage for the next round of the civil war in Afghanistan.

○ The Taliban is also signalling that it will not be a proxy for anyone else and that it will pursue independent policies.

➤ **China:** The US withdrawal from Afghanistan today reinforces the strongly held conviction in China that the US is in terminal decline.

　○ The withdrawal, at a time when China is offering an alternative to the Western model of international governance, is seen in China as a great ideological victory.

　○ However, for China, potential Taliban support to the Xinjiang separatist groups is a major concern.

➤ **India:** India will have three critical areas in dealing with the Taliban.

　○ Protecting its investments, which run into billions of rupees, in Afghanistan;

　○ Preventing a future Taliban regime from being a pawn of Pakistan;

　○ Making sure that the **Pakistan-backed anti-India terrorist groups do not get support** from the Taliban.

➤ **Other:** None of the regional countries want to see Afghanistan becoming the nursery of international terror again under the Taliban.

　○ Iran can't ignore the Sunni extremism of the Taliban and its oppressive record in dealing with the Shia, and Persian-speaking minorities.

　○ Pakistan worries about the danger of the conflict spilling over to the east of the **Durand Line**, and hostile groups like the **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)** gaining sanctuaries in Afghanistan.

India's Approach

➤ The era of prolonged peace in Afghanistan secured by the US military presence has come to its end.

　○ This would mean new constraints on India's ability to operate inside Afghanistan.

➤ **Three structural conditions** will continue to shape India's Afghan policy.

○ One is India's **lack of direct physical access to Afghanistan**. This underlines the importance of India having effective regional partners.

○ **Pakistan** has the **capability to destabilise any government** in Afghanistan. But it does not have the power to construct a stable and legitimate order in Afghanistan.

➤ The contradiction between the interests of Afghanistan and Pakistan is an enduring one.

○ Pakistan likes to turn Afghanistan into a protectorate, but Afghans deeply value their independence. All Afghan sovereigns, including the Taliban, will look for partners to balance Pakistan.

➤ India should focus on **intensifying its engagement with various Afghan groups**, including the Taliban and **finding effective regional partners** to secure its interests in a changing Afghanistan.

Way Forward

➤ **Use of Multilateral Organisations:** Such as **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation(SCO)** should be used in dealing with the Afghan questions and achieve stability.

○ Geography, membership and capabilities make the SCO an important forum to address the post-American challenges in Afghanistan.

➤ An **independent, sovereign, democratic, pluralistic and inclusive Afghanistan** is crucial for peace and stability in the region.

○ In order to ensure the same, the Afghan peace process, as stated by India's Afghan policy, should be **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled**.

➤ Also, there is a need for the global community to **fight against the global concern of terrorism**.

○ In this context, it high time to adopt the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism** (proposed by India at UN in 1996).

➤ **Admin and Military Reforms:** More militancy is witnessed in the region where the state fails to deliver. Thus, Administrative and military reforms within Afghanistan are the need of the hour to tackle the menace of emerging Taliban 2.0.

Conclusion

➤ The US's exit from Afghanistan has triggered Taliban emergence, geopolitical flux and thus, instability in the region.

➤ As these factors will increasingly push India into a geopolitical tough spot in the region, smart statecraft, therefore, is required to deal with changing dynamics in Afghanistan.

> If India remains active and patient too, many opportunities could open up in the new Afghan phase.

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Growth Matters

This article is based on Growth matters but income levels matter more which was published in The Hindu on 14/07/2021. It talks about the challenges facing economic growth and ways to achieve a high growth rate.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Growth & Development, Mobilization of Resources, Fiscal Policy

After the **Covid-19** shock economic growth has been showing a downward trend and private investment and demand has also been decreasing.

In the context, India needs a sharp revival of demand for which higher per capita incomes are necessary.

However, there are several challenges needed to be tackled in order to increase the demand and economic growth rate.

Some Observations About Economy
> The agriculture sector continued its impressive growth performance, reiterating that it still remains as the vital sector of the economy, especially at times of crisis.
> The manufacturing sector continued its subdued growth performance, failing to emerge as the growth driver, with production interruptions due to localised lockdowns to be blamed.
> The contraction in trade (-18.2%), construction (-8.6%), mining (-8.5%) and manufacturing (-7.2%) is a matter of concern as these sectors account for the bulk of low-skilled jobs.

Challenges Confronting Economic Growth

> **Rising unemployment rate:** According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), in May 2021, India's labour participation rate at 40% was the same as it was in April 2021. But, the unemployment rate shot up to 11.9% from 8%.
  ○ A stable labour participation rate combined with a higher unemployment rate implies a **loss of jobs** and a fall in the employment rate.
  ○ According to CMIE, over 15 million jobs were lost in May 2021, higher than the 12.3 million in November 2016, the month of demonetisation.
> **High Informality:** Job losses bring out the high informality and vulnerability of labour in India as of the total jobs lost during pandemic were of daily wage

earners.This challenges inclusive growth and higher economic growth potential of the country.
> **Low Business Confidence:** Business confidence index (BCI),from the survey by the FICCI, has fallen down severely. **Purchasing Managers Index(PMI)** has also slipped to a 10-month low indicating that the manufacturing sector is showing signs of strain with growth projections being revised lower.
  ○ Both BCI and PMI slipping down indicates that the overall optimism towards 2021-22 is low, which could **impact investments and cause further job losses**
> **Weak Demand:** With household income being severely impacted and past savings being already drawn on during the first wave of **covid-19 pandemic**, demand conditions are weak.

Issues With India's Policy Response

> There has been **less direct action by the government** to support the vulnerable to alleviate their hardships.
> The bulk of the **policy measures are supply side measures** and not on the demand side.
  ○ In times of financial anxiety, what is needed is direct state spending for a quick demand boost.
> Large parts of all the stimulus packages announced till now would work in the **medium term(**not immediate**)**. These include policies related to the external sector, infrastructure and manufacturing sector.
> The use of credit backstops as the main plank of policy has limits compared to any direct measure on the demand side as this could result in poor growth performance if private investments do not pick up.
> Further, the credit easing approach would take a longer time to multiply incomes as lending involves a lender's discretion and borrower's obligation.

Way Forward

> **Sharp Revival in Overall Demand:** Growth recovery depends on demand recovery. Increased demand will come only with increased saving and increased income levels.
  ○ Investment, especially private investment, is the "key driver" that drives demand, creates capacity, increases labour productivity, introduces new technology, allows creative destruction, and generates jobs.
> **Export Promotion:** External demand looks robust as India's exports touched USD 32 billion in May 2021, 67% higher than in May 2020 indicating that global demand rebound is fast.
  ○ Also Export finance can be provided to exporters.

- **Increasing the MGNREGA funding and expanding to Urban areas:** The **MGNREGA** programme has proved to be a bedrock of support in the normal times and during times of difficulty (like Covid-19) and it will be a good idea to expand the scheme to urban areas.
- **Transfer of Cash benefits**: A meaningful cash transfer can restore confidence in these families. Money in the hands of people can provide an immediate sense of security and confidence, which is the cornerstone to restoring economic normalcy.
  - It will raise the consumption and demand of the economy and can bring back the virtuous cycle in play.
- **Use of technology:** With rising internet penetration, governments should collaborate with industry leaders to create online tutorials in local regional languages to impart knowledge and skills to all.
- **Promoting labour-intensive sectors** such as gems and jewellery, textiles and garments and leather goods.

Conclusion

- Focusing on growth rates has its merits in the long term as achieving higher income levels require sustained growth for longer periods.
- India is slowly but surely on the path to economic recovery and investment is the way to sustain this growth momentum.

Women After Pandemic

This article is based on Women work more, earn less, and face greater health risks which was published in Hindustan Times on 15/07/2021. It talks about the issues women have faced during and after the pandemic and ways to recover from those impacts.

Tags: Social Justice, GS Paper - 2, Issues Related to Women, Role of Women, Social Empowerment, Women's Issues

Women tend to be the backbone of society during crises, even as they are also more likely to face the disproportionate impacts of such events. The **Covid-19 pandemic** is no different.

It has severely exacerbated existing gendered barriers, widened India's gender gap in the workforce, and affected (overwhelmingly female) caregivers and frontline workers.

Moreover, Dalberg conducted one of the largest studies of the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on women in low-income households, which pointed out that there is a multi-generational impact of poor nutrition, lack of access to contraceptives, and debt.

Impact on Women

- **More Women Unemployed:** Women were more affected than men by employment issues. Women made up just 24% of those working before the pandemic, yet accounted for 28% of all those who lost their jobs.
- **Issues of Food Insecurity:** Loss in incomes for women as well as their households led to reduction in food supply and women were affected more than other members of the family.
- **Issues of Reproductive Health:** Women's health indicators also deteriorated because they could no longer afford contraception and menstrual products.
  - About 16% of women (an estimated 17 million if extrapolated) had to stop using menstrual pads, and more than one in three married women were unable to access contraceptives.
- **Unpaid Labour:** Indian women already do almost three times more unpaid work than Indian men, and the survey showed a 47% increase in unpaid labour for women, and a 41% increase in unpaid care work for women.
- **Marginalised Groups:** Women from historically marginalised groups (Muslims, migrants, single/separated/divorced), were more affected than the average woman.
  - The variance is across the board, with more single, separated/divorced women having limited food or running out of food and many more Muslim women losing their income and livelihood.
  - Conditions on the ground are likely to worsen for those women (such as **dalit women** and **transgender individuals**) who bear the brunt of social discrmination.

Way Forward

- **Expanding public distribution system (PDS):** Expanding **PDS** beyond food as it's a far-reaching delivery channel. For instance, women's access to menstrual pads could be revolutionised in this fashion for the short term, improving reach considerably.
  - Bundling free menstrual hygiene products with PDS would relax women's dependence on income for these essentials.
  - Optimally, this would go hand-in-hand with national-, state- and district-level awareness drives around menstrual health and hygiene.
- **Benefits of Schemes Must Be Universalised**: Enlist Women on **MGNREGA** job cards to increase the total number of person-days to meet women's demand for job opportunities.

○ Strengthen the resilience of **SHGs** by focusing on their economic recovery and market linkages via the existing Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

○ SHGs could also provide technical and managerial training to help women develop the skills needed to run small businesses digitally.

➢ **Inclusive Approach:** Focus on the inclusion of single, divorced/separated women in the **One Nation One Ration Card** rollout, and build social assistance programmes for **informal workers**, specifically domestic workers and casual labourers.

➢ **Increasing Awareness:** The government can build upon and accelerate its existing efforts through **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)** workers, **Mission Parivar Vikas**, and other schemes to strategically focus on contraceptive usage.

Conclusion

➢ According to the survey, one in three women said that government welfare schemes and SHGs had played an important role in helping them navigate the pandemic.

○ Specifically, the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana**, and the **public distribution system (PDS)** supported 12 million, 100 million, and 180 million women respectively during the crisis.

➢ Thus, there is a need for universalising, deepening, and extending the government schemes and SHG setups in order to help every woman come out of the ill impact from the pandemic as soon as possible.

➢ Making the right investments in women's issues now could prove transformational in the long-term recovery and health of our economy and society.

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One Nation One Ration Card Scheme

This article is based on *"Easing access to entitlements"* *which was published in The Indian Express on 15/07/2021. It talks about the benefits and challenges associated with the One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC).*

Tags: Social Justice, GS Paper - 3, Government Policies & Interventions, Buffer Stocks & Food Security

Covid-19 pandemic has created a dilemma of lives vs livelihood for almost every sector of the economy. However,

the migrant workers are one the most vulnerable sections of the society, which got impacted by the pandemic.

Food and income security is the main concern of the jobless migrants after the two deadly waves of Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to tackle the problem of food security, the government of India introduced the One Nation One Ration Card scheme (ONORC). ONORC allows a beneficiary to access his food entitlements from anywhere in India irrespective of the place where the ration card is registered.

Status of ONORC Scheme

➢ Presently, thirty-two States and Union territories have already completed the formalities of the scheme, which include linking beneficiaries' ration cards with their Aadhaar numbers and installing e-Point of Sale (e-POS) machines in each FPS.

➢ The full mobility of food subsidy under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 relies on digitisation of the public distribution system (PDS), a network of over 5,00,000 fair-price shops (FPS).

○ This would be ensured on the basis of Aadhaar authentication and validated data.

➢ The Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IMPDS) portal records all purchases made under ONORC.

Benefits of ONORC

➢ **Enabling Right To Food:** Previously, ration cardholders can avail their entitlement of subsidised food grains under the National Food Security Act, only from the designated Fair price shop (FPS) within the concerned state.

○ However, if a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.

○ Thus, ONORC envisages removing the geographical hindrance to social justice and enabling the right to food.

➢ **Supporting One-Third of Population:** Nearly, 37% of the population is that of migrant labourers. The scheme is therefore important for anyone who is going to move from one place to the other.

➢ **Reducing Leakages:** The ONORC can reduce leakages, because the fundamental prerequisite of this scheme is deduplication.

○ This will ensure that the same person does not figure as a beneficiary in two different locations of the country.

○ Further, the scheme is linked with Aadhaar and biometrics, this removes most possibilities of corruption.

➤ **Reducing Social Discrimination:** ONORC will be particularly beneficial for women and other disadvantaged groups, given how social identity (caste, class and gender) and other contextual factors (including power relations) provide a strong backdrop in accessing PDS.

Associated Challenges

➤ **Exclusion Error:** The digitisation of this PDS process, through Aadhaar-linked ration cards and smart cards, has been pushed in an effort to reduce leakages. However, there has been a rise of exclusion errors in post-Aadhaar seeding.

  ○ There are many sections of society who still don't have Aadhar Cards, thereby depriving them of food security.

➤ **Domicile-Based Social Sector Schemes**: Not only PDS, most of the anti-poverty, rural employment, welfare and food security schemes were historically based on domicile-based access and restricted people to access government social security, welfare and food entitlements at their place of origin.

➤ **Disrupting Supplies At FPS:** An FPS receives the monthly quota of products strictly in accordance with the number of people assigned to it.

  ○ The ONORC, when fully operational, would disrupt this practice, as some FPSs may have to cater to more numbers of cards even as others cater to less, owing to migration of people.

Way Forward

➤ **Opening up Alternate Delivery Centres:** If emergencies continue to hamper uptake at ration shops, alternate delivery channels can be considered for delivering food grains to vulnerable groups.

➤ **Focusing on Nutritional Security:** Food security should be seen from a broader framework of nutritional security. Therefore, ONORC must allow the portability of Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals, immunisation, health care and other facilities.

➤ **Replacing PDS With Food Coupons:** In the longer run, the PDS system may be replaced by a fool-proof food coupon system or direct benefit transfer.

  ○ Wherein, a Below Poverty Line family can buy rice, pulses, sugar and oil from any Kirana store at the market price, by either paying fully through the coupon or by cash.

Conclusion

ONORC is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. It will provide food security to jobless migrants and will help achieve the target set under SDG 2: Ending hunger by 2030.

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Build Back Better World Proposal

This article is based on "A counter-strategy called B3W" which was published in The Indian Express on 17/07/2021. It talks about the recent Build Back Better World (B3W) proposal moved by the G-7 Countries.

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

Recently, G-7 leaders have come out with the Build Back Better World (B3W) proposal. The proposal aims to address the infrastructure investment deficit in developing and lower income countries.

Thereby, the proposal seeks to counter China's rising influence across 100-plus countries through Belt Road Initiative (BRI) projects. Through BRI projects, China seeks to deploy corrosive tactics or debt traps for its strategic dominance in trade, foreign policy and geopolitics in the world.

B3W is at its nascent stage, it remains to be seen what role India will play in Build Back Better World since it has been a strong opponent of BRI, which is designed by China to establish strategic dominance in trade, foreign policy and geopolitics.

Status of BRI & Associated Issues

➤ The BRI project was launched in 2013, it broadly aims to facilitate cross-border transportation of goods, access to energy, creating demand for existing excess capacity in Chinese industries.

  ○ China had an overall exposure of investment around $750 billion between 2013 to mid-2020.

➤ However, from a macro view of BRI projects clearly reflects the motive of China-centric international economic integration, production networks, hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and, eventually, the global economy.

➤ For Instance, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Bangladesh-China, India, the Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) and the Colombo Port City Project in Sri Lanka, amongst others, are important BRI projects.

  ○ These projects are not only commercial in nature but have strategic implications too.

➤ Further, the BRI project is colonial in nature as China's trade, gives more market access to Chinese markets and ensures stable supply of energy and other resources.

❍ According to the Council on Foreign relations overall debt to China has soared since 2013, surpassing 20% of GDP in some countries.

B3W & It's Guiding Principles

➢ **Goal:** The Build Back Better Plan is a Covid-19 relief, future economic, and infrastructure package proposed by G-7 countries for developing and lower income countries.

➢ **Components of B3W:** Through B3W, the G7 and other like-minded partners will coordinate in mobilizing private-sector capital in four areas of focus:

❍ Climate,

❍ Health and health security,

❍ Digital technology,

❍ Gender equity and equality.

➢ **Values-Driven Development:** Infrastructure development carried out in a transparent and sustainable manner—financially, environmentally, and socially—will lead to a better outcome for recipient countries and communities.

➢ **Good Governance and Strong Standards:** B3W to infuse investment by complying to the standradds promoted by the Blue Dot Network, relating to the environment and climate, labor and social safeguards, transparency, financing, construction, anticorruption, and other areas.

➢ **Climate-Friendly:** The investments will be made in a manner consistent with achieving the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

➢ **Strong Strategic Partnerships:** B3W will envisage countering the aggressive model of development and establish a more inclusive model of global development.

Way Forward

➢ **Reinventing Capitalism:** Covid-19 has exposed the fragility and societally negative outcomes of contemporary capitalist economies.

❍ Thus, in order to build a global development as highlighted by the B3W blueprint, it will require fine-tuning of the current model of Capitalism.

➢ **Building Concenus in Democracies:** Any plan formulated by vibrant democracies such as these countries usually takes time and has to go through many diplomatic and bureaucratic twists and turns.

❍ Thus, the mian challenge for G-7 countries is to build global consensus and deliver projects in a time bound manner.

Conclusion

The counter proposal of B3W is certainly a welcome step to contain the adverse implications of a Chinese mega plan. However, B3W lacks coherent thoughts and proper planning at this stage.

Nevertheless, it is better late than never. Moreover, it remains to be seen what role India will play in B3W since it has been a strong opponent of China's BRI.

■■■

Renewed Healthcare System

This article is based on **India needs a renewed healthcare system** *which was published in The Hindu on 19/07/2021. It talks about challenges of the public health care system in India and the ways forward.*

Tags: Social Justice, GS Paper - 2, Health, Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Relating to Development

The **Covid-19 pandemic** reiterates the importance of Public Health systems. The private health sector which accounts for 70% of healthcare services in India, is playing only a supporting role.

There is a need to address the constraints and revamp of the public health system in India which would not only enable improved handling of Covid-19, but would also have widespread positive impacts extending much beyond the Covid-19 situation.

Covid-19 And Significance of Public Health Care

➢ For Indian population, the availability of functional public health systems is literally a question of life and death.

➢ A robust government health-care service is translated into a more effective outreach, timely testing, early case detection and more rational treatment for Covid patients. This is evident by comparing two States—Maharashtra and Kerala.

❍ Their per capita gross **State domestic product (GSDP) i**s similar. However, their Covid-19 case fatality rates are hugely different — this being 0.48% for Kerala and 2.04% for Maharashtra.

➢ A major reason for such critical divergence is likely to be the huge differences in the effectiveness of public health systems.

❍ Kerala has **per capita two and a half times more government doctors**, and an equally **higher proportion of government hospital beds** when compared to Maharashtra, while allocating per capita over one and half times **higher funds on public health** every year.

➢ Despite Maharashtra having a large private health-care sector, its weak public health system has proved to be a critical deficiency.

Issues With Current Healthcare System

➤ **Lack of Primary Healthcare Services:** The existing public primary health care model in the country is limited in scope.

  ❍ Even where there is a well-functioning public primary health centre, only services related to pregnancy care, limited childcare and certain services related to national health programmes are provided.

➤ **Supply-Side Deficiencies:** Poor health management skills and lack of appropriate training and supportive supervision for health workers prevent delivery of the desired quality of health services.

➤ **Inadequate Funding:** Expenditure on public health funding has been consistently low in India (approximately 1.3% of GDP). As per OECD, India's total out-of-pocket expenditure is around 2.3 % of GDP.

➤ **Sub-optimal Public Health System:** Due to this, it is challenging to tackle **Non-communicable Diseases**, which is all about prevention and early detection.

  ❍ It diminishes preparedness and effective management for new and emerging threats such as pandemic like Covid-19.

Way Forward

➤ **Focus On Public Health:**

  ❍ Need for a larger programme which requires the immediate attention is the **National Health Mission (NHM);** since 2017-18, Union government allocations for the NHM have declined in real terms, resulting in inadequate support to States for core activities such as immunisation, while systemic gaps affect the delivery of Covid-19 vaccination.

  ❍ The condition of the **National Urban Health Mission (NUHM)** also remains pathetic.

    ● This year's Central allocation for the NUHM is ₹1,000 crore, which amounts to less than ₹2 per month per urban Indian.

➤ **Private Sector Regulation:**

  ❍ Another clear priority that has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic is the need to regulate rates and standards of care in the private sector.

  ❍ Massive hospital bills have caused untold distress even among the middle class.

  ❍ Although various determinants have contributed to the Mucormycosis outbreak, irrational use of steroids in Covid-19 patients, especially diabetics, appears to be an important factor.

  ❍ The central government should take necessary steps to promote the implementation of the **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act (CEA)**.
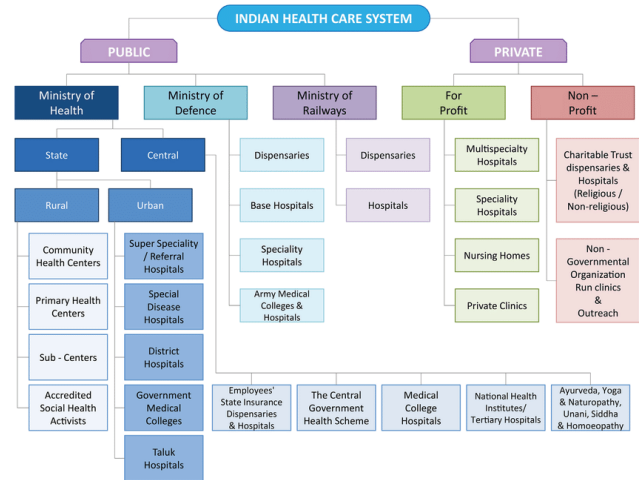
● Passed in 2010 and presently applicable to 11 States across India, this Act is not effectively implemented due to a major delay in notification of central minimum standards, and failure to develop the central framework for regulation of rates.

➤ **NITI Aayog Prescriptions:**

  ❍ NITI Aayog has recently published the document, **'Investment Opportunities in India's Healthcare Sector'**.

  ❍ The document states that 'in the hospital segment, the **expansion of private players to Tier 2 and Tier 3** locations, beyond metropolitan cities, offers an attractive investment opportunity'.

  ❍ **Manufacturing of medical devices and equipment,** expansion of diagnostic and pathology centres and miniaturized diagnostics have high growth potential.

  ❍ Technology advancements such as **Artificial Intelligence, wearables and other mobile tech**, along with the Internet of Things, also offer numerous avenues for investment.

Conclusion

Existing evidence from the Covid-19 pandemic provides a clear message that a neglect of public health systems can mean large-scale, avoidable losses of lives; hence, public health services must be upgraded rapidly and massively as a topmost priority.

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Surveillance In India

*This article is based on **Surveillance reform is the need of the hour** which was published in The Hindu on 20/07/2021. It talks about the issues associated with the surveillance regime in India.*

The **'Pegasus Project'** says that over 300 verified Indian mobile telephone numbers, including those used by ministers, opposition leaders, journalists, the legal community, businessmen, government officials, scientists, rights activists and others, were targeted using spyware made by the Israeli firm, NSO Group.

In India the government can surveillance through existing laws that offer impunity for surveillance. However, there are several issues associated with the surveillance regime.

Provisions For Surveillance in India

➤ The Indian government for surveillance relies on existing provisions of law under the **Indian Telegraph Act** of 1885 and the **Information Technology (IT) Act of 2000**.

➤ These provisions are problematic and offer the government total opacity in respect of its interception and monitoring activities.

➤ While the provisions of the Telegraph Act relate to telephone conversations, the IT Act relates to all communications undertaken using a computer resource.

➤ Section 69 of the IT Act and the Interception Rules of 2009 are even more opaque than the Telegraph Act, and offer even weaker protections to the surveilled.

➤ No provision, however, allows the government to hack the phones of any individual since hacking of computer resources, including mobile phones and apps, is a criminal offence under the IT Act.

➤ Nonetheless, surveillance itself, whether under a provision of law or without it, is a gross violation of the fundamental rights of citizens.

Impacts of Surveillance

➤ **Threat to Press Freedom:** Surveillance affects press freedom. In 2019, similar allegations were made about the use of Pegasus against journalists and human rights activists.

   ○ The **World Press Freedom Index** produced by Reporters Without Borders has ranked India 142 out of 180 countries in 2021.The press requires greater protections on speech and privacy.

   ○ **Privacy and free speech are what enable good reporting**. They protect journalists against threats of private and governmental reprisals against legitimate reporting.

➤ **Against Right to Privacy:** The very existence of a surveillance system impacts the right to privacy and the exercise of freedom of speech and personal liberty under **Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution**, respectively.

   ○ The fear of citizens knowing that their email is being read by the government may impact their ability to express, receive and discuss unorthodox ideas.

   ○ In the absence of privacy, the safety of journalists, especially those whose work criticises the government, and the personal safety of their sources is jeopardised.

➤ **Authoritarian Regime:** The surveillance promotes spread of authoritarianism in the government functioning since it allows the executive to exercise a disproportionate amount of power on the citizen and impacts their personal lives.

➤ **Against Due Process:** Surveillance, when carried out entirely by the executive, curtails **Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution** as it happens in secret.

   ○ Thus, the affected person is unable to show a breach of their rights. This **violates not only the ideals of due process and the separation of powers** but also goes **against the requirement of procedural safeguards** as mandated in **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017).**

Way Forward

➤ **Oversight By Judiciary:** In order to satisfy the ideal of "due process of law", to maintain an effective separation of powers and to fulfill the requirements of procedural safeguards and natural justice, there needs to be judicial oversight.

   ○ Only the judiciary can be competent to decide whether specific instances of surveillance are proportionate, whether less onerous alternatives are available, and to balance the necessity of the government's objectives with the rights of the impacted individuals.

   ○ The need for judicial oversight over surveillance systems in general, and judicial investigation into the Pegasus hacking in particular, is also essential because the leaked database of targeted numbers contained the phone number of a sitting Supreme Court judge, which further calls into question the independence of the judiciary in India.

➤ **Surveillance reform is the need of the hour** in India as a comprehensive reform of the surveillance framework is long overdue.

   ○ Not only are existing protections weak but the **proposed legislation** related to the **personal data protection** of Indian citizens fails to consider surveillance while also providing wide exemptions to government authorities.

➤ There needs to be **greater transparency in the system** as in the current system, Government agencies are not accountable to anyone other than the government itself.

➤ The current debate, therefore, is not only about **'whether surveillance at all'**, but about '**how, when, and what kind of surveillance**'.

➤ If the goal eg.protecting national security can be achieved by a smaller infringement upon fundamental rights, then the government is Constitutionally bound to adopt the method that does, indeed, involve minimal infringement.

➤ Reforms in the Indian surveillance regime should incorporate **ethics of surveillance** which considers the moral aspects of how surveillance is employed.

Conclusion

This is also the right time across the world, there is an increasingly urgent debate about how to protect basic rights against encroachment by an aggressive and intrusive state, which wields the rhetoric of national security like a sword.

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Green Energy Transition For Economic Growth

This article is based on India needs an economic stimulus that can also aid green energy transition *which was published in The Indian Express on 21/07/2021. It talks about the greener ways to achieve faster economic growth.*

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Issues Relating to Development, Growth & Development, Renewable Energy, Environmental Pollution & Degradation

The economic and social disruption caused by the **Covid-19 pandemic** is devastating. Millions of enterprises face an existential threat. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality health care and have lost access to productive assets and demand in the economy.

A large demand stimulus seems necessary in getting the **V-shaped economic recovery** that India needs. In this context, a green stimulus can create demand, address air pollution and accelerate the green energy transition.

Covid-19 Impact on Indian Economy

➤ **GDP Growth Rate:** Due to the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on business confidence, financial markets and the travel sector, including disruption to supply chains, economic growth rate suffered significantly.

➤ **Pharmaceuticals:** Given the pharmaceutical industry's deep linkages to China, the supply chain of raw materials of drugs has taken a hit.

➤ **Automobile Industry:** The coronavirus is expected to have an impact on the Indian automotive industry and therefore also on the automobile component and forging industries, which had already reduced their production rate due to the market conditions and on account of the impending change over to **BS-VI emission norms from BS-IV** from April 2020.

➤ **Manufacturing and Other Sectors**: While manufacturing may not be directly hit due to partial lockdowns, the impact on the contact services sectors like hospitality, travel, and tourism will have a multiplier effect, as these sectors have strong backward linkages with other sectors of the economy.

Focus on Green Energy
For Boosting Economic Growth

➤ **Crop Residue And Electricity Generation:** Around Diwali, the **burning of rice crop residue** in northern India creates an air pollution crisis.

○ This can be avoided by procuring all the crop waste at a remunerative price.

○ The waste can be converted into briquettes, which can be substituted for coal in thermal power stations.

○ **NTPC** has already done this successfully without adding to the cost of generation, as the cost of briquettes is comparable to that of coal in energy terms.

➤ **Boost Investment:** The crop waste can be given for conversion into briquettes to private entrepreneurs. Dispersed private investment for conversion would take place, creating **demand for the conversion equipment, labour and transport.**

○ Alos, Air pollution would be reduced without any cost to the government.

➤ **Electric vehicles (EVs):** **EVs** Such as cars, three and two-wheelers are available in the market. They do not cause air pollution. They are also considerably cheaper to run on a life cycle per km basis.

○ But demand is not rising because of the lack of charging infrastructure.

○ A national programme for building charging stations in all cities with a population of over a million is called for. It can be financed fully through a central government guaranteed debt.

○ This would provide a large demand stimulus across the country, generate a sustained surge in demand for EVs and their m**anufacturing supply chain.** The purchase of electric buses for city bus services

may also be fully financed through government guaranteed debt.

○ These measures, in addition to creating **a demand stimulus**, would also lead to substantial improvement in air quality in our highly polluted cities.

➤ **Renewable Energy Infrastructure:** India has shown admirable ambition in going well beyond its commitment under the **Paris agreement** to aim for 450 GW of **renewable energy capacity** by 2030.

○ An easy way of achieving progress is to have a national policy guidance for the states to get electricity distribution companies to announce a remunerative price (feed-in tariff) at which they would buy solar power in the kw range from the rural areas.

○ Solar power generated in a village would make it much easier to provide electricity in the day to farmers for irrigation.

○ This would also facilitate more **efficient use of water.** If generating 1 MW from a village is realistic, with 6 lakh villages, there is a potential of 600 GW capacity creation.

○ Such a programme would generate widely **dispersed private investment and increased incomes**.

➤ **Income Generation At Village:** Now that all households are getting LPG stoves and cylinders and have already got electricity connections, cow dung is no longer required for cooking. It can be converted in small village-level plants to gas which can be used as a fuel for cooking and transport, or, to generate electricity.

○ A government-promoted system for procurement of this gas, or electricity generated from this gas, at a remunerative price would create the right incentives for private investment and income generation across all villages.

➤ **Livestock Wealth:** India has the largest cattle population in the world and the goal should be to convert all the cow dung into useful commercial energy. This would be a fit case for a bit of cross-subsidy.

○ Cross-subsidy was used to get the National Solar Mission going. Costs have since fallen dramatically.

Conclusion

➤ It is important to know that innovations around solar power, crop residue can create dispersed demand and jobs with large multiplier effects

➤ Thus, these are some innovative and affordable pathways for a green stimulus which would create dispersed demand and jobs with large multiplier effects and clean and green energy.

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Registration of Migrant Workers

This article is based on **Why the Supreme Court order on registration of migrant workers is welcome** *which was published in The Indian Express on 22/07/2021. It talks about the supreme court order on registration of migrant workers.*

Tags: Social Justice, GS Paper - 3, Government Policies & Interventions, Employment, Growth & Development, Industrial Growth, Inclusive Growth, Social Empowerment

According to the latest government data on migration from the **2011 Census**, India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011 (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population).

The migrant workers are the worst sufferers due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** as they could not access the government schemes benefits due to the status of statelessness. Thus, the workers in the **unorganised sector (around 93%**, including most migrants in lower-end jobs) need to be able to access numerous welfare schemes in existence.

However, the recent **Supreme Court (SC) judgment** on the problems and miseries of migrant workers will go down in history as a radical judgment to reduce human suffering in the wake of the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

The order explicitly recognises the critical contribution of migrant workers to the economy, even though they are often employed in precarious jobs. However, the judgement has its own challenges in the smooth implementation.

Significance of SC Order

➤ **Accept Self-declaration:** In a significant break with convention, the order declared that **authorities shall not insist on an ID card and accept "self-declaration"** from workers to access welfare programmes (a similar provision was made in the 2008 **Social Security Act**).

○ In a country where documents determine access to state resources and who is or is not granted citizenship, it is nothing short of revolutionary to issue orders to do away with paperwork.

➤ **Universalise the Access to Welfare Scheme:** The order also says that the lack of documentation cannot be used as an excuse by the state to abdicate its responsibility, especially during the pandemic.

○ However, the long-term goal is to get all migrant workers registered so that access to welfare schemes reaches to all.

➤ **Inspires Confidence in Socialist agenda**: The SC orders inspires confidence in India's original socialist agenda at a time when neoliberal policies have challenged measures to protect the dignity and rights of the

weakest in society and when industries are engaged in a nasty "race to the bottom" on labour standards to cut costs and stay competitive.

➢ The order is a welcome indicator that the highest court is still looking out for the **most vulnerable sections** of society.

Issues of Migrants

➢ **Delay in Registering Workers:** The main barrier preventing access is the delay in registering workers on the **national database** of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

➢ **Issues in the Labour Department:** There are numerous barriers within the labour department, including a lack of guidelines on procedures related to registration, and delays in uploading data submitted in hard copy on the portal as it cannot be directly updated by others.

➢ **Administrative Issues:** Migrants experienced a variety of problems with registration ranging from digital illiteracy, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and the requirement of multiple documents (even where only Aadhaar would suffice).

➢ **Exclusion of Vulnerables:** Exclusion was markedly worse among the vulaneables such as Muslims, lower castes owing to discrimination in the society. The tasks set out in the SC order challenge entrenched patterns of labour recruitment and employment that have taken root in the current neoliberal context.

Way Forward

➢ **Fast Forward Registration Process:** Without registration, none of the welfare schemes in existence can be accessed. Thus, the process should be fast-forwarded to register all the migrant workers.

➢ **Implementation of Existing Laws:** Workers must be registered under the three laws that are in place to protect labour and migrant workers, namely, the **1979 Interstate Migrant Workmen Act**, the **1996 Building and Other Construction Workers Act** and the **2008 Unorganised Sector Social Security Act.**

➢ **Earliest Rollout of ONORC Scheme:**

○ The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution should allocate additional food grains to the states for disbursement to migrant workers under the **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme** under the **National Food Security Act**.

○ The rollout of this system requires beneficiaries to possess a ration card, an Aadhaar number, and electronic points of sale (ePoS) in ration shops.

➢ **Reform Labour Departments:** The labour departments are seriously short of staff and capacity to carry out the Supreme Court order.

○ Steps must be taken to bring organisational transformation in the departments.

Conclusion

➢ Social security measures should cover all the unorganized workers to bring overall development in our country.

➢ Thus, the supreme court's recent order regarding registration of migrant workers stands up for the rights of the weakest and recognises their critical contribution to the economy.

■■■

Reshaping India's Foreign Approach

This Article is based upon "Expanding India's Foreign Policy Canvas" which was published in the Hindustan Times on 22/07/2021. It talks about the changes occurring in the global economic domain and how India can shift from just an aspirational player to a global one by expanding its foreign agenda.

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

After living for more than a year and a half with the covid 19 pandemic, the world is recovering and bringing changes in the global economic domain.

On one hand, a new global tax is being worked upon to establish a minimum corporate tax regime. On the other, carbon border levies are being unveiled to aid net zero emission goals.

Binding dispute resolution provisions are also being sought to be embedded into international agreements. Technological decoupling is also taking place, leading to new value chains being set up.

Climate, health, digital technology and geo-economics will define the global conversation. India must remain proactive and focus on understanding and shaping these domains rather than just remaining at the receiving end.

India's Foreign Policy

➢ **Focus on Geo-Politics:** Indian foreign policy, like that of most other States, has generally given primacy to the frictions and friendships relating to geopolitics such as:

○ The **demand for nuclear disarmament**

○ The **Non-Aligned Movement** as a response to the Cold War

○ Support for **United Nations (UN) peacekeeping**

○ Call for adoption of **Comprehensive convention on international terrorism**

○ However, lesser importance has been given to geo-economics.

➢ **Environment Related Initiatives:** The Prime Minister of India has espoused climate action as an issue where what India does within its borders to benefit its citizens also matters well beyond our borders. This has both economic and political benefits.

○ Also, India is among the select few countries to have hosted the **COP** of all three Rio conventions on climate change (**UNFCCC**), biodiversity **(Convention on Biological Diversity)** and land **(United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).**

➢ **Foreign Policy amid the Pandemic:** During the **second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic**, India's foreign policy apparatus was key in securing essential global supplies.

Challenges Associated

➢ **Issues regarding Human Resource:** Migration and human mobility are emerging issues.

○ India and Africa will be the largest repositories of young populations while most other societies age. Lack of opportunities in India create an obvious situation of **Brain Drain**.

➢ **Issues related to Science & Technology: Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** is a growing global problem to which the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic may further contribute.

○ Global concerns regarding **cybersecurity** are also rising.

➢ **A Stronger China:** Militarily, China has further strengthened itself and now seeks to dominate the **Indo-Pacific Ocean** with its announcement of its third aircraft carrier's launch in 2021.

➢ **Deteriorating India-Russia Ties:** Though India and Russia share a long history of strategic and economic cooperation, the post-Cold war Russia and China strategic convergence remains a foreign policy issue for India.

○ Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Russia after Crimea's annexation in 2014 has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of China.

● This seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.

○ India's closeness to the U.S. has also weakened its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran.

Way Forward

➢ **Thinking Beyond Geo-Political:** Subjects such as regulation of trans-boundary digital behemoths, big data management, trade issues and disaster & humanitarian relief can prove to be beneficial by being addressed through the prism of a broader approach taking into account the global dimensions.

○ There is a need to expand India's foreign policy agenda beyond the traditional thinking of what is geopolitical.

➢ **Realising the Significance of Geo-Economics:** Geo-economics inevitably impacts geopolitics. China's Belt and Road Initiative is an example.

○ Climate, health security and digital technologies are becoming aspects of geopolitical contestation of different kinds.

○ India's willingness to encompass these areas, which it previously considered beyond the pale of its foreign policy posture, will be key to its ability to navigate the coming wave of global changes.

➢ **G20 in 2023:** India's presidency of **G20** in 2023 will provide it the opportunities to weave geo-economic themes with geopolitical interests.

○ Till now, India has played the role of an emerging power with ambitions to play the role of a global power.

○ The G20 summit of 2023 will provide the opportunities to articulate and be vocal on issues that matter to the world, and be proactive to further its interests.

➢ **Strategic Hedging:** The way forward for the Indian foreign policy should be **strategic hedging**; a combination of bolstering domestic as well as external strategic capabilities and creating economic dependencies abroad through enhanced manufacturing and exports.

○ Furthermore, a balance between capabilities and reach is what India needs to master strategic hedging with other countries.

Conclusion

➢ The primary goal of India's foreign policy is to preserve, promote and protect national interests in the broadest sense of the term, and not to limit the canvas.

➢ If India wants to ride the next wave of global change, it will need a broader global agenda and a carefully crafted game plan in place soon.

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Digital Challenge For Civil Society

*This article is based on **Digital challenge for civil society** which was published in The Indian Express on 23/07/2021. It talks about the challenge in front of Civil Societies in times of digital era and how it can be resolved.*

Tags: Social Justice, GS Paper-2, GS Paper - 3, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Government Policies & Interventions

Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the deep fault lines that have created challenges for India's transition towards a more digitally enabled society.

During the pandemic, several essential services, ranging from access to healthcare services – including vaccines – to education, livelihoods, and rations — have felt the effects of unequal distribution of technology in the country.

Thus, with increasing inequalities and the burden on systems, the need for digitally driven programmes is now more urgent than ever before.

In this context, even the **development sector (NGOs, Civil Society Organisation (CSOs))** cannot remain aloof to new technologies. They must strive for digital transition so that it can be helpful in resolving various digital challenges.

Digital Challenge

➢ **Digitally Inaccessible Remote Communities:** The first wave of Covid-19 brought with it an immediate and urgent need for the development sector to shift towards technology, when faced by the inability to access communities remotely.

○ A survey in June 2020 indicated that only about half of the respondents were aware of online classes being held in their communities.

○ The consequences of these gaps are likely dire – an estimated 10 million girls could drop out of school.

➢ **Unserved Remote Areas:** With digital services not being uniformly distributed, communities in remote areas often require on-ground staff to deploy and supplement digital tools.

○ They may also face significant barriers in accessing funding for innovative and infrastructural digital solutions. This, in turn, poses challenges for Civil Society Organisations(CSOs).

➢ **Digital Divide:** During the second wave, urban Indians have consistently relied on social media platforms to seek life-saving medical supplies but rural Indian could not utilise it to the fullest.

○ Unequal access to the internet has also made accessing and registering for Covid-19 vaccines in India a challenge, leaving millions of Indians unable to even register for them.

➢ **Digital Illiteracy:** It's apparent that a majority of Indian citizens lack **digital literacy** and online safety is an alien concept to many who may have digital literacy.

○ Language and accessibility barriers and limited data and infrastructural systems further compound the scenario.

➢ **Social barriers and systemic inequality** also play a large role in this — even today, mobile ownership among women is significantly lower than their male counterparts.

○ Moreover, communities continue to remain averse to mobile devices in the hands of young people, especially young women, to prevent them from disrupting existing patriarchal systems.

Way Forward

➢ **Need For Technology Enabled Development Sector:** It is time for the development sector (NGOs/CSOs) to shift towards technology-driven ecosystems, to enable a more systematic and concerted effort to bridge the present digital divide and help access remote communities digitally.

➢ **Technological Intervention:** The process of creating and implementing digital solutions is multi-layered and complex. According to many CSOs, the first step is to **address the demands posed by technological interventions across a programme life cycle**.

○ This calls for customised digital interventions. The issue gets complicated because CSOs need to work with local communities who face digital challenges themselves.

○ Digital interventions have to factor in these imperatives.

➢ **Feedback from People:** The success of technology-based programmes is ultimately contingent on the support for it on the ground, and community feedback is critical to driving successful and sustainable programmes.

○ Programmes, therefore, need to integrate and account for interpersonal mediation and the last-mile "human touch".

➢ **Partnership with Stakeholders:** To enable them to incorporate technology at scale, CSOs require more systematic partnerships with stakeholders across the development ecosystem.

○ Collaboration with the government, funders, and other civil society partners is vital to normalising the use of technology-based interventions at scale.

○ For example, the government and private sector service providers need to prioritise the availability of digital infrastructure and connectivity while civil

society integrates programmatic responses into government priorities.

➢ **Documenting the Learnings**: There are no blanket solutions to the critical challenges that come with embracing technology in framing programmes for the development sector.
  ○ Documenting their learnings is an important first step in pushing for more open conversations with regard to digital interventions in India.

Conclusion

Recognising the essential role that digital tools, access and literacy will play in the months and years to come, Civil societies and NGOs should strive to bring technological revolution in their working.

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India's Military Convergence

*This article is based on **Getting India's military convergence formula right** which was published in The Hindu on 26/07/2021. It talks about the issues facing the reorganisation of armed forces and ways to tackle them for effective defence capability.*

Tags: Internal Security, GS Paper - 3, Cyber Security, Cyber Warfare, Security Challenges & their Management in Border Areas, Role of External State & Non-State Actors, Various Security Forces & Agencies & Their Mandate

Given the key geostrategic challenges, emanating from the threat of two-front war (against China and Pakistan combinedly), India faces the complex threats and challenges spanning the full spectrum of conflict from nuclear to sub-conventional. Thus, required reorganisation of the armed forces for effective and efficient utilisation of its resources.

Meanwhile, the **Chief of Defence Staff(CDS)** General Bipin Rawat's description of the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** as a supporting arm and the IAF chief Air Chief Marshal's rebuttal, is the newest bump in the turbulent journey marking the reorganisation process of the armed forces.

The reform in the military organization, thus, is marred by various challenges which are needed to be resolved.

Issues Before Reorganisation of Forces

➢ **Issue With Synergising:** With dwindling budgets, a steadily deteriorating security situation and the march of technology, the armed forces understand the need to synergise. But natural human faults interfere.
  ○ For instance, different services do not coexist well where they are co-located. Bitter fights over land,

buildings, facilities, etc. mar optimal operational synergising.

➢ **Lack of Substantial Operational Charte**r: There is the issue of giving each other the best, or of wanting to be with each other.
  ○ The **Andaman and Nicobar Command** suffered from the **lack of a substantial operational charte**r, and the services not positioning appropriate personnel or resources there.
  ○ Moreover, as a joint tenure did not benefit career, no one strove for it.

➢ **Acute Indigence And Shrunken Economy:** The biggest challenge India's military faces is monetary in times of acute indigence and a shrunken economy, hammered further by the ongoing **Covid-19 pandemic.**

➢ **Shortage of Physical And Human Resources:** Media reports suggest that the IAF is 25% short on fighter squadrons, even after counting ageing aircraft.
  ○ A pan service shortage of about 400 pilots, almost 10% of their authorised strength, further aggravates this.
  ○ Therefore, the IAF warns against splitting assets as there may be nothing much to split.

➢ **Used Outside the Services:** But shortage alone is not at the core of the IAF's objections. There is also the prospect of operational plans for the IAF being made outside the service.

Air Force As Supplementary Power

➢ Armies and navies will see air power as a supplement, history being the reason.

➢ Analysing the experience of the United States, the air power theorist Tami Davis Biddle wrote in 2019 that **'aerial bombing cannot control the ground'**.

➢ It is an important and much-utilized military instrument for both deterrence and compellence. However, its ability to produce results varies, and students of strategy must understand the circumstances under which it is more or less likely to achieve particular results or political ends'.

➢ Holding and controlling land or water is essential in conflict.

➢ From Vietnam to Afghanistan, air power failed to deliver the promised results to the USA. But everyone acknowledges how greatly air power can aid victories though.

Difference In Opinion of Three Services

➢ **ARMY** – **In favour:**
  ○ It is time to move away from a service specific approach to operations towards a system which

avoids duplication, ensures optimum utilisation of available resources.

➢ **AIR FORCE – Strongly opposed:**

  ○ It doesn't have enough resources — fighter squadrons, mid-air refuellers and AWACS — to allocate them dedicatedly to different theatre commanders.

  ○ It believes that India is not geographically large enough to be divided into different theatres, as resources from one theatre can easily be moved to another theatre

➢ **NAVY - More nuanced, it too is not in favour of implementing the proposal currently:**

  ○ The current model of control by the Navy Headquarters is ideally suited for its strategic role.

  ○ There are also underlying fears about the smaller Services losing their autonomy and importance.

Way Forward

➢ **Comprehensive National Security Strategy:** There is the need for a **comprehensive National Security Strategy** to guide the services develop capacities required in their respective domains.

➢ **Transform Professional Education:** It is needed to transform professional education and inter-service employment to nurture genuine respect for others.

➢ **Resolve The Differences:** The armed forces must resolve their differences among themselves, as the politicians or bureaucrats cannot do it.

➢ **Need For Adequate Human Resources:** To ensure good quality staff, in adequate numbers, at apex joint organisations, to reassure individual services and those in the field that they are in safe hands.

➢ **Problem Specific Solutions:** Need to accept the fact that what works for other countries need not work for us. We need tailor-made solutions which may need more genuine thinking.

  ○ For genuine military jointness, a genuine convergence of minds is critical.

➢ **Clear And Written Concepts:** Major reorganisations must strictly follow the sequence of written concepts, their refinement through consultation, simulation or tabletop wargaming, field evaluation and final analysis before implementation.

  ○ This would help address command and control, asset adequacy, individual service roles, operational planning under new circumstances and the adequacy of joint structures.

  ○ The Western Command between the Indian Army and the IAF, the Northern Command with the Indian

Army, Maritime Command with the Indian Navy and the Air Defence Command with the IAF may be an acceptable formula.
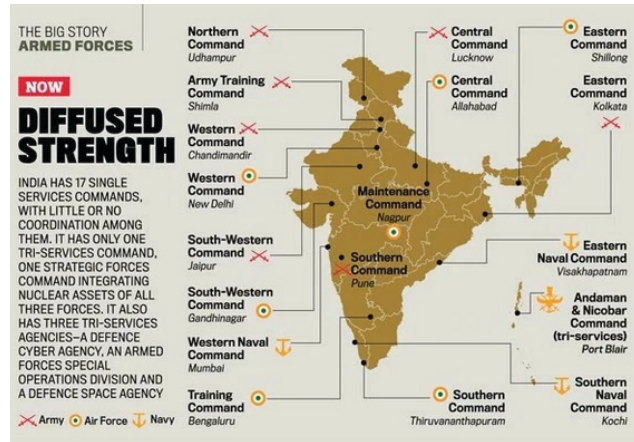
Conclusion

Changing dynamics of national security which now encompasses cyber, automation and such new challenges, cannot be solved by a disjointed general but rather a clear and robust structure that should quickly respond to emergent situations.

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Wounded Mountains

*This article is based on **Wounded mountains: on Himachal landslide tragedy** which was published in The Hindu on 27/07/2021. It talks about the increasing incidences of natural disasters in the Himalayan states and the way forward to reduce the threat in the region.*

Tags: Biodiversity & Environment, GS Paper - 3, Growth & Development, Environmental Pollution & Degradation, conservation

The tragic death of nine tourists in a landslip in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh is a pointer to the fragility of the ecology of the Himalayan States.

Extraordinarily heavy rain hit Himachal Pradesh recently, leaving the hill slopes unstable and causing floods in built-up areas. The descending boulders from destabilised terrain, which crushed a bridge like a matchstick, are a source of worry for cautious local residents, and the visitors.

The Himalayan ecosystem is vulnerable and susceptible to the impacts and consequences of **changes on account of natural causes**, **climate change** resulting from **anthropogenic** emissions and **developmental paradigms of modern society.**

Himalayan states such as Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand may be entering a phase of irreversible

decline because of losses to their ecology and frequent landslides may become inevitable.

Some Instances of Disasters in Western Himalaya

➤ Nine tourists were killed and three others injured in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district when boulders fell on their vehicle during multiple landslides, triggered by heavy southwest monsoon rains.

➤ Earlier, heavy rain-triggered flash floods in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh swept away three people, buildings, and vehicles.

➤ Uttarakhand too has been affected with natural disasters with the **massive flash flood in Chamoli** in February 2021 that killed more than 80 people.

Threat To The Himalayan Ecology

➤ **Increased Intensity and Frequency of Natural Disaster:**
  ○ The Himalayan landscape is susceptible to landslides and earthquakes.
    ● Formed due to the collision of Indian and Eurasian plates, the northward movement of the former puts continuous stress on the rocks, rendering them weak and prone to **landslides and earthquakes**.
  ○ This, combined with **steep slopes**, rugged topography, **high seismic vulnerability**, and **rainfall,** makes the region one of the most disaster prone areas in the world.

➤ **Unsustainable Exploitation:** From the mega road expansion project in the name of national security (Char Dham Highway) to building cascading hydroelectric power projects, from unplanned expansion of towns to unsustainable tourism, the Indian States have ignored warnings about the fragile ecology.
  ○ Such an approach has also led to **pollution, deforestation**, and **water and waste management crises**.

➤ **Threat of Development Activity:** Mega hydropower, which is a significant source of "green" power that substitutes energy from fossil fuels, could alter several aspects of ecology, rendering it vulnerable to the effects of extreme events such as cloudbursts, flash floods, landslides and earthquakes.
  ○ An **incompatible model of development** in the hills, represented by big hydroelectric projects and large-scale construction activity involving destruction of forests and damming of rivers, is an invitation to harm.

➤ **Impacts of Global warming on the Himalayan Ecology:**
  ○ With the utter disregard for the fragile topography and climate-sensitive planning, the threat to ecology has increased many folds.

  ○ Glacier melting, resulting in an abrupt rise in water causes floods and impacts the local society.
  ○ Increased incidences of forest fire are also linked with warming of Himalayan region.

➤ **Conversion of forest to agricultural land**, and the exploitation of forests for timber, fodder and fuel wood are some of the main threats to biodiversity in this region.

Way Forward

➤ **Early Warning System:** It is important to have early warning and **better weather forecast systems** in order to forecast the disaster and alert the local population and tourists.

➤ **Regional Cooperation:** There is a need for a trans-boundary coalition of Himalayan countries to share and disseminate knowledge about the mountains and preservation of the ecology there.

➤ **Area Specific Sustainable Plan:** What is most critical is to review the area's present status and draw up **a sustainable plan** that respects the specific requirements of this fragile region and the impact of the climate crisis.

➤ **Promote Ecotourism**: Initiating a dialogue on adverse impacts of commercial tourism and promoting **ecotourism**.

➤ **Sustainable Development**: Government must strive for achieving **sustainable development** not only development that is against the ecology.
  ○ Detailed Project Reports (DPR), **Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)** and **Social Impact Assessment (SIA)** are needed before implementing any project.

Conclusion

It is impossible to assign a real value to the costs to people and communities, together with the loss of pristine forests that weak afforestation programmes cannot replace.

From the mega road expansion project in the name of national security to building cascading hydroelectric power projects, from unplanned expansion of towns to unsustainable tourism, the Indian State has ignored warnings about the fragile HImalayan ecology. The need of the hour is that governments have a changing course to help preserve natural riches including human lives.

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India's Options In Afghanistan

*This article is based on **Evaluating India's options in Afghanistan** which was published in The Hindu on*

27/07/2021. It talks about the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the option available for India in order to tackle the challenges emerging after that.

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

It is not a coincidence that the United States of America (US) is **exiting Afghanistan** at the same time that the focus of its foreign policy is shifting to East Asia.

There is growing consensus that the USA, instead of staying engaged in the lost wars should now urgently prepare itself for the unfolding geopolitical contest with China.

Defeating the Taliban and nation-building were part of the **neoconservative ideology** (promotion of democracy and interventionism in international affairs) of the US, which has evidently failed.

However, the US can abandon the Afghan government and exit the theatre, but India cannot. It has to protect its investments, prevent Afghanistan from becoming another safe haven for anti-India terrorist groups, and also check Pakistan deepening its influence in Kabul.

> **US's Changed Priority**
> - **Changing Priorities From Middle East to Indo-Pacific:**
>   - ○ The USA may have retreated from Afghanistan as part of **a grand strategy to take on China in maritime Asia**, in which it needs India's involvement, and India might find it tempting to join the ranks, especially after China's aggression on the Line of Actual Control.
>   - ○ America's strategic response to China's rise is its **Indo-Pacific strategy**, which is aimed at containing China's rise and challenging its high-functioning single party dictatorship.
>   - ○ The US wants India to play a key role in the **Quad bloc**. But there is one problem. **India**, unlike the other members, is the only **continental Asian power** in the Quad, which shares a contested land border with China and is vulnerable to the geopolitical changes in the Eurasian landmass.
> - **Ending Endless Wars:** After the costly and prolonged military interventions in Afghanistan, the US has begun to see no more interest in resolving the conflict there.

India's Presence In Afghanistan

- Barring a brief pause in the 1990s, India has historically enjoyed **good ties with Afghanistan**, which go back to the **1950 Treaty of Friendship**.
- Indian interests and influence suffered when the Taliban, backed by Pakistan, captured Kabul in 1996.

- But India was back in action as soon as the Taliban were ousted from power after the US invasion in 2001.
- India has made huge investments and commitments ever since, which run into over USD 3 billion, and cultivated strong economic and defence ties with the Afghan government.
- Now, it is again staring at uncertainty with the US pullback having effectively changed the balance of power in Afghanistan and the Taliban making rapid territorial gains.

India's Options In Afghanistan

- **Talking with the Taliban:** Talking to Taliban would allow India to seek security guarantees from the insurgents in return for continued development assistance or other pledges as well as explore the possibility of the Taliban's autonomy from Pakistan.
  - ○ At this point, **talking to the Taliban looks inevitable**. But India should not overlook the deep ties between Pakistan's security establishment and the Haqqani Network, a major faction within the Taliban.
  - ○ The USA overlooked it while fighting the Taliban along with Pakistan, and it paid a heavy price for it.
- **Taking Afghan Government in Confidence:** There is no guarantee that India's quest for engagement with the Taliban would produce a desirable outcome. So India should broad-base its options.
  - ○ While talking to the Taliban to protect its interests, India should also enhance aid to Afghanistan's legitimate government and security forces and work with other regional powers for long-term stability in the country.
- **Support Afghan Military Forces:** The Afghan military has some 200,000 battle-hardened soldiers, including the highly trained special forces. The only force that is standing up to the Taliban is the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.
  - ○ India should urgently step up training Afghan forces and provide military hardware, intelligence and logistical and financial support so that Afghan military can continue to defend the cities.
  - ○ India should also coordinate with other regional powers to support the Afghan government because if the government forces crumble before the Taliban, the prospects for a political settlement would be narrowed.
- **Regional solution:** There is a convergence of interests between India and three key regional players — China, Russia and Iran — in seeing a political settlement in Afghanistan.

- ○ None of these countries would like to see the Taliban taking over Afghan militarily, which means there would be an isolated Sunni Islamist regime in a country with fractured ethnic equations.
- ○ Thus, there is a need for cooperation from like minded countries on this front.

➤ **Short Term and Long Term Goal:** India's **immediate goal should be the safety and security of its personnel** and investments.

- ○ The long-term goal should be finding a **political solution to the crisis**. None of this can be achieved unless it works together with the regional powers.

➤ **Russian Support:** Russia has cultivated links with the Taliban in recent years. India would need Russia's support in any form of direct engagement with the Taliban.

➤ **Significance of Iran:** Iran shares a long border with Afghanistan and has close resemblance of ethnic minorities.

- ○ The original objective of India's **Chabahar project** in Iran was to create a direct access to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.
- ○ This direct access is critical for India in all different scenarios — move supplies to Afghanistan in larger quantities, retain its presence in the event of a civil war or carry out covert operations if the Taliban take power by force.
- ○ However, the US's pressure on India is a roadblock in good relations between the two countries.

➤ **Bonhomie With China:** India should talk with China, with the objective of finding a political settlement and lasting stability in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

India, as would be impacted by the consequences of American withdrawal, has to work with Eurasian powers to protect its interests and stabilise Afghanistan. If India remains active and patient too, many opportunities could open up in the new Afghan phase.

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Reforming Indian Agriculture

This article is based on Farm reforms must be oriented towards minimising risk and increasing returns for farmers which was published in The Indian Express on 29/07/2021. It talks about issues emerging from the present Indian agriculture setup and recommendation to eliminate such issues.

Agricultural policies in India are designed and implemented by a complex system of institutions. States have constitutional responsibility for many aspects of agriculture, but the central government plays an important role by developing national approaches to policy and providing the necessary funds for implementation at the state level.

The government agencies have a say on all aspects of the farmer's livelihood — the latest findings includes various central and state ministries and agencies that oversee rural property rights, land use and land ceilings; commodity prices, input subsidies and taxes, infrastructure, production, credit, marketing and procurement, public distribution, research, education and extension services; trade policy; agri-business and research-the list goes on.

At the height of the **farm protests**, the rhetoric was common that the new farm laws would result in a corporate takeover of Indian farms. However, the agriculture sector today is largely government owned.

Issues Emerged With Current Setup

➤ **Varying Yields Across States:** There is a large gap in rice and wheat yields between Green revolution states and the farm districts in the rest of the country even after five decades of the **Green Revolution.**

- ○ Moreover, rice and wheat grown outside of Punjab and Haryana continue to display far higher levels of yield variation or risk across districts.

➤ **Lack of Infrastructural Development:** There is severe unevenness in the provision of common goods across districts — **irrigation, roads, power,** etc.

- ○ Combined with the absence of well-functioning markets for agricultural land, crops, and inputs, the slow labour reform, and the poor quality of education have reduced overall resource mobility within and across farming districts.
- ○ Most importantly, they have limited the mobility of ideas and technology needed to increase productivity and reduce the variation of yield across districts.

➤ **Lack of Effective Decentralised:** The real promise of a decentralised system — of experimentation, of learning from each other, and the adoption of best-practices and policies — has largely failed to materialise.

- ○ Instead, Indian agriculture since Independence has remained highly fragmented.

➤ **Degradation of Natural Resource:** The various **input subsidies and minimum price guarantee** procurement

schemes provided by the state have worked to worsen the overall levels of productivity and the risk in agriculture, generating adverse effects, through the degradation of water resources, soil, health, and climate.

➢ **Food Security at Cost of Agricultural Sector:** The result has been a suffocating mix of arbitrary and conflicting policy interventions by both the central and state government agencies.

   ❍ Ironically, "food security" has been brought at the cost of an agricultural sector that captures all the stakeholders - farmers, households, consumers, traders, firms, and the state — with lower levels of individual welfare and higher levels of overall risk.

Way Forward

➢ **Maximising Income, Minimising Risk:** The **three farm laws** are only a part of the far wider set of economic reforms that will be needed to stabilise Indian agriculture.

   ❍ The guiding principle for these reforms must be to create conditions that allow farm households to maximise their income while minimising the overall level of risk in Indian agriculture.

➢ **Liberalised Farming:** Farmers must be made **free to determine the best mix** of resources, land, inputs, technology, and organisational forms for their farms.

   ❍ The state has too long subjected the farm households to top-down production, marketing, and distribution schemes.

   ❍ Farmers, just as entrepreneurs in the non-farm sector, must be allowed to enter and exit agriculture, on their own terms and contract with whomever they wish.

➢ **Improve Agricultural Institutions And Governance Systems:** Need to clarify roles and responsibilities at central level by bringing key policy areas under a single umbrella.

   ❍ Strengthen coordination among central ministries and agencies and between the centre and the states.

➢ **Kind of Decentralised System:** Need fundamental reforms that allow for greater mobility of farmers and agricultural resources across the country.

   ❍ Within a true decentralised polity, a farmer in Assam ought to benefit as much from the "Punjab model" as do farmers in Punjab, and vice-versa.

Conclusion

India's agro-food sector is at a critical juncture, facing multiple challenges and multiple opportunities. The required reforms if implemented, would help India improve food security for its vast population, advance the quality of life of its millions of smallholders, overcome severe resource and climate pressures, while generating sustainable productivity growth and creating a modern, efficient and resilient agro-food system that can contribute to inclusive growth and jobs throughout the economy.

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National Education Policy And Higher Education

*This article is based on **How NEP can transform higher education in India** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 30/07/2021. It talks about issues with higher education institutions and how National Education Policy can be a game changer for such institutions.*

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Education, Issues Arising Out of Design & Implementation of Policies, Issues Relating to Development

India today has over 1,000 **Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)**, including over 150 of national importance. Over the years, it has also become a hub of scientific research. HEIs have shown a consistent growth in both the quality and the quantity of research in the past decade.

India currently ranks third globally in terms of the total research output, accounting for 5.31% of the total of research publications. Of three aspects — education, knowledge generation (research and development) and innovation — Indian HEIs have performed very well, in relative terms, in the first two aspects, but **lack on the innovation front**.

National Education Policy (NEP) is expected to transform the landscape of higher education in India by making HEIs work on **"solutions to the problems" rather than "solutions looking for a problem"**.

Issues With Indian HEIs

➢ **Enrollment:**

   ❍ According to the **All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report 2019-20**, the **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** in Higher education in India is only **27.1%,** which is quite low as compared to the developed as well as, other developing countries.

   ❍ With the increase of enrollments at the school level, the supply of higher education institutes is insufficient to meet the growing demand in the country.

➢ **Quality:**

○ Ensuring quality in higher education is amongst the foremost challenges being faced in India today.

○ A large number of colleges and universities in India are unable to meet the minimum requirements laid down by the **University Grant Commission (UGC).**

➢ **Political Interference:**

○ Increasing interference of politicians in the management of higher education jeopardises the autonomy of HEIs.

○ Also, students organise campaigns, forget their own objectives and begin to develop their careers in politics.

➢ **Poor Infrastructure and Facilities:**

○ Poor infrastructure is another challenge to the higher education system of India, particularly the institutes run by the public sector suffer from poor physical facilities and infrastructure.

○ Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many years.

○ Large numbers of NET/PhD candidates are unemployed even though there are a lot of vacancies in higher education.

➢ **Inadequate Research:**

○ There is inadequate focus on research in HEIs.

○ There are insufficient resources and facilities, as well as limited numbers of quality faculty to advise students.

○ Most of the research scholars are without fellowships or not getting their fellowships on time which directly or indirectly affects their research. Moreover, Indian HEIs are poorly connected to research centres and to industries.

➢ **Poor Governance Structure:**

○ Management of Indian education faces challenges of over-centralization, bureaucratic structures and lack of accountability, transparency, and professionalism.

Prospects of NEP For HEIs

➢ **National Research Foundation (NRF):** Indian academia has traditionally been focused on R&D without much emphasis on relevance and delivery. The establishment of the **National Research Foundation (NRF)** is expected to connect our academia with ministries and industry and fund research that is relevant to local needs.

○ Under the framework of NRF, each government ministry, be it central or state, is expected to allocate separate funds for research.

○ NRF, therefore, is expected to pose well-defined problems to the researchers, so that they can find solutions in a goal-oriented and time bound manner.

➢ **Multi-disciplinary University:** In order to unleash the technology development potential of HEIs, our institutions need to not only become **multi-disciplinary** in their scope and offerings, but also **collaborate among themselves**.

○ Bringing "unlike" minds together in terms of disciplines, cultures (international programmes) and attitudes (academia-industry collaborations) is the need of the hour.

○ Multi-disciplinary universities, as envisaged in NEP, rightly emphasises on the creative potential of researchers.

➢ **Scaling up existing HEIs**: With the goal of increasing the gross enrollment ratio (GER) from the current 27% to 50% by 2035, India needs to not only open new HEIs and universities but also scale-up existing HEIs.

○ This massive expansion will not only require additional financial resources but also calls for a new governance model.

○ NEP speaks of achieving graded autonomy for HEIs. Over time, independent boards will manage the HEIs with active participation from alumni and experts from academia, research and industry.

➢ **Funding For HEIs:** NEP is expected to bring in significant funding. For higher education, for the first time, the government promises a **budget allocation for education as a fixed percentage of Gross Domestic Product at 6%**.

○ This will be a game changer for HEIs.

➢ **Right Focus:** Under NEP 2020, Indian HEIs will focus on **3Is – Interdisciplinary research, Industry connect and Internationalisation**, the three pillars needed to elevate our institutions to global standards.

○ Until now, Indian HEIs lacked international diversity and remained predominantly local; they hired only Indian faculty and trained only domestic talent.

○ The lack of international faculty and students in Indian elite institutions is one reason for the poor rankings of Indian institutions.

○ NEP has enabled mechanisms for Indian HEIs, such as IITs, to venture out and open international campuses across the world. This will not only increase their international footprint but also improve their perception globally.

Conclusion

The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, is a good policy as it aims at making the education system

holistic, flexible, multidisciplinary, aligned to the needs of the 21st century. The intent of policy seems to be ideal in many ways but it is the implementation where lies the key to success.

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Democide: Causes And The Way Forward

*This article is based on **How does a democracy die?** which was published in The Indian Express on 31/07/2021. It examines the causes which lead to the death of democracy in a country.*

> **Tags:** Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Issues Arising Out of Design & Implementation of Policies, Issues Relating to Development, Indian Constitution

The global surveys are everywhere reporting dipping confidence in democracy and marked jumps in citizens' frustrations with government corruption and incompetence. Young people are the least satisfied with democracy — much more disaffected than previous generations at the same age.

In its **Democracy Report 2021**, Sweden's V-Dem Institute noted that India "has almost lost its status as a democracy". It ranked India below Sierra Leone, Guatemala and Hungary.

In this context, it is important to understand the true meaning and challenges the democracy in India faces.

True Meaning of Democracy

➢ Democracy is much more than pressing a button or marking a box on a ballot paper. It goes beyond the mathematical certitude of election results and majority rule.

➢ It's not reducible to lawful rule through independent courts or attending local public meetings.

➢ Democracy is a **whole way of life**. It is freedom from hunger, humiliation and violence.

➢ Democracy is saying no to every form of **human and non-human indignity**.

➢ It is **respect for women, tenderness with children**, and **access to jobs** that bring satisfaction and sufficient reward to live comfortably.

➢ In a healthy democracy, citizens are not forced to travel in buses and trains like livestock, wade through **dirty water from overrunning sewers**, or **breathe poisonous air**.

➢ Democracy is equal **access to decent medical care** and sympathy for those who have fallen behind.

➢ It's the **rejection of the dogma** that things can't be changed because they're "naturally" fixed in stone.

Causes For Death of Democracy (Democide)

➢ **Government Failure:** Wild rumours and talk of conspiracies flourish. Street protests and outbreaks of uncontrolled violence happen. Fears of civil unrest spread. The armed forces grow agitated.

    ○ As the government totters, the army moves from its barracks onto the streets to quell unrest and take control. Democracy is finally buried in a grave it slowly dug for itself.

    ○ The military coup d'états against the elected governments of Egypt (2013), Thailand (2014), **Myanmar** and Tunisia (2021) are some of the examples.

➢ **Weak Institutions:** When the judiciary becomes vulnerable to cynicism, political meddling and state capture, threat to democratic values and constitutional morals emerges.

➢ **Social Emergencies:** When social fabric weakens, the threat to democracy emerges. Democracy suffers a slow-motion social death.

    ○ When a constitution promises its citizens justice, liberty and equality, the division among and shattering of social life induce a sense of legal powerlessness among citizens.

➢ **Inequality in the Society:** Massive imbalances of wealth, chronic violence, famine and unevenly distributed life chances also make a mockery of the ethical principle that in a democracy people can live as citizen partners of equal social worth.

➢ **Unavailability of Basic Amenities:** Domestic violence, rotten health care, widespread feelings of social unhappiness, and daily shortages of food and housing destroy people's dignity. It kills the spirit and substance of democracy.

➢ **Vulnerable Remain Unheard:** Citizens' ability to strike back, to deliver millions of mutinies against the rich and powerful, is inherent in a democracy.

    ○ But the brute fact is social indignity undermines citizens' capacity to take an active interest in public affairs, and to check and humble the powerful.

➢ **Demagoguery:** When democratically elected governments cease to be held accountable by a society weakened by poor health, low morale, and joblessness, **demagogues** are prone to blindness and ineptitude.

    ○ They make careless, foolish, and incompetent decisions that reinforce social inequities.

○ Those who exercise power in government ministries, corporations, and public/private projects aren't subject to democratic rules of public accountability.

Demagoguery

It is political activity or practices that seek support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people rather than by using rational argument.

➢ **Ineffective Redistribution:** In the absence of redistributive public welfare policies that guarantee sufficient food, shelter, security, education, and health care to the downtrodden, the ideal of democracy weakens among citizens.

   ○ Democracy begins to resemble a fancy mask worn by wealthy political predators.

   ○ Society is subordinated to the state. People are expected to behave as loyal subjects, or else suffer the consequences.

Way Forward

➢ **Constitutional Renaissance:** It refers to the process of **constant repair and renewal of "constitutionalism"** as a function of adjudication.

   ○ It includes the following:

     ● Obeisance to the constitutional spirit, vision and letter.

     ● The interpretation of the constitution by the judiciary in a way that glorifies its democratic spirit and reflects a 'reverence' towards the constitution.

     ● **Protection of "rights of all,** which means that people are true sovereign and they should not be treated as just 'subjects' and all forms of public power should be placed at the service of constitutional ends.

➢ **Constitutional Morality:** It specifies norms for institutions to survive and an expectation of behaviour that will meet not just the text but the soul of the Constitution. It also makes the governing institutions and representatives accountable.

➢ **Purposive Interpretation:** This refers to the interpretation of the constitution by the judiciary in light of the interest of the people of India and maintaining institutional integrity.

➢ **Good Governance:** The ultimate motive of constitution-related judicial articulation and government schemes and programmes should be enabling a good governance system.

➢ **Voices Should be Heard:** The Government should hear criticism rather than rejecting it outrightly. Suggestions on eroding democratic values need a thoughtful, and respectful response.

➢ **Checks on Executive Powers:** The press and the judiciary, which are considered the pillars of India's Democracy, require it to be independent of any executive interference to enable auditing of the

➢ **Need For Strong Opposition:** Strong democracy requires strong opposition. Without an alternative choice, the very objective of election to provide a check on arbitrary power gets defeated.

➢ **Social Equality:** If redistributive public welfare policies are effective, the inequality in the society would be reduced. Thus, it must be the priority of the government to maintain social and economic equality and inclusive growth.

Conclusion

The institutionalization of constitutional democracy has helped the people of India realize the importance of democracy and inculcate democratic sensibilities among them. At the same time, it is important that all the government organs work in harmony to uphold the trust people of the country have held in them and ensure objectives of true democracy.

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Drishti Mains Questions

1. The shift in monsoon may entail grave consequences for India's economy, food systems and people's well-being. Discuss.

2. To make Bharat Atmanirbhar, all the skilling efforts need to be brought under one platform to eliminate silos and duplications. Discuss.

3. The practice of dowry is not only illegal but also unethical. Therefore, social consciousness about the ill effects of the dowry system needs to be aroused. Comment.

4. With right policy intervention Spacecom has a tremendous scope to contribute a sizable chunk to the GDP growth, with the potential to open floodgates for greater innovation, R&D, employment, investment and connectivity. Discuss.

5. The establishment of All India Judicial Service is a positive step but faces many constitutional and legal hurdles. Discuss.

6. Farmer Producer Organisations has been considered to be the way forward for enhancing farmers' income and boosting agricultural growth. Discuss.

7. Upholding federalism requires political maturity and a commitment to the federal principle in present times. Discuss.

8. Discuss the significance of 'Democracy in the Collegium System and vice versa' and analyse how it is gradually eroding from India and what is the way ahead.

9. The sugar industry requires a paradigm shift to be sustainable and profitable in the long run. Discuss.

10. It is necessary to safeguard young people's well-being because India's welfare hinges on them. Examine.

11. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan has led to emergence of new challenges for the regional powers. Comment.

12. Direct action through government policy response to create demand is the ideal way to sustain the growth momentum. Comment.

13. 'Women tend to be the backbone of society during crises, even as they are also more likely to face the disproportionate impacts of such events.' Analyse the statement in the light of Covid-19 pandemic.

14. One Nation One Ration Card scheme is the far-reaching reform of the public distribution ecosystem since the Food Security Act. Discuss.

15. The counter proposal of Build Back Better World (B3W) proposal is certainly a welcome step to contain the adverse implications of a Chinese mega plan. Discuss.

16. The Covid-19 pandemic highlights issues and reiterates the importance of Public Health systems. Comment.

17. Surveillance whether under a provision of law or without it, is a gross violation of the fundamental rights of citizens. Comment.

18. India needs an economic stimulus that can also aid green energy transition. In the light of the statement discuss the greener ways to boost economic growth.

19. 'The contribution of migrant workers to the economy is inumerable, even though they are often employed in precarious jobs.' In the light of the statement, discuss the supreme court's recent order on registration of migrant workers on national databases.

20. "It has been long since India has remained as an aspirational/emerging power. The time is now to bring a change in the paradigm and become one of the countries shaping the global economic domains". Discuss.

21. Civil societies cannot remain aloof to new technologies, and need to shift towards technology-driven ecosystems. Discuss.

22. For genuine military jointness, a genuine convergence of minds is critical. Discuss the statement with reference to creation of Integrated Theatre Commands.

23. Rapid decline of Himalayana ecology and increased loss of human lives is the result of human intervention in the region. Comment.

24. After withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, India has to work with regional powers to protect its interests and stabilise Afghanistan. Discuss.

25. Farm reforms must be oriented towards minimising risk and increasing returns for farmers. Discuss the statement with reference to the current state of agriculture.

26. Discuss the issues faced by Higher Education Institutions in India and examine how National Education Policy would bring the transformation in Indian higher education.

27. 'Democracy is very important for human development.' In the light of the statement discuss the challenges democracy is facing today.