Monthly Editorial Consolidation

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Content

Restructuring Priority Sector Lending

This article is based on "The priority sector lending India needs" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 30/05/2021. It talks about the need for revision of Public Sector Lending as a concept and as a practice.

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

Covid-19 has forced us to re-examine many things from the past. The importance of health and education infrastructure has been sharply highlighted.

One such thing that needs to be re-examined can be Priority Sector Lending (PSL). The concept of 'Priority sector lending' focuses on the idea of directing the lending of the banks towards a few specified sectors and activities in the economy.

Banks today, lend nearly 40% of their adjusted net bank credit (ANBC), a not inconsiderable ₹39,50,205 crore, to the priority sector. In the present context, there is the need to balance between economic growth and social development.

Thus, the Public Sector Lending as a concept and as a practice can be 'reprioritized'.

Priority Sector Lending In India: History & Background

➢ **Underlying Philosophy:** The Constitution of India inherently provided the aims and guidelines of inclusive growth and development through the 'directive principles of state policy'.
  ○ Further, the bend of the governance in India towards 'socialist principles' and 'socialism' was quite evident in the post-independence era.
  ○ This forms the underlying philosophy around the need for priority sector lending.
➢ **Triggering Point:** The most primary sector of the economy at that point in time i.e. agriculture was in need of funds but it was not the desired avenue for the commercial banks.
➢ **Origin:** Thus, in July 1966, the All India Rural Credit Review Committee recommended that the commercial banks should play a complementary role in extending the rural credit.
  ○ This moment can be traced as the origin of PSL in India.
  ○ However, the definition for PSL was only formalised based on a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report in the National Credit Council in 1972.

➢ **Objective:** The PSL allows the commercial banks to generate high social returns along with the profits and it also contributes to economic development by increasing investment in the strategic sectors
➢ **Regulatory Control:** The Reserve Bank of India, which is the supervisory body of the banking sector in India, also referred to as the Apex Bank of the country, has from time to time issues instructions/guidelines/directives to the banks in India with regard to the PSL.
➢ **Constituents:** Presently, PSL includes eight identified sectors. The biggest is agriculture with an 18% target of total Adjusted Net Bank Credit.
  ○ The other important category is MSMEs.
  ○ In addition, five sectors are classified as PSL — housing, export credit, education, social infrastructure and renewable energy.

Associated Issues With the Rules

➢ **High Burden of NPAs:** Despite the tweaks, the classification retains a heavy focus on agriculture and small industries (defined as micro, small and medium enterprises or MSME) till today.
  ○ The banks lending to these categories have double digit non-performing assets (NPA) in their loan portfolios, making the sector economically unviable for them.
  ○ The banks then have to set aside the capital to account for assets that might be decreased due to NPAs which erodes the profitability of the banks.
➢ **Problem of Moral Hazard:** Granting loans to this borrower segment with the high probability of NPAs creates corruption opportunities for bank managers and creates moral hazards for the identified beneficiaries.
➢ **Economic Burden of Banks:** PSL diverts funds from the productive sectors, imposes economic burdens on the banks in the form of loan losses and payment defaults and also imposes opportunity costs of lending to non-priority sectors of the economy.
➢ **Capping Issues:** Educational infrastructure has a low credit limit of ₹5 crore. Also, health is only a sub-category of social infrastructure with a ₹10 crore limit for building hospitals.

Way Forward

➢ **PSL to Grants:** Converting some part of PSL to a grant paid directly by the government can unlock large amounts of efficiency in the system, and dramatically increase the valuation of public sector banks also.
➢ **Leveraging JAM for Social Development:** The full possibilities of JAM (full access to Jan Dhan accounts, universal Aadhaar numbers and near-universal mobile penetration) can address the issues that PS lending cannot achieve.

- For example, JAM can institutionalise the functioning of direct benefit transfers (DBT).
➢ **Increasing Quota of Social Infrastructure:** Covid-19 has forced us to re-examine many things from the past. The importance of health and education infrastructure has been sharply highlighted.
  - Thus, PSL should be restructured to prioritize formation of social infrastructure.

Conclusion

The scheme of PSL (the fixation of the targets and the sub-targets) must be structured according to the type of bank along with various other considerations such as branch availability and the willingness of the bank to lend to a particular sector.

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Child Labour In India

This article is based on "Breaking the cycle of child labour is in India's hands" which was published in The Hindu on 02/06/2021. It talks about the menace of child labour in India.

Tags: Social justice, GS Paper - 2, Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Related to Children

With increased economic insecurity, lack of social protection and reduced household income, the Covid-19 pandemic is pushing the children from poor households to contribute to the family income with the risk of exposure to exploitative work.

Subsequent lockdowns have worsened the situation, posing a real risk of backtracking the gains made in eliminating child labour.

The true extent of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on child labour is yet to be measured but all indications show that it would be significant as children are unable to attend school and parents are unable to find work.

However, not all the factors that contribute to child labour were created by the pandemic; most of them were pre-existing and have been exposed or amplified by it. Though the pandemic has amplified its contributing factors, policy and programmatic interventions can save children.

Status of Child Labour in India

➢ Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful.

➢ The Census of India 2011 reports 10.1 million working children in the age group of 5-14 years, out of whom 8.1 million are in rural areas mainly engaged as cultivators (26%) and agricultural labourers (32.9%).

➢ The side-effects of working at a young age are:
  - Risks of contracting occupational diseases like skin diseases, diseases of the lungs, weak eyesight, TB etc.;
  - Vulnerability to sexual exploitation at the workplace;
  - Deprived of education.
  - They grow up unable to avail development opportunities and end up as unskilled workers for the rest of their lives.

Child Labour: Constitutional And Legal Provsions

➢ According to Article 23 of the Indian Constitution any type of forced labour is prohibited.

➢ Article 24 states that a child under 14 years cannot be employed to perform any hazardous work.

➢ Article 39 states that "the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused".

➢ In the same manner, Child Labour Act (Prohibition and Regulation) 1986 prohibits children under the age of 14 years to be working in hazardous industries and processes.

➢ Policy interventions such as MGNREGA 2005, the Right to Education Act 2009 and the Mid Day Meal Scheme have paved the way for children to be in schools along with guaranteed wage employment (unskilled) for rural families.

➢ Further, with the ratification International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 in 2017, the Indian government have demonstrated its commitment to the elimination of child labour including those engaged in hazardous occupations.

Associated Issues With the Child Labour

➢ **Cause & Effect Relationship:** Child labour and exploitation are the result of many factors, including poverty, social norms condoning them, lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents, migration and emergencies.
  - These factors are not only the cause but also a consequence of social inequities reinforced by discrimination.

➢ **Threat to National Eonomy:** The continuing persistence of child labour and exploitation poses a threat to national economies and has severe negative short and long-term consequences for children such as denial of education and undermining physical and mental health.

- ➢ **Child Labour in Informal Sector:** Though child labour is banned the law, across India child labourers can be found in a variety of informal industries like in brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, agriculture, fisheries, etc.
- ➢ **Disguised Child Labour:** Despite rates of child labour declining over the last few years, children are still being used in disguised form of child labour like domestic help.
  - ○ Work performed may not appear to be immediately dangerous, but it may produce long-term and devastating consequences for their education, their skills acquisition.
  - ○ Hence their future possibilities to overcome the vicious circle of poverty, incomplete education and poor quality jobs.
- ➢ **Linkage With Child Trafficking:** Child trafficking is also linked to child labour and it always results in child abuse.
  - ○ Trafficked children are subjected to prostitution, forced into marriage or illegally adopted; they provide cheap or unpaid labour, are forced to work as house servants or beggars and may be recruited into armed groups.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Role of Panchayat:** As nearly 80% of child labour in India emanates from rural areas, the Panchayat can play a dominant role in mitigating child labour. In this context, panchayat should:
  - ○ Generate awareness about the ill-effects of child labour,
  - ○ Encourage parents to send their children to school,
  - ○ Create an environment where children stop working and get enrolled in schools instead,
  - ○ Ensure that children have sufficient facilities available in schools,
  - ○ Inform industry owners about the laws prohibiting child labour and the penalties for violating these laws,
  - ○ Activate Balwadis and Aanganwadis in the village so that working mothers do not leave the responsibility of younger children on their older siblings.
  - ○ Motivate Village Education Committees (VECs) to improve the conditions of schools.
- ➢ **Integrated Approach:** Child labour and other forms of exploitation are preventable through integrated approaches that strengthen child protection systems as well as simultaneously addressing poverty and inequity, improve access to and quality of education and mobilize public support for respecting children's rights.

- ➢ **Treating Children as Active Stakeholder:** Children have the power to play a significant role in preventing and responding to child labour.
  - ○ They are key actors in child protection and can give valuable insights into how they perceive their involvement and what they expect from the government and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Children belong in schools not workplaces. Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Child labour acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school.

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Census 2021

This article is based on "Conduct the decadal Census of India, 2021" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 02/06/2021. It talks about the importance of census and why the 2021 census should not be delayed.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Issues Relating to Development, Human Resource

Many legacies of the colonial raj continued after 1947. The Census of India is one of the many. The term census is derived from the latin term from censere, which means to assess.

Population censuses, typically with a semi-decadal (five-year) or decadal frequency are recognised as indispensable to national resource planning. In India, a census is conducted every decade and Census 2021 will be the 16th national census of the country.

However, owing to Covid-19 pandemic, we are midway into 2021 and there is no sign of the Census. As the census shapes political structures, economic decisions, development goals, delaying it will have its costs.

Census in India: Background & Importance

In 1858, the Government of India Act 1858 was passed in the British parliament, the company was liquidated, and its authorities were transferred to the British Crown. By this time, the British Crown had taken near-absolute control of India.

- ➢ **Intention:** In order to administer the dominion, the British government needed detailed, reliable data on the people and where they lived.
  - ○ The British government sought to conduct Census in India, as they had been doing it at home since 1801.

- **Origin:** The newly established office of the registrar general and census commissioner launched and completed the first Census of India in 1881.
- **Positive Feedback Loop:** While the intended objective of the Census was to exploit Indian resources and Indians to the maximum, once the data became available, it found traction among a diverse range of user groups.
  - Education departments used the data to plan for primary education.
  - Public works departments used it to plan road networks.
  - Planners used it to locate electric power plants, trunk lines & railways.
  - As the data began to impact infrastructure, it facilitated large-scale population movements and rapid growth of port cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.
- **Importance:** India is recognised for its 'Unity in diversity' and the Census gives the citizens a chance to study this diversity and associated facets of their nation through its society, demography, economics, anthropology, sociology, statistics, etc.
  - It provides valuable information for planning and formulation policies for Central and the State Governments and is widely used by National and International Agencies, Scholars, business people, industrialists, and many more.

Why should we care about the Census in 2021?

- **Delimitation Exercise:** The political balance in the Lok Sabha is about to transform when the next delimitation exercise concludes in 2026.
  - If census 2021 doesn't happen, the states with the poorest record of population management, largely in northern India, will increase their relative presence massively.
  - On the contrary, South and West India will be disadvantaged.
  - Thus, there is a need for a wider palette of demographic variables to inform the exercise.
- **Distribution of Proceeds**: Finance commissions provide guidance on the distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the states.
  - As the Goods and Services Tax makes deciding the basis of distribution more controversial, the population plays a key role in routing revenue and like in delimitation, disadvantages success and rewards failure.

- **Checking the Polarised Discourse:** Many arguments made by majoritarian politicians are about what they allege to be a shrinking majority and explosive growth of minorities.
  - The Census is the objective, all-India process for determining the situation on the ground.
  - Not only does this give us population data, we can also use various statistical measures such as birth and death rates, fertility rates, gross and net birth rates, and thereby bringing facts to a polarised discourse.
- **Targeted Investments:** There are talks of large-scale investments in infrastructure to restart the economic cycle in Post-Covid-19 period.
  - The Census helps target the investments, by giving planners a sense of who benefits, how much, and at what cost.

Way Forward

Hence, given the importance of Census the decadel exercise of 2021 must be conducted keeing in the mind the following measures:

- **Strengthening the Data Quality:** This can be done by minimising the coverage error and content error (through increased list of questions in the survey).
  - It will help in changing the discourse of the government's programme implementation.
- **Strenthenging the System:** Proper training of enumerators (data collectors) and organizers should be organised. Also, enumerators should be well paid to keep them motivated, as they are the focal point of data collection and ensuring data accuracy.
  - A safe, transparent, unbiased environment should be provided to the interviewers.
- **Strengthening the Campaigns:** Launching massive publicity campaigns in order to make people aware about the importance of Census in their life should be organized.
  - Relevant community political & religious leaders, college students (conducting flash mobs) should be involved in order to spread awareness and educate people.

Conclusion

Census is the basis for reviewing the country's progress in the past decade, monitoring the ongoing Schemes of the Goverment and most importantly , planning for the future. That is why the Slogan is " Our Census - Our Future ''.

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Sustainably Developing Andaman & Nicobar

This article is based upon "Developing the sister islands of Indian Ocean" which was published in the Hindustan Times on 03/06/2021. It talks about the significance of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, its sustainable development and how India's maritime partner France can assist in the developmental projects in the Archipelago.

Tags: Biodiversity & Environment, GS Paper - 2, Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Related to SCs & STs, GS Paper - 3, Growth & Development, Environmental Pollution & Degradation

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI), popularly known as **'Bay Islands'**, hold great significance for India from maritime as well as ecological point of view. ANI provides for nearly 30% of India's Exclusive Economic Zone.

ANI, besides being a home to a rich floral and faunal diversity, is also home to a number of tribal and **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**, a few of which are on the verge of extinction.

In the immediate past, there have been quite a few projects proposed for these island groups for economic purposes as well as for **militarising Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

As much potential these islands can prove to have for making India a maritime power, this ecological significance can and must not be undermined. A balanced development plan is the ultimate solution.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI)

➢ **Indigenous People of ANI:** The **Andaman and Nicobar Islands** are home to five PVTGs: **Great Andamanese, Jarwas, Onges, Shompens and North Sentinelese**.

   ❍ The **Great Nicobarese** are a Scheduled Tribe.

   ❍ The population of Andaman and Nicobar Islands' primitive tribes has rapidly declined over the years.

➢ **Significance of ANI:** India's key maritime partners such as the US, Japan, Australia and France acknowledge and recognise the strategic location of the Andaman and Nicobar.

   ❍ These islands not only provide Delhi with a **key maritime space but also carry significant potential in shaping the strategic and military dynamics** of the Indian Ocean region.

➢ **Island Territories Similar to ANI:** France's **La Reunion** island is similar to ANI and lies in the Southwest Indian Ocean near strategic waters.

   ❍ Australia and the US too have similar island territories in the Indian Ocean with **Cocos (Keeling) islands and Diego Garcia** respectively.

   ● However, Diego Garcia's sovereignty is disputed by Mauritius, which has garnered support through a United Nations (UN) resolution.

   ❍ The ANI and Reunion islands are part of a series of island territories under **key maritime players in the Indian Ocean**.

Recent Developmental Plans for ANI

➢ **Japan's Overseas Development Assistance:** In March 2021, for the first time, Japan's government approved a grant aid of approximately ₹265 crore toward developmental projects in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

   ❍ It is **Japan's first Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)** initiative toward the islands.

➢ **ANI as a Maritime and Startup Hub:** In August, 2020 the Prime Minister had declared that the Andaman and Nicobar islands will be developed as a **"maritime and startup hub"**.

   ❍ 12 islands of the archipelago have been **selected for high-impact projects** with an **emphasis on boosting trade of sea-based, organic and coconut-based products** of the region

➢ **NITI Aayog's Project for Great Nicobar:** Great Nicobar is the southernmost island of the Nicobar Islands Archipelago.

   ❍ The **proposal** includes an international container trans-shipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, a power plant and a township complex spread over 166 sq. km. (mainly pristine coastal systems and tropical forests).

➢ **NITI Aayog's Proposal for Little Andaman:** The **plan** involves building a new greenfield coastal city that will be developed as a free trade zone and will compete with Singapore and Hong Kong.

Issues Faced by ANI

➢ **Lack of Connectivity:** The island groups, specially the Little Andaman Island, have **little connectivity with the Indian mainland** and global cities.

➢ **Geological Volatility:** The island's groups lie in a **seismically highly active zone**.

   ❍ The 2004 earthquake and accompanying **tsunami devastated large parts of the island chain**.

   ● Nicobar and Car Nicobar (northernmost Nicobar island) lost almost one-fifth of its population and close to 90% of its mangroves.

➢ **Declining Population:** The population of native communities like the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and North Sentinelese has **plummeted from 1,999 to 550 since 1901 to 2011**.

○ Massive projects, epidemics and crippling health crises in the ecologically fragile Little Andaman Island have led to near-extinction of the Onge tribe.

○ The developmental project proposed by NITI Aayog for Little Andaman includes **de-reserving 32% of the reserved forest** and **denotifying 31% of the tribal reserve** thus rendering the habitations of the tribal groups at risk.

➤ **Aspects of Blue Economy:** The primary issues facing island nations in the Indian Ocean are related to the key aspects of the **Blue Economy**.

○ Sustainable development, illegal fishing, disaster management, the climate crisis, renewable energy and issues of waste management impacts both tourism as well as ecosystems specific to islands.

➤ **Development and Biodiversity:** A slew of infrastructure projects have been proposed in ANI to give a major boost to tourism and business.

○ While this may transform the islands substantially, it would also cause loss of biodiversity and have a negative impact on the indigenous people.

○ The **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Committee,** granted the clearance for the infrastructural projects on the condition that all large, medium, and small trees will be counted and geo-referenced and not felled.

● However, **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)** is seeking an amendment to this clause so that trees may be felled if required

Way Forward

➤ **Balanced Development:** Militarising ANI and infrastructure and developmental projects will not doubt aid India's strategic and maritime capabilities, but such development should not come at the cost of the ruthless exploitation of Biodiversity hotspot i.e ANI.

➤ **Sustainably Developing ANI:** Given its economic, ecological & environmental constraints and the laws to protect the indigenous tribes, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will have to be first **developed sustainably in order to maximise its economic and military potential**.

○ A sustainable island development framework is not only important for the ANI but will also be applicable and of interest to other island nations across the Indian Ocean.

➤ **Sister Islands:** Reunion is the **most developed island territory** among the above-mentioned four island territories, with a framework that supports both the island's economic needs as well as France's military priorities in the Indian Ocean.

○ Taking from the idea of "sister cities", the framework of **"sister islands"** can be formed.

○ India and France should lead an effort, utilising their island territories of Andaman and Reunion in developing a concept of sister islands aimed at **creating a foundation for a sustainable model for island development across the Indian Ocean**.

● Similar to sister cities, a sister island concept would allow India and France to co-develop a sustainable framework for island development.

➤ **India's Development Plans in Indo-Pacific:** If India is to invest in capacity building initiatives and maritime projects in the Indian Ocean, there is a need to research and create an island model for development. Such an approach also creates a new avenue for Indian-led initiatives in the Indo-Pacific.

○ As India and its partners compete for access and influence across the Indo-Pacific toward achieving common interests, there is a need to engage with and address regional concerns and challenges of strategically located island nations.

➤ **Role of IOC:** Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is the only island driven organisation in the Indian Ocean. It plays an important role in voicing the concerns and challenges of the islands of the western Indian Ocean.

○ France recently took over as the Chair of the IOC. India in 2020, formally joined the group as an Observer.

○ It provides an opportunity for both the countries to lead an island-focused development model.

● India could also borrow lessons from France's island experiences in both the Indian Ocean as well as in the Pacific.

Conclusion

As India looks to maintain and strengthen its advantages in the Indian Ocean, it should look to leveraging its island territories and non-traditional security issues in offering solutions and addressing regional concerns and challenges. The Andaman and Reunion provide an excellent starting point to do so.

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One Nation One Election

This article is based on "One Nation, One Election" which was published in The Indian Express on 02/06/2021. It talks about the argument for and against the simultaneous elections.

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

As the elections in four states and one Union territory in March-April are suspected to have contributed to the second wave of Covid infections, a well-reasoned debate on a concept as important as "one nation, one election" is called for.

The concept needs to be debated mainly around five issues: Financial costs of conducting elections; cost of repeated administrative freezes; visible and invisible costs of repeatedly deploying security forces; campaign and finance costs of political parties; and the question of regional/smaller parties having a level playing field.

Simultaneous Election: Background

➢ The idea has been around since at least 1983, when the Election Commission first mooted it. However, until 1967, simultaneous elections were the norm in India.

➢ The first General Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in 1951-52.

➢ That practice continued in three subsequent General Elections held in the years 1957, 1962 and 1967.

➢ However, due to the premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle got disrupted.

➢ In 1970, the Lok Sabha was itself dissolved prematurely and fresh elections were held in 1971. Thus, the First, Second and Third Lok Sabha enjoyed full five-year terms.

➢ As a result of premature dissolutions and extension of terms of both the Lok Sabha and various State Legislative Assemblies, there have been separate elections to Lok Sabha and States Legislative Assemblies, and the cycle of simultaneous elections has been disturbed.

Arguments For Simultaneous Election

A NITI Aayog paper says that the country has at least one election each year; actually, each state has an election every year, too. In that paper, NITI Aayog argued that multiple elections incurs many direct and indirect disadvantages

➢ **Incalculable Economic Costs of Elections:** Directly budgeted costs are around Rs 300 crore for a state the size of Bihar. However, there are other financial costs, and incalculable economic costs.

   ○ Each election means government machinery misses out on their regular duties due to election duty and related work.

   ○ These costs of the millions of man-hours used are not charged to the election budget.

➢ **Policy Paralysis:** The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) also affects the government's functionary, as no new significant policy can be announced and executed after the elections are announced.

➢ **Administrative Costs:** There are also huge and visible costs of deploying security forces and transporting them, repeatedly.

   ○ A bigger invisible cost is paid by the nation in terms of diverting these forces from sensitive areas and in terms of the fatigue and illnesses that repeated cross-country deployments bring about.

Arguments Against Simultaneous Elections

➢ **Federal Problem:** Simultaneous elections are almost nearly impossible to implement, as it would mean arbitrarily curtailing or extending the term of existing legislatures to bring their election dates in line with the due date for the rest of the country.

   ○ Such a measure would undermine democracy and federalism.

➢ **Against Spirit of Democracy:** Critics also say that forcing simultaneous elections is against democracy because trying to force an artificial cycle of elections and restricting the choice for voters is not correct.

➢ **Regional Parties At Disadvantage:** Regional parties are supposed to be at a disadvantage because in simultaneously held elections, voters are reportedly likely to predominantly vote one way, giving the dominant party at the Centre an advantage.

➢ **Diminished Accountability:** Having to face the electorate more than once every 5 years enhances the accountability of politicians and keeps them on their toes.

Conclusion

It is obvious That the Constitution and other laws would need to be amended for implementing simultaneous elections. However, it should be done in such a way that it doesn't hurt the basic tenets of democracy and federalism.

In this context, the Law Commission has suggested an alternative i.e. categorising states based on proximity to the next general election, and having one round of State Assembly polls with the next Lok Sabha election, and another round for the remaining States 30 months later. But there is still no guarantee that mid-term polls would not be needed.

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National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being

This article is based on "Saving biodiversity, securing earth's future" which was published in The Hindu on 05/06/2021. It talks about the positive impact of the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being.

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

Globally, there has been a 7% loss of intact forests since 2000, and recent assessments indicate that over a million species might be lost forever during the next several decades. Further, climate change and the ongoing pandemic will put additional stresses on our natural ecosystems. India is not an exception to these trends.

Today, it is becoming clear that repairing our dysfunctional relationship with nature is one of the ways to mitigate climate change and curtail future outbreaks of infectious diseases that can bring unimaginable misery. Thus, preserving biodiversity is directly relevant to the social, economic, and environmental well-being.

In this context, the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being (NMBHWB) is a step in the right direction.

Significance of India's Biodiversity

➢ **Biodiversity Hotspot:** India is home to nearly 8% of global biodiversity on just 2.3% of global land area, and contains sections of four of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots.

  ○ **Staggering Economic Value:** While the precise economic value of all ecosystem services provided by biodiversity may not be known, estimates suggest that India's forests alone may yield services worth more than a trillion rupees per year.

    ● Further, it can be imagined how much greater this value will be with grasslands, wetlands, freshwater, and marine can add.

➢ **Protection From Natural Disasters:** The varied ecosystems across land, rivers, and oceans, feed our people, enhance public health security, and shield us from environmental disasters.

➢ **Spiritual Enrichment:** Our biodiversity also serves as a perpetual source of spiritual enrichment, intimately linked to our physical and mental well-being.

NMBHWB: Vision

➢ In 2018, the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) in consultation with the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change and other Ministries approved an ambitious National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being.

➢ The Mission proposes a national effort that aims to transform biodiversity science by linking it to the peoples' economic prosperity.

➢ It further aims to help India realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by using India's rich biodiversity to create solutions for challenges in agriculture, health, and climate change.

➢ Under this Mission, research institutions, government, and non-government organizations will work together to catalogue, map, assess, monitor, and use our vast but declining natural assets sustainably.

➢ The Mission will also help create a cadre of biodiversity science professionals to sustain and secure Indian biodiversity.

➢ Finally, the Mission hopes to initiate a mass movement to engage India's massive population to feel pride in our natural heritage, and help in restoring and conserving nature.

NMBHWB: Impact

The pandemic has exposed the dysfunctional relationship between humanity and nature, and wants us to focus on challenges like: the emergence of infectious diseases; lack of food and nutritional security; rural unemployment; and climate change, etc. In this context, the mission can help in following ways:

➢ **Boosting Rural Economy:** The mission can rejuvenate agricultural production systems and increase rural incomes from biodiversity-based agriculture while also creating millions of green jobs in restoration and nature tourism.

➢ **Augmenting International Commitment:** The Mission can help India meet its commitments under the new framework for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and UN SDGs related to pressing social issues including poverty alleviation, justice and equity, and protection of life.

  ○ Further, the mission can help India to emerge as a leader in demonstrating linkage between conservation of natural assets and societal well-being.

➢ **Economic Advantage:** The Mission's comprehensive efforts will empower India to restore, and even increase, our natural assets by millions of crores of rupees.

  ○ Further, restoration activities across India's degraded lands, which amount to almost a third of our land area, alone could generate several million jobs.

➢ **Developing National Commitment:** It will generate a strong national community committed to sustaining biodiversity, promoting social cohesion and uniting the public behind an important goal.

Way Forward

➢ **Envisaging One Health Concept**: There is a need to rethink and reimagine the concept of One Health for all living organisms, including the invisible biota in soils that sustain our agricultural systems.

- ❍ Implementing One Health concept has both the preventive potential to curtail future pandemics along with the interventional capability for unexpected public health challenges.
- ➢ **Dedicated Cadre:** There is a need for a strong and extensive cadre of human resources required to meet the enormous and complex environmental challenges of the 21st century.
  - ❍ This will require training professionals of the highest calibre in sustainability and biodiversity science, along with an investment in civil society outreach.
- ➢ **Enabling Cultural Change:** The gains of environmental change will be upheld and carried forward by the cultural change from environmental education for millions of students, from kindergarten to postgraduate levels.
- ➢ **Promoting Nature-based Solutions:** There is a need to promote nature-based solutions to numerous environmental challenges, including degradation of rivers, forests, and soils, and ongoing threats from climate change, with the goal of creating climate-resilient communities.

Conclusion

On this World Environment Day (June 5), with the novel coronavirus pandemic raging across our vast country, we must reflect on the ways to rebuild our relationship with nature. In this context, the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being Mission can offer a holistic framework, integrated approaches, and widespread societal participation.

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Importance of Blue Economy

This article is based on "After the pandemic, the centrality of the Blue Economy in recovery" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 07/06/2021. It talks about the importance of the Blue economy as a model of development.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Inclusive Growth, Conservation

One of the major challenges following the pandemic is the loss of livelihoods and jobs. One of the ways for recovery and growth can go through the ocean. The Blue Economy represents enormous potential for sustainable economic activity and job creation after the crisis.

India has a unique maritime position, with a 7,517-km long coastline and an Exclusive Economic Zone of over two million sq-km. Having vast ocean resources at their disposal – presenting a huge opportunity for boosting their economic growth and to tackle unemployment, food security and poverty.

The resources in these areas can spur India's economic recovery in a manner that is also beneficial to our climate and environment.

Blue Economy vs Ocean Economy

- ➢ The 'Blue Economy' is an emerging concept which encourages better stewardship of our ocean or 'blue' resources.
- ➢ Similar to the 'Green Economy', the blue economy model aims for improvement of human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.
- ➢ International society believes that the blue economy covers three economic forms:
  - ❍ Economy coping with global water crisis
  - ❍ Innovative development economy
  - ❍ Development of marine economy
- ➢ It is important to note that the blue economy goes beyond viewing the ocean economy solely as a mechanism for economic growth.
- ➢ In the ocean economy model, large-scale industrial nations sought to exploit the maritime and marine resources, often without a view to the effects their activities have on the future health or productivity of those same resources.
  - ❍ For example through shipping, commercial fishing, and the oil, gas, minerals and mining industries.
- ➢ The blue economy is not just about market opportunities; it also provides for the protection and development of more intangible 'blue' resources.
  - ❍ For example, traditional ways of life, carbon sequestration, and coastal resilience to help vulnerable states mitigate the often devastating effects of climate change.
- ➢ It provides for an inclusive model in which coastal states - which sometimes lack the capacity to manage their rich ocean resources - can begin to extend the benefit of those resources to all.

Significance of Blue Economy

- ➢ **High Return on Investment:** New research commissioned by the high-level panel for a sustainable ocean economy, co-chaired by the Norwegian Prime Minister (PM), shows that every dollar invested in key ocean activities yields five times i.e. $5 in return, often more.
  - ❍ It is for good reason that the Government of India (GOI)'s Vision of New India by 2030 highlighted the Blue Economy as one of the 10 core dimensions of growth.

- ➢ **Synergy With SDG:** It supports all of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG14 'life below water'.

- ➢ **Sustainable Energy:** Supporting the increasing demand for renewable energy, offshore regions have tremendous potential in the form of offshore wind, waves, ocean currents including tidal currents, and thermal energy.

- ➢ **Importance For India:** With an over 7,500-km-long coastline spread across nine coastal states, 12 major, and 200 minor ports, India's blue economy supports 95% of the country's business through transportation and contributes an estimated 4% to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

  - ❍ All the sectors across the blue economy have the potential to engage a large workforce and have been doing so from the past many decades at least in sectors such as fishing, aquaculture, fish processing, marine tourism, shipping and port activities.

  - ❍ Now, engagement in new sectors such as offshore wind, marine biology, biotechnology, and other activities like shipbuilding and ship breaking is also rising extensively.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Providing Blue Stimulus:** A Sustainable and Equitable Blue Recovery to the COVID-19 Crisis report, highlights five blue stimulus actions that can spur recovery and build a sustainable ocean economy in India and globally.

  - ❍ These include investments in coastal and marine ecosystem protection; sewage and wastewater infrastructure for coastal communities; and sustainable marine aquaculture.

  - ❍ They also include incentives for zero-emission marine transport and sustainable ocean-based renewable energy.

- ➢ **International Cooperation:** India-Norway Integrated Ocean Management Initiative is a good example, whereby researchers and officials are cooperating on improving the governance of ocean resources through marine spatial planning.

- ➢ **Education In Blue Economy:** The number and type of educational programmes on both the traditional and emerging sectors of the blue economy should be offered at universities and engineering/technical institutes for sustained supply of trainer personnel.

- ➢ **Gandhian Approach:** India should look to adopt the Gandhian approach of balancing economic benefits with sustainability for meeting the broader goals of growth, employment generation, equity and protection of environment.

Conclusion

The ocean has a role to play in strengthening resilience to economic and environmental disruptions. Investing in shipping decarbonisation, sustainable seafood production and ocean-based renewable energy provides for better health outcomes, richer biodiversity, more secure jobs and a safer planet for generations to come.

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G-7 & India

This article is based on "The G-7 opportunity" which was published in The Indian Express on 08/06/2021. It talks about the significance of the upcoming G-7 Summit for India.

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

In the coming days, the summit of the Group of Seven (G-7) industrial countries is going to take place in the United Kingdom. In the context of Post-Covid-19 era, the summit promises to be a definitive moment in the political evolution of the Western countries as a group of nations.

Apart from this, the summit will also see the digital participation of Indian Prime Minister. For India, the G-7 summit is an opportunity to expand the global dimension of India's growing partnerships with the US and Europe.

Thus, the summit can emerge as an important step towards a new global compact between India and the West.

G-7: Background

- ➢ The G7 was created as a consultation of industrialized economies, all of which have been democracies since the grouping's origins in 1975.

- ➢ The original G6 included the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy, with Canada joining to make the G7 by 1976.

- ➢ Russia participated in the G8 from 1998 to 2014 until its invasion of Ukraine's Crimea caused the group to eject it.

Significance of G-7 Summit For India

- ➢ **America First To America is Back:** Former US President Donald Trump's "America First" policies weakened the US hegemony. Now US President Joe Biden is determined to strengthen US alliances and draw India into a new global architecture.

- ➢ **Need for a Strong G-7 Coalition:** The need for reinvigoration of G-7 emanates from the challenges put

forward by increasingly aggressive China, the urgency of mitigating climate change, and the construction of a post-pandemic international order.

- ❍ These challenges are generating an unprecedented convergence between the interests of India and the West.

➢ **G-7 to G-11:** Not a long time ago, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the G-7 of the world's most developed nations was "outdated" and proposed to expand it.

- ❍ Now, the move to invite India, Australia, South Africa and South Korea to this can be seen as a possible step onwards upgradation of G-7 to G-11.
- ❍ The idea of a G-11 also can emerge as a global democratic coalition and India is at the very heart of this narrative.
- ❍ Further, the proposed G-11 grouping would recognise India's place amongst the world's richest nations, and acknowledge its global voice.

➢ **Countering China:** India now can't escape the conclusion that China is the greatest obstacle to India's global aspirations.

- ❍ Thus, forming a western pivot which includes strong bilateral strategic cooperation with the US, France, UK, EU as well as the Quad can help India counter China.
- ❍ India is also eager to emerge as a critical node in future supply chains oriented to the democratic world, including in the area of vaccine production.

➢ **Easing Navigation Among Great Powers:** With Russia also invited at the G-7 summit, India now hopes that a renewed dialogue between US and Russia can lead to a relaxation of tensions between them and will ease India's navigation among the great powers.

Associated Challenges With G-7 & India

➢ **Clash of Interests:** The growing convergence of interests between India and the West does not mean the two sides will agree on everything.

- ❍ After all, there are many areas of continuing divergence within the West — from the economic role of the state to the democratic regulation of social media and the technology giants.

➢ **Internal Tussle Within G-7:** An evaluation of the G-7's effectiveness as a multilateral forum thus far is needed, given deep member differences on issues including climate change, security contributions, Iran, etc.

➢ **Emerging New Cold War:** Despite its border tensions with China, India must also consider its objectives in attending a grouping that appears aimed at fuelling a new Cold War between the U.S. and China.

Conclusion

While India continues to strengthen its partnerships in Asia and the global south, a more productive partnership with the West helps secure a growing array of India's national interests and adds a new depth to India's international relations.

However, this would require sustained negotiations on converting shared interests — on reforming the global economic order, mitigating climate change, promoting greener growth, making the world immune to future pandemics, and constructing trusted supply chains — into concrete outcomes.

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Digital Justice Delivery

This article is based on "The promise and perils of digital justice delivery" which was published in The Hindu on 10/06/2021. It talks about the intended benefits and issues pertaining to proposed Phase III of the e-courts project.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Judiciary, E-Governance

In popular perception, Indian courts are associated with long delays and difficulties for ordinary litigants. According to data released by the Supreme Court in June 2020, 3.27 crore cases are pending before Indian courts, of which 85,000 have been pending for over 30 years.

Technological interventions in the form of e-courts are being established to address the issue of pendency and other problems.

However, technology can only be used to revolutionise India's courts when it operates within the constitutional framework of the fundamental rights of citizens. If not, technology can further exclusion, inequity and surveillance.

The e-Courts Project: Background

➢ The e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India recently released its draft vision document for Phase III of the e-Courts project.

➢ Phases I and II had dealt with digitisation of the judiciary, i.e., e-filing, tracking cases online, uploading judgments online, etc. This has helped in easing justice delivery procedures.

- ❍ For example, Phase II of the e-Courts project saw the development of the National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes, a software that enabled e-service of summons.

➢ Despite some hiccups due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court and High Courts have been able to function online.

➢ Phase III of the e-Courts project, reaffirms its commitment to the digitisation of court processes, and plans to upgrade the electronic infrastructure of the lower judiciary and enable access to lawyers and litigants.

➢ Most importantly, the Phase III proposes an "ecosystem approach" to justice delivery.

Ecosystem Approach: Intended Benefits

➢ **Seamless Exchange of Information:** Through this data can be exchanged between various branches of the State, such as between the judiciary, the police and the prison systems through the Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS).

➢ **Uniformity and Standardisation:** Data aggregation under Phase III can be useful when it provides anonymous, aggregated, and statistical information about issues without identifying the individuals.

  ○ This could be made possible in Phase III by encouraging uniformity and standardisation of entry fields.

➢ **360-Degree Profiling:** Phase III envisages creating a 360-degree profile of each person by integrating all of their interactions with government agencies into a unified database.

  ○ Once any government department moves online, their pen-and-paper registers will become excel sheets, shareable with a single click.

  ○ Localised data will become centralised which can lead to great advancements in problem-solving.

Ecosystem Approach: Associated Challenges

➢ **Exacerbating Inequalities:** It has been pointed out by organisations such as the Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project that the ICJS will likely exacerbate existing class and caste inequalities that characterise the police and prison system.

  ○ For Instance, the exercise of criminal data creation happens at local police stations.

  ○ Local stations have historically contributed to the criminalisation of entire communities through colonial-era laws such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, by labelling such communities as "habitual offenders".

➢ **Housing of Data With Home Ministry:** This is of particular concern since the data collected, shared and collated through the e-Courts project will be housed within the Home Ministry under the ICJS.

  ○ While it is understandable why the courts could reasonably benefit from access to police and prison records, courts deal with a variety of matters, some of which may be purely civil, commercial or personal in nature.

  ○ There is no clear explanation offered for why the Home Ministry needs access to court data that may have absolutely no relation to criminal law.

➢ **Data Privacy Issue:** Data aggregation can not violate the privacy standards that it set in Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), especially since India does not yet have a data protection regime.

➢ **Fear of Targeted Surveillance:** 360-degree profiling of an individual has been perfected by social media platforms and technology companies for targeted advertisements.

  ○ However, the difference is that when technology companies do this, we get targeted advertising, but if the government does it, we get targeted surveillance.

Conclusion

Since the Phase III vision document is a draft, there is still an opportunity to use technology in order to streamline judicial processes, reduce pendency, and help the litigants. However, this should be done within the framework of our fundamental rights.

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Blue-Green Economic Model of Development

This article is based on "A greener urbanscape" which was published in The Hindu on 09/06/2021. It talks about the need to incorporate Blue-Green Economic Framework as a counter to conventional infrastructure practices.

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

The motto of the SDG 2030 agenda — "Leave no one behind" — very much embodies the essence of Gandhiji's philosophy of sarvodaya through antyodaya, reaching the most marginalised first.

This guiding principle has long been a part of Indian thought and policy and is a fundamental virtue for the execution of the national programmes and missions

However, as the threat from climate hazards rise, the government of India should alter their urban planning and design approaches to incorporate Blue-Green Economic Framework as a counter to conventional infrastructure practices by harnessing blue elements (for instance, seas, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and water utilities) alongside the green (such as trees, parks, gardens, playgrounds and forests).

> **Blue-Green Economic Framework**
> ➤ The blue economy originates in the green economy concept of incorporating strategies to mitigate climate change and adaptation to result in "improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

Green Urbanisation & Policy Making India

➤ **Swachh Bharat Mission:** The Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) focuses on achieving an open-defecation-free India, building solid waste management capacity and bringing about behavioural change.

○ Swachhata movement, in effect, has become the harbinger of a total transformation of our urban landscape.

○ It is estimated that the various initiatives under SBM-U can mitigate 17.42 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2022.

➤ **Smart Cities Mission:** The Smart Cities Mission (SCM) envisages technological advancements of our cities to improve governance, sustainability and disaster risk resilience.

○ It sought to improve energy efficiency and non-motorised transport capacity in urban centres.

○ The overall reduction in GHG emissions from projects implemented under SCM is expected to reach 4.93 million tonnes of CO_2 by 2022.

➤ **Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework:** It has been adopted which aims to help cities adapt, collaborate and exchange best practices to achieve international standards for green, sustainable and resilient urban habitats.

➤ **AMRUT:** Under AMRUT, water supply and management, energy efficiency and increased green spaces have been part of the goal in 500 target cities.

○ The mission is likely to result in the mitigation of 48.52 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent to GHG emissions by 2022.

➤ **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:** With 1.12 crore houses sanctioned, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) has focused on new construction technologies (for eg. using fly ash bricks) that are innovative, environmentally friendly and disaster-resilient.

○ Overall, the mission has the potential to mitigate around 12 million tonnes CO_2 equivalent of GHG emissions by 2022.

➤ **Metro Rails:** These are an energy-efficient mass rapid transit system and Government of India plans to make them operational in 18 cities, in the near future.

Way Forward

➤ **Institutionalising a Blue-Green Urban Framework:** To streamline and ensure the integrity of the original blue-green canvas, governments must maintain uniform statutory terminologies and definitions, and undertake a comprehensive integration of all urban plans and records that highlight environmental features.

➤ **Blue-Green Economic Agenda:** India must club its ongoing green efforts with the 'blue economy' to create a blue-green economic agenda.

○ A typical blue-green infrastructure project may have several economic benefits, such as health improvement, lesser pollution, better amenities and quality of life, and social cohesion. At the same time, it could also cause a loss of trees or green spaces.

➤ **Fast-Tracking SDGs:** Blue-green infrastructure has the potential to fulfil multiple targets outlined in the SDGs, such as:

○ Those related to water (SDG 6 and SDG 14), land (SDG 15) and climate change (SDG 13).

○ Blue-green infrastructure can also accelerate progress on green employment prospects (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), offsetting medical infrastructure load (SDG 3) and improving air and habitation quality in cities (SDG 11).

○ It will also have implications for SDGs related to returns on investment and startups increasing employment prospects (SDG 8), assured resilience (SDG 9), and social inclusion through greater and more equitable access to natural spaces (SDG 10).

➤ **Outcome-Based Policies:** The blue-green concept could transform India's urban planning approach from input to output based by focusing on the outcomes of projects and processes.

○ This means that required environmental outcomes or specific levels of performance are specified in the framework and the method to achieve the outcome is flexible.

➤ **Sustainable Land Management:** Climate change cannot be mitigated only through greening and reversing land degradation. This will have to be coupled with sustainable land management strategies.

○ Sustainable land management is the use of land to meet changing human needs (agriculture, forestry, conservation), while ensuring the land's socioeconomic and ecological functions over the long term.

Conclusion

The concept of blue-green infrastructure is relatively

new, but many global cities have already begun the transition, driven by exacerbating climate impacts and events. While the green infrastructure concept has found some acceptance in India, the country must also consider including blue infrastructure in its sustainability transition.

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Sedition Law

This article is based on "Why the sedition law must go" which was published in The Indian Express on 12/06/2021. It talks about the associated issues with the Sedition Law.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Fundamental Rights, Judgments & Cases

Recently, the Supreme Court decision quashed the sedition charges against a senior journalist. Civil society hailed this as a heartening development, especially in the context of the increasing number of sedition cases filed.

Increasing number of sedition cases reflects the repressive approach to dissent and criticism of the government.

Moreover, a report by Freedom House (Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege) downgraded India's status from a free country to a partly free country. One of the reasons for the fall is the rise in sedition cases against dissenters.

Therefore, as the sedition law is often used to stifle democracy, it should be removed from the statutes.

Historical Background of Sedition Law

➢ Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy.

➢ This sentiment (and law) was borrowed and inserted into the Section 124A of IPC in 1870, by the British.

➢ British used Sedition law to convict and sentence freedom fighters. It was first used to prosecute Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897.

➢ Mahatma Gandhi, too, was later tried for sedition for his articles in Young India.

Relevance of Sedition Law

➢ **Reasonable Restrictions:** The constitution of India prescribes reasonable restrictions (under Article 19(2)) that can always be imposed on this right in order to ensure its responsible exercise and to ensure that it is equally available to all citizens.

➢ **Maintaining Unity & Integrity:** Sedition law helps the

government in combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements.

➢ **Maintaining Stability of State:** It helps in protecting the elected government from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the stability of the State.

Note:

➢ Reasonable restrictions are mentioned under Article 19(2) Constitution of India i.e. interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

Associated Issues With Sedition Law

➢ **Relic of Colonial Era:** Colonial administrators used sedition to lock up people who criticised the British policies.

○ Stalwarts of the freedom movement such as Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhagat Singh, etc., were convicted for their "seditious" speeches, writings and activities under British rule.

○ Thus, rampant use of the sedition law recalls the colonial era.

➢ **Stand of Constituent Assembly:** The Constituent Assembly did not agree to include sedition in the Constitution. The members felt it would curtail freedom of speech and expression.

○ They argued that the sedition law can be turned into a weapon to suppress people's legitimate and constitutionally guaranteed right to protest.

➢ **Disregarding Supreme Court's Judgement:** Supreme Court in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar case 1962, limited application of sedition to "acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence".

○ Thus, invoking sedition charges against academicians, lawyers, socio-political activists and students is in disregard of the Supreme Court's order.

➢ **Repressing Democractic Values:** Increasingly, India is being described as an elected autocracy primarily because of the callous and calculated use of sedition law.

Way Forward

➢ **Scrapping Sedition Law:** There are enough laws in our country to deal with external and internal threats

to India and there is no need to continue with the sedition law.

   ❍ Thus, there is a need to abolish the sedition law on the ground that it is used to curb freedom of expression and speech.

➢ **Role of Judiciary:** Until the sedition law is scrapped by the parliament, the higher judiciary should use its supervisory powers to sensitize the magistracy and police to the constitutional provisions protecting free speech.

   ❍ Further, to avoid overuse of sedition law, the higher judiciary can narrow down the definition of sedition, to include only the issues pertaining to the territorial integrity of India as well as the sovereignty of the country.

➢ **Raising Civil Society Awareness:** Civil society must take the lead to raise awareness about the arbitrary use of Sedition law.

Conclusion

Now that the Supreme Court has quashed sedition charges slapped on a journalist, we as the citizens of the Indian Republic should demand the quashing of the sedition law in its entirety to fulfil the vision of the Constituent Assembly, which rejected sedition while framing the Constitution.

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Overlapping Hazards

This article is based on "Managing Risks From Overlapping Hazards" which was published in The Indian Express on 13/06/2021. It talks about the frequent occurrence of overlapping hazards and remedies to address the problem.

Tags: Biodiversity & Environment, GS Paper -3, Disaster Management

Recently, India has been hit by two cyclones, first the Western Coast (Cyclone Tauktae) and then the eastern coast (Cyclone Yass). The increasing frequency of environmental hazards indicate the vulnerability owing to climate change.

However, the more concerning matter is the occurrence of overlapping hazards.For example, while the Yaas cyclone caused immediate damage, the flooding it induced took the adversity to a different scale altogether.

Further, these environmental hazards happened in the middle of another mega hazard – the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is an urgent requirement on the part of the state – along with the non-state actors -- to take immediate measures towards acknowledging the multiple risks that emanate from these overlapping hazards and reducing the same.

Examples of Overlapping Hazards

➢ **Floods In Ganga-Brahmaputra Plains:** Flood months bring with themselves a typology of hazards associated with the geographical location of habitation and have differential effects. The typologies include:

   ❍ Waterlogged regions,

   ❍ Areas which are in the riverside and prone to bank erosion,

   ❍ Riverine floods in areas with no embankment,

   ❍ Riverine floods in the countryside after the breach of the embankment,

   ❍ Flash floods,

   ❍ River bank erosion.

➢ **Cyclone Induced Flooding:** As an outcome of the cyclone Yass and the Yaas-induced flooding, the affected witnessed many overlapping hazards. For example:

   ❍ Disruptions in the form of salinity intrusion,

   ❍ Loss of agriculture and capture fisheries,

   ❍ Decimation of the marine capture fishery supply chain

   ❍ Rotting fish, plants and animals are resulting in severe stench and pollution are enhancing the possibility of water borne disease.

➢ **Social Vulnerability:** Vulnerability owing to overlapping hazards also emerges from underlying socio-economic-political conditions.

   ❍ Often the (socially, economically and politically) marginalised population have to reside in such precarious areas.

   ❍ They often lack access to various resources – land (due to salinity intrusion or erosion), safe housing, water and sanitation, stable livelihoods and markets.

   ❍ All this is both a cause and outcome of their social vulnerability.

Way Forward

➢ **Identifying Risk Drivers:** When overlapping hazards take place, with each hazard having their own character, the final shape of the hazard is often a product of these individual characters.

   ❍ Accordingly, the disaster risk reduction activities need to be geared towards first an interdisciplinary diagnosis of various risk drivers.

   ❍ The government needs to develop a disaster atlas of India for better preparedness and mitigation measures.

- ➢ **Focusing on Disaster Risk Reduction:** Rather than focusing on knee-jerk ex-post set of actions, there is a need to build resilience at the individual and community level. This can be achieved through following interventions:
  - ❍ Reducing the probability of the occurrence of the hazards in the first instance.
  - ❍ Preparation strategies like early warning systems.
  - ❍ Arrangement of adequate spaces for evacuation and prompt rescue and evacuation.
  - ❍ Disaster Impact Assessment must be made a mandatory part of Environment Impact Assessment.
- ➢ **Disaster risk insurance:** It covers hazards arising from geological, meteorological, hydrological, climatological, oceanic, biological, and technological/man-made events, or a combination of them.
- ➢ **Decentralised-Integrated Framework:** Disaster management approach needs to be more decentralised as suggested by the Sendai Framework and 14th Finance Commission.
  - ❍ The key action points that need to be taken include a ward-level disaster management plan, large-scale construction of elevated platforms through MGNREGA, universal access to safe water and sanitation facilities, etc.

Conclusion

Tackling overlapping hazards would require a multidisciplinary approach to risk reduction, where each of the risk drivers is subject to interdisciplinary deliberation, followed by a preparation of a plethora of thematic interventions planned round-the-year which would reduce the intensity of the risk drivers.

■■■

Global Minimum Tax

This article is based on "Illusion of redistributive justice" which was published in The Indian Express on 15/06/2021. It talks about the issues associated with the proposed global minimum tax.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper -3, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Mobilization of resources, Linkages of Organized Crime with Terrorism

The recent G7 meeting saw the finance ministers of the seven nations communicating their commitment to a global minimum tax (GMT) of at least 15 per cent and sharing the excess profits of the 100 largest companies with the countries where they operate.

Since the inception of the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) programme, the proposal for GMT is another positive step towards global taxation reforms.

This aims to stop giant companies from shifting their profits to low-tax havens via what are basically shell companies. Another rationale that runs behind this proposal is the rise of money laundering and terror financing.

However, there are many issues associated with GMT, especially pertaining to the developing world. These issues must be resolved before coming to the final agreement.

Understanding Tax Haven

- ➢ **Definition:** A tax haven is generally an offshore country that offers foreign individuals and businesses little or no tax liability in a politically and economically static environment.
- ➢ **Characteristics:** Characteristics of tax haven countries generally include no or low-income taxes, minimal reporting of information, lack of transparency obligations, lack of local presence requirements, and marketing of tax haven vehicles.
- ➢ **Modus Operandi:** Generally, tax havens do not require residency or business presence for individuals and businesses to benefit from their tax policies.
  - ❍ Individuals and corporations can potentially benefit from low or no taxes charged on income in foreign countries where loopholes, credits, or other special tax considerations may be allowed in accordance with the law.
  - ❍ An IMF research paper estimated that $12 trillion of global corporate investment was "just phantom investment" to avoid tax.
- ➢ **Popular Tax Havens:** A list of some of the most popular tax haven countries includes Andorra, the Bahamas, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Channel Islands, the Cook Islands, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Lichtenstein, Monaco, Panama, British Virgin Islands, and the Cayman Islands.
- ➢ **Intranational Tax Havens:** In some cases, intranational locations may also be identified as tax havens if they have special tax laws.
- ➢ **Regulatory Oversight:** Worldwide, there are some programs in place to increase the enforcement of offshore investment reporting. The Automatic Exchange of Financial Information is one example, overseen by OECD.
  - ❍ To maximize tax receipts, many foreign governments maintain relatively constant pressure on tax havens to release information regarding offshore investment accounts.
  - ❍ However, because of the monetary burdens, regulatory oversight may not always be a top national priority.

How Will GMT Work?

➢ **Taxing Ultimate Parent Entities:** It gives the jurisdictions of the ultimate parent entities — of firms with revenue above 750 million euros — the first right to tax the differential between the actual and the effective tax rate.

➢ **Mirror Rule:** A mirror rule that gives source countries such as India the right to withhold a higher rate on cross-border payments to low-tax jurisdictions is subject to certain thresholds and more so would require bilateral treaty renegotiations unlike the rules applicable to residence countries.

Associated Issues With GMT

➢ **Race To Bottom:** The minimum tax will essentially imply that even tax incentives that exist in treaty rates or local tax systems may no longer be available.

  ❍ This remains a problem for developing and underdeveloped countries, where tax incentives work in attracting investment.

  ❍ Even for a country like India, the recent push to bring foreign investors through the international financial services centre is an incentive.

➢ **Exclusivist in Nature:** The proposal of GMT is exclusivist in nature, as the rules for the world were being decided by select developed countries.

  ❍ Further, there concerns of loss of sovereignty to tax remain for developing countries.

➢ **Counteractive Effect:** If all nations do not agree to the global minimum tax proposal, it may spark a new sort of competition — corporations will search for countries without the minimum tax rule as their residence.

  ❍ This inturn will result in creation of new tax havens.

➢ **Dualistic Nature of Developed Countries:** Britain has long connived in creating tax havens in British territories like Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Channel Islands.

  ❍ Further, some countries, including India, have already started taxing digital MNCs on the basis of their revenue. It was the US administration that threatened India and other such countries with retaliation.

➢ **Impeding Development in Developing Countries:** A 15% minimum corporate tax will hit not just tax havens but countries, including India, that offer tax breaks for specific purposes — export industries, investment in backward areas or Special Economic Zones, green investments, R&D, accelerated depreciation, and affecting other legitimate incentives.

Conclusion

The simplest, most honest solution is to decree an Alternative Minimum Tax of 15% regardless of tax breaks. Any country wishing to attain political or social goals through special incentives will have to do so through budgetary grants, not tax concessions.

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India's Election Funding System

This article is based on "Needed: full disclosure on electoral bonds" which was published in The Hindu on 16/06/2021. It talks about the issues associated with anonymous corporate funding and foreign money to political parties.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Representation of People's Act, Government Policies & Interventions

In a democracy, political power is in theory supposed to flow from popular or people's approval, as measured by results in elections. However, in practice, this system is often distorted by a number of factors, financial power being the most prominent of them.

This leads to the scenario, where the Political parties often shape policy not as per the desires of their voters but their funders.

Moreover, the government has brought many legal changes in Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 1976, Companies Act, 2013, which may increase the influence of anonymous corporate funding in the elections.

Further, the lack of transparency in political funding is a cause for concern and electoral bonds have made it worse. Unfortunately, these changes in India's election funding system creates more loopholes which allows moneyed interest groups to clandestinely influence political parties.

Issues In India's Election Funding System

➢ **Electoral Bonds:** In 2017, the introduction of electoral bonds brought a new form of anonymity to thousands of crores of donations.

  ❍ Under the electoral bond scheme, only the ruling party via the State Bank of India (SBI) has a full account of all donations being made via electoral bonds.

  ❍ Parliament, the Election Commission and the Opposition parties do not have this information, nor do the public.

  ❍ In effect, electoral bonds give political power to companies, wealthy individual donors, and foreign entities, thus diluting the universal franchise of one voter-one vote.

- ➢ **Amendments in FCRA, 1976:** In 2014, the Delhi High Court held that two national political parties were guilty of illegally accepting donations from two companies registered in India but whose controlling shareholder was a foreign company.
  - ○ In 2016 and 2018, the government amended the FCRA through the annual Finance Bills, to retrospectively legalise the violations.
  - ○ As per the amendment, earlier, foreign companies or companies where the controlling stake was held by a foreign company couldn't contribute; now they can.
  - ○ According to the Election Commission of India, this may allow unchecked foreign funding of political parties in India, which could lead to Indian policies being influenced by foreign companies.
- ➢ **Amendments in Companies Act, 2013:** The Finance Bill of 2017 amended Section 182 of the Companies Act of 2013 to remove the requirement for declaring disaggregated donations to political parties.
  - ○ Earlier, only profit-making domestic companies could contribute to political parties; now loss-making companies can too.
  - ○ Further, the limit of 7.5% for corporate donations to political parties has been removed.
  - ○ With this amendment corporations are free to donate any amount of money and are not liable to declare the recipient of their donations.
- ➢ **Nullifying RTI Effect:** The Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005 enables easier access to information held by public authorities.
  - ○ However, above changes could in effect nullify the impact of transparency provisions even if political parties come under the Right to Information (RTI) umbrella.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Transparency in Electoral Bonds:** Even though the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of electoral bonds, it could order full and real-time disclosure, to the actual benefit of transparency and accountability.
- ➢ **Moral Leadership:** Companies and political parties could exercise moral leadership and voluntarily disclose the identity of recipients and donors, as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha recently did.
- ➢ **State Funding of Elections:** In many advanced countries, elections are funded publicly. This ensures principles of parity and there is not too great a resource gap between the ruling party and the opposition.
  - ○ 2nd ARC, Dinesh Goswami committee, and several others have also recommended state funding of elections.

- ○ Further, until the elections do not get publicly funded, there can be caps or limits on financial contributions to political parties.
- ➢ **Transition Towards Civic Culture:** India has been working well as a democracy for nearly 75 years. Now in order to make the government more accountable, the voters should become self-aware and reject candidates and parties that violate the principle of free and fair elections.

Conclusion

Every vote is not equally valuable if companies can influence policies through hidden donations.

The winner of this arrangement is the ruling party, whether at the Centre or in a State, and the loser is the average voter.

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AI: Promises & Perils

This article is based on "The promise and perils of Artificial Intelligence partnerships" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 16/06/2021. It talks about the promises and perils associated with Artificial intelligence.

Tags: Science & Technology, GS Paper - 3, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Scientific Innovations & Discoveries

Historically, Technology competition has been a main aspect of geopolitics. In this day and age, it can be increasingly reflected in geopolitical battles between the US and China. One such technological competition can be easily witnessed in the field of Artificial intelligence (AI).

Artificial intelligence is that activity devoted to making machines intelligent or to make them think like humans. AI has emerged as one technology of particular importance because of its role as an accelerator, its versatility, and its wide applicability.

However, AI can also be used for a host of undesirable purposes — generating misinformation, criminal activity, and encroaching upon personal privacy or inducing technological unemployment.

Therefore, as the global community seeks to leverage the promises of AI, they should also confront similar challenges when it comes to the development and deployment of AI and develop a human-centric approach to AI.

Promises of AI

- ➢ **Some Primary advantages of AI are as follows:**
  - ○ AI drives down the time taken to perform a task.

It enables multi-tasking and eases the workload for existing resources.

- ○ AI enables the execution of hitherto complex tasks without significant cost outlays.
- ○ AI operates 24x7 without interruption or breaks and has no downtime
- ○ AI augments the capabilities of differently abled individuals
- ○ AI has mass market potential, it can be deployed across industries.
- ○ AI facilitates decision-making by making the process faster and smarter.

➢ **360-degree Effect:** Based on these advantages, AI can be used in many positive ways — to foster innovation, increase efficiency, improve development, and enhance consumer experience.

- ○ For India, AI deployment will be tied closely to inclusive growth and its development trajectory, with potentially positive implications for agriculture, health, and education, among other sectors.

➢ Driven by recent breakthroughs in machine learning & Big data, AI is a good bellwether for the possibilities and challenges of international cooperation on emerging technologies.

Perils Associated With AI

➢ **Promoting Prejudices and Inequalities:** It shouldn't be forgotten that AI systems are created by humans, who can be biased and judgemental. Thus, AI can promote prejudices and inequalities, if initial training of the AI algorithms are biased.

- ○ For example, it can lead to AI facial recognition and surveillance technology to discriminate against people of color and minorities.

➢ **Comprising Privacy:** AI systems learn by analyzing huge volumes of data and they keep adapting through continuous modelling of interaction data and user-feedback.

- ○ Thus, with the increasing use of AI, the right to privacy can be under threat due to unauthorized access to one's activity data.

➢ **Disproportionate Power and Control:** Technology giants are investing heavily in regard to artificial intelligence, both at the scientific/engineering and also at the commercial and product development level.

- ○ These big players have an unmatched advantage when compared to any ambitious competitor out there which is a symptom of data-oligarchic society.

➢ **Technological Unemployment:** AI companies are building intelligent machines that perform tasks typically carried out by low-income workers.

- ○ For example self-service kiosks to replace cashiers, fruit-picking robots to replace field workers, etc.
- ○ Moreover, the day is not far when many desk jobs will also be edged out by AI, such as accountants, financial traders, and middle managers.

Way Forward

➢ **International Cooperation:** Given that various governments have only recently established AI policies, and in some cases are still formulating them, international cooperation is still very much a work in progress. in the setting of standards at the multilateral level.

➢ **Building Resilient Supply Chains:** Beyond talent, additional challenges like, securing the necessary infrastructure; ensuring resilient supply chains, alignment on standards, governance, ensuring critical minerals and other raw materials required for the development of the necessary physical infrastructure, needs to be addressed.

➢ **Right Steps Taken:** AI technological revolution brings great opportunities for prosperity and growth — but it has to be ensured that the technology will be applied and used in the right direction.

- ○ In this regard, some steps are already being taken in different parts of the world, like Explainable AI (XAI) and the European Union's GDPR — General Data Protection Regulation).

Conclusion

The critical decisions made in the near future could have transformative effects for international cooperation on AI, which, in turn, could decisively shape the contours of what some have described as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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Role of Social Media in Democracy

This article is based on "Why democracy needs social media '' which was published in The Indian express on 17/06/2021. It talks about the role of social media in democracy.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, E-Governance, Transparency & Accountability

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how social media can help average citizens and complement the efforts of the modern governments in dealing with the crisis.

Around the world, social media is making it easier for people to have a voice in government — to discuss issues, organize around causes, and hold leaders accountable.

However, due to its unregulated nature and its role in the spread of fake news, social media leads to spread of propaganda, targets minorities, destabilizes the elected governments, which all in turn compromises the spirit of democracy.

Thus, there is a need to regulate social media, in a way that strikes a balance between freedom of speech, interest of minorities, law & order and promote participation of citizens in governance.

Positive Impact of Social Media on Democracy

➢ **Digital Democracy:** Democratic values can evolve when people have freedom of expression. In this way, social media enables the concept of digital democracy through these platforms of freedom.

➢ **Setting Accountability:** Social media acts as an instrument that can question the seemingly invincible governments, make them accountable and bring sustained change driven by people beyond one vote in years.

➢ **Giving Voice:** Social media has enormous power to keep people informed. This can be seen, when social media played a critical role in the Arab Spring in places like Tunisia, it was heralded as a technology for liberation.

➢ **Civic Engagement:** Social media's implications for civic engagement are profound, as many people tend to discuss & debate news over these platforms.

❍ It has long been observed that when people discuss the news, they're more likely to be involved in their community, whether by volunteering or reaching out to elected officials.

Negative Impact of Social Media on Democracy

➢ **Political Polarization:** One of the most common criticisms of social media is that it creates echo chambers where people only see viewpoints they agree with — further driving us apart.

❍ As unprecedented numbers of people channel their political energy through this medium, it's being used in unforeseen ways with societal repercussions that were never anticipated.

➢ **Propaganda Setting:** According to Google Transparency Report, political parties mostly in the last two years have spent around $800 million (Rs 5,900 crore) on election ads.

❍ Micro-targeting can enable dishonest campaigns to spread toxic discourse without much consequence.

➢ **Foreign Interference:** Around the US 2016 election, Russian entities set up and promoted fake Pages on Facebook to influence public sentiment — essentially using social media as an information weapon.

❍ In this way, social media enables nation-states to use these platforms to wage a cyberwar intended to divide society.

➢ **Fake News:** Social media gives people more voice and can sometimes be used, by anyone, to spread hoaxes and misinformation.

➢ **Unequal Participation:** Social media also distorts policymakers' perception of public opinion. This is because it is believed that social media platforms tend to represent every walk of life, but not everyone is using their voice equally.

Conclusion

If there's one fundamental truth about social media's impact on democracy it's that it amplifies human intent — both good and bad. At its best, it allows us to express ourselves and take action. At its worst, it allows people to spread misinformation and corrode democracy.

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Power Sector Reforms

This article is based on "Band-aid for power" which was published in The Indian express on 19/06/2021. It talks about the associated challenges with the power sector in India.

Tags: Indian economy, GS - 3, Industrial Policy, Industrial Growth

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic last year, the government of India announced a rescue package for the power sector under the Atmanirbhar Bharat plan. This rescue package was arranged to prevent the entire power sector chain from suffering because of the discoms' inability to meet their obligations.

This is not the first time (earlier intervention: UDAY scheme) that the Centre government has stepped in to aid discoms and tackle the problems plaguing the distribution segment. However, even after the repeated interventions, the end result has been the cash-strapped discoms looking for another rescue package.

This highlights the major structural problems ailing the power sector, which must be rectified for a sustainable power sector in India.

Associated Challenges

➢ **AT&C Losses:** Aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses stem from poor or inadequate

infrastructure or on account of theft or bills not being generated or honoured.

- ❍ The UDAY scheme had envisaged bringing down these losses to 15 per cent by 2019.
- ❍ However, as per data on the UDAY dashboard, the AT&C losses currently stand at 21.7 per cent at the all-India level.

➢ **Cost-Revenue Gap:** The difference between discoms' costs (average cost of supply) and revenues (average revenue realised) is still high.

- ❍ This is due to the absence of regular and revision in electricity tariffs.

➢ **Magnifying Effect:** Paradoxically, the government's push for ensuring electrification of all has contributed to greater inefficiency.

- ❍ As household connections are ramped up, to support higher levels of electrification, cost structures need to be reworked, and the distribution network (transformers, wires, etc) would need to be augmented.
- ❍ In the absence of all this, losses are bound to rise.

➢ **Economic Fallout of the Pandemic:** Amid pandemic, with demand from industrial and commercial users falling, revenue from this stream, which is used to cross-subsidise other consumers, has declined, exacerbating the stress on discom finances.

➢ **Low Investment:** Owing to the poor financial health of the dicoms, there are less new investments in the electricity sector (particularly by the private sector).

➢ **Fossil Fuel Dominated Energy Generation:** Thermal power based on fossil fuel such as coal, natural gas and diesel accounts for 80% of the country's generation.

- ❍ Moreover, the majority of plants in India are old and inefficient.

Way Forward

➢ **Eliminate Cross Subsidization:** High industrial/commercial tariff and the cross-subsidy regime have affected the competitiveness of the industrial and commercial sectors.

- ❍ Thus, there is a need to ensure effective enforcement of rationalization of cross-subsidy.

➢ **Covering up AT&C Losses:** To manage the demand for power, it is necessary to introduce 100% metering-net metering, smart meters, and metering of electricity supplied to agriculture.

- ❍ There is also a need to introduce performance-based incentives in the tariff structure.

➢ **Greening The Grid:** The KUSUM scheme provides a suitable alternative to the power subsidy model in agriculture.

- ❍ The scheme intends to promote the use of solar pumps for agriculture and make provisions that local discoms should buy surplus power from the farmer.

➢ **Cross-Border Trade:** The government needs to actively promote cross-border electricity trade to utilize existing/upcoming generation assets. The SAARC electricity grid is a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

A solution that has now been pitched forward to deal with the ailing discoms, is the creation of a national power distribution company. However, without addressing the systemic challenges, it is difficult to see how a sustainable turnaround in the financial and operational position of discoms can be engineered.

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1991 Reforms & 2021 Crisis

This article is based on "From 1991, the lessons for the India of 2021" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 19/06/2021. It talks about the 30 years of 1991 reforms and lessons that can be learned from it in dealing with the economic crisis induced by Covid-19 pandemic.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Government Budgeting, Fiscal Policy

Thirty years ago, the liberalization regime launched in 1991 completed its 30 years in 2021. The 1991 was a landmark moment in India's post-independence history that changed the nature of the economy in fundamental ways.

A severe balance of payments problem triggered an acute economic crisis in 1991. In response, India's economic establishment launched a multipronged reforms agenda to repair India's macroeconomic balance sheet and ignite growth.

Three decades later, the country faces another big test due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the two crises differ vastly in content and structure, they are completely comparable in their respective severities.

Significance of 1991 Reforms

India's Post-1990 Economic Strategy:
➢ It dismantled the vast network of controls and permits that dominated the economic system.
➢ It redefined the role of the state as a facilitator of economic transactions and as a neutral regulator rather than the primary provider of goods and services.

➤ It led to moving away from a regime of import substitution and to integrate fully with the global trading system.

Effect of Reforms:

➤ By the first decade of the 21st century, India began to be seen as one of the fastest growing emerging markets.

➤ The 1991 reforms unleashed the energies of Indian entrepreneurs, gave untold choice to consumers and changed the face of the Indian economy.

➤ Far from poverty increasing, for the first time, there was a substantial reduction in it.

Comparing 1991 Crisis With 2021

High Fiscal Deficit

➤ **1991 Crisis:** 1991 crisis was caused by excess domestic demand sucking in imports and widening the current account deficit (CAD).

  ○ A loss of confidence triggered an outflow of funds and financing CAD forced a sharp drawdown in reserves.

➤ **2021 Crisis:** The pandemic-induced lockdown brought the wheels of economic activity to a grinding halt, triggering a sharp economic contraction.

  ○ This has resulted in a collapse in production following the disruption caused by the pandemic, which, in turn, has caused a fall in demand.

  ○ Faced with a collapse in demand, it is appropriate to increase the fiscal deficit. The government allowed the fiscal deficit to expand to 9.6% last year.

Macroeconomic Situation

➤ **1991 Crisis:** India had to pledge tonnes of gold to stave off a default on sovereign debt. Then, we had almost run out of foreign exchange to pay for critical imports.

➤ **2021 Crisis:** Today, the economy is shrinking at a rapid pace, with the central government defaulting on its revenue commitments to the states.

  ○ Today, we have run out of jobs for our hordes of unemployed; poverty is increasing after decades of decline.

Criticism of the Reform

➤ **1991 Reforms:** The 1991 reforms package faced heavy criticism as being dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

  ○ Further, some of the reforms were criticized as a sellout to capitalists.

➤ **2021 Reforms:** Such a centralised approach to reforms may not work now. It can be seen in the protest emanating from three farm laws.

Way Forward

➤ **Sustaining Public Expenditure:** In the short term, sustaining public expenditure is a key to reviving growth.

  ○ Currently public expenditure is highly desirable for providing more funds for vaccination and to cover expanded demand for the MGNREGA which is proving to be a valuable safety net.

  ○ Also, there is a need to undertake a credible path for deficit reduction over the next three years and revising revenue targets to a more realistic level.

➤ **Mutually Supportive Reforms:** The 1991 reforms succeeded because they were structured around a core package of mutually supportive reforms.

  ○ Thus, the need is to move away from a long list of reforms towards a more strategic approach, focussing on the most critical reforms needed immediately.

  ○ In this context, the power sector, the financial system, governance structures and even agricultural marketing need reforms.

➤ **Improving Investment Climate:** Investment is a key source of aggregate demand and economic growth. In this context:

  ○ Perceptions regarding growth prospects are key.

  ○ The policy framework must be supportive of fresh investments so that entrepreneurs are encouraged to take risks.

  ○ Non-economic factors such as a peaceful environment and social cohesion are also relevant.

  ○ The government must begin to act on all these fronts.

➤ **Maruti Model of Disinvestment:** The government should reduce its ownership to 26% in each undertaking, including banks, to strategic partners, like it did under the Maruti disinvestment following 1991 reforms.

  ○ In this context, PSUs like Air India, BPCL, and Concor can be sold within the next six months, with the commitment that two dozen PSUs would be divested at the 'Maruti model' every year for the next five years.

  ○ This will help in generating billions of rupees of investible surplus for the government.

➤ **Multi-stakeholders Approach:** Today's reforms also require much more discussion and consensus-building. The central government needs to work in tandem with state governments and consult different stakeholders impacted by reform decisions.

Conclusion

The 1991 reforms helped the economy stave off a crisis and then bloom. It is time to outline a credible new

reform agenda that will not just bring GDP back to pre-crisis levels, but also ensure growth rates higher than it had when it entered the pandemic.

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UAPA & Constitutional Freedom

This article is based on "A limited victory" which was published in The Indian Express on 22/06/2021. It talks about the recent judgement of the Delhi High Court pertaining to UAPA and associated issues.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Judgements & Cases Judiciary Government Policies & Interventions

Recently, the judgment of the Delhi High Court granted the bail to three activists, who have been in jail for over a year without trial, for their alleged role in the 2020 Delhi riots.

The judgment assumes significance because the charges were under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967. UAPA is criticied by the civil society as anthieical to constitutional freedom to dissent, rule of law and fair trial.

The Delhi high court judgement is a step in the right direction, but there are many issues associatewith the UAPA.

UAPA Law

➢ Originally enacted in 1967, the UAPA was amended to be modelled as an anti-terror law in 2004 and 2008.

➢ In August 2019, Parliament cleared the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2019 to designate individuals as terrorists on certain grounds provided in the Act.

➢ In order to deal with the terrorism related crimes, it deviates from ordinary legal procedures and creates an exceptional regime where constitutional safeguards of the accused are curtailed.

➢ Between 2016 and 2019, the period for which UAPA figures have been published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,231 FIRs were filed under various sections of the UAPA, of which 112 cases have resulted in convictions.

○ This frequent application of UAPA indicates that it is often misused and abused like other anti-terror laws in the past in India such as POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act).

Associated Issues

➢ **Vague Definition of Terrorist Act:** The definition of a "terrorist act" under the UAPA substantially differs from the definition promoted by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism.

○ According to Special Rapporteur to call an offence a "terrorist act", three elements must be cumulatively present:

● The means used must be deadly;

● The intent behind the act must be to cause fear amongst the population or to compel a government or international organisation to do or refrain from doing something; and

● The aim must be to further an ideological goal.

○ UAPA, on the other hand, offers an overbroad and ambiguous definition of a "terrorist act" which includes the death of, or injuries to, any person, damage to any property, etc.

➢ **Denail of Bail:** The major problem with the UAPA lies in its Section 43(D)(5), which prevents the release of any accused person on bail if, police have filed the chargesheet that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.

○ The effect of Section 43(D)(5) is that once the police elect to charge an individual under the UAPA, it becomes extremely difficult for bail to be granted. Bail is a safeguard and guarantee of the constitutional right to liberty.

➢ **Pendency of Trails:** Given the state of justice delivery system in India, the rate of pendency at the level of trial is at an average of 95.5 per cent.

○ This means that trials are completed every year in less than 5 per cent cases, signifying the reasons for long years of undertrial imprisonment.

➢ **State Overreach**: It also includes any act that is "likely to threaten" or "likely to strike terror in people", giving unbridled power to the government to brand any ordinary citizen or activist a terrorist without the actual commission of these acts.

○ It gives the state authority vague powers to detain and arrest individuals who it believes to be indulged in terrorist activities.

○ Thus, the state gives itself more powers vis-a-vis individual liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution.

➢ **Undermining Federalism:** Some experts feel that it is against the federal structure since it neglects the authority of state police in terrorism cases, given that 'Police' is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

Significance of Judgement

➢ **Limiting Scope:** The court's judgment notes that as the UAPA is meant to deal with terrorist offences, its application must be limited to acts that can reasonably fall within a plausible understanding of "terrorism".

➢ **Confirming Constitutional Freedom:** Earlier this year, the Supreme Court in Union of India v K A Najeeb 2021, held that despite restrictions on bail under the UAPA, constitutional courts can still grant bail on the grounds that the fundamental rights of the accused have been violated.

  ○ The Court held that the rigours of UAPA bail restrictions "will melt down where there is no likelihood of trial being completed within a reasonable time.

  ○ The Delhi High Court took this reasoning a step further, holding that it would not be desirable for courts to wait till the accused's rights to a speedy trial are entirely vitiated before they are set at liberty.

Conclusion

Drawing the line between individual freedom and state obligation to provide security is a case of classical dilemma. It is up to the state, judiciary, civil society, the balance between constitutional freedom and the imperative of anti-terror activities.

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Development Financial Institutions

This article is based on "Why DFIs have regained relevance today" which was published in The Hindu Business line on 22/06/2021. It talks about the role of Development financial institutions in infrastructure building.

Tags: Indian Economy, GS Paper - 3, Mobilization of resources, Industrial policy, Planning

Development financial institutions provide long-term credit for capital-intensive investments spread over a long period and low yielding rates of return, such as urban infrastructure, mining and heavy industry, and irrigation systems.

They act as critical intermediaries for channelling long-term finance required for infrastructure and realising higher economic growth.

In India, after the 1991 reforms, major DFIs were converted into commercial banks. However, after these there were few institutions in the country which could take care of industrial or infrastructure development.

Therefore, in order to plug the infrastructure deficit, the government has taken a positive step by making a proposal to re-establish the DFIs in India.

DFI: Background & Present Status

➢ Development banks are different from commercial banks, which mobilize short- to medium-term deposits and lend for similar maturities to avoid a maturity mismatch.

➢ In India, the first DFI was operationalized in 1948 with the setting up of the Industrial Finance Corporation (IFC).

➢ DFIs in India like Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) and IFCI did play a significant role in aiding industrial development in the past with the best of the resources made available to them.

➢ However, after 1991 reforms, the concessional funding they were getting from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government was no longer available in the subsequent years.

  ○ As a consequence, IDBI and ICICI had to convert themselves into universal banks.

➢ While these DFIs disappeared, a new set of institutions like IDFC (1997), IIFCL (2006) and more recently, National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) (2015) emerged to focus on funding infrastructure.

➢ In budget 2021, with the initial capital base of ₹20,000 crore as committed by the government, the new DFI, assuming a leverage of around 7 times, can lend up to ₹1.4 trillion.

Need for DFI

➢ **Infrastructure Building:** Inadequate and inefficient infrastructure leads to high transaction costs, which in turn stunts an economy's growth potential.

  ○ Therefore, DFIs makes sense as the Centre government envisages mobilizing nearly ₹100 lakh crore for the ambitious National Infrastructure Pipeline.

➢ **International Precedent:** Irrespective of the level of development, countries across the world have set up development banks to finance key infrastructure and manufacturing projects.

  ○ For instance, the European Investment Bank (EIB) acts like a DFI for Europe.

➢ **Lack of Finance for Infrastructure:** Although India has a long-term debt market for the government securities and corporate bonds cut, it is still out of reach of retail investors and unable to meet the large infrastructure financing needs.

➢ **Economic Crisis Triggered By Covid-19 Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequality, the poverty gap, unemployment, and the economy's slowing down.

○ Thus, infrastructure building through DFIs can help in quick economic recovery.

Way Forward

➢ **Mobilizing Capital For DFI:** To lend for the long term, DFI requires correspondingly long-term sources of finance.

○ In this context, the government may allow equity investment by institutions having a long term horizon like insurance companies, pension funds to augment the capital.

○ Further, DFI can be adequately capitalized by the sovereign-backed funds, alternative routes such as capital gains/tax-free bond issues, external borrowings, and loans from multilateral agencies.

➢ **Administration of DFI:** The ownership and organisation structure are critical and require greater clarity as this would have bearing on the functioning, flexibility, governance of the institution and its long-term sustainability.

➢ **Functionality of DFI:** It is critical to hire experts with a good understanding of infrastructure, policies, financing and risk management to work with the institution by offering market-driven lending packages.

➢ **Reaching Out Retail Investors:** The government needs to set up institutions and network platforms to reach retail investors and incentivise and structure the bonds/instruments so that they are attracted to invest long-term in those instruments.

➢ **Periodic Review of DFI:** Periodic reviews are necessary to ensure that the DFI remains relevant by taking into account changing priorities of the economy and making consequential adjustments in the role.

Conclusion

For a developing country like India, it is desirable that the new DFI remains viable and sustainable to be able to cater to the long-term development financing requirements.

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Union vs. Centre

This article is based on "The 'Union government' has a unifying effect" which was published in The Hindu on 22/06/2021. It talks about the recent difference between the Union Government and Central Government terminology.

Recently, the Tamil Nadu government has decided to shun the usage of the term 'Central government' in its official communications and replace it with 'Union government'.

After going through the 395 Articles in 22 Parts and eight Schedules in the original Constitution, it can be stated that the term 'Centre' or 'Central government' is nowhere used.

Even though there is no reference to the 'Central government' in the original Constitution, the General Clauses Act, 1897 gives a definition for it.

Therefore, the real question is whether such definition for 'Central government' is constitutional as the Constitution itself does not approve of centralising power.

Origin: Union Government & Central Government

➢ Under the British rule, the administration that the governor general ran was often described as the "Central Government" .

○ In 1919, for example, when a new Government of India Act passed by Britain's parliament introduced a rudimentary form of self-government and federalism in India, powers were split between "central" and "provincial" subjects

➢ The modern term "Union" was first officially used in 1946 by the Cabinet Mission Plan, a British scheme to keep India united after transfer of power.

➢ Many members of the Constituent Assembly were of the opinion that the principles of the British Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) be adopted.

○ Cabinet mission contemplated a Central government with very limited powers whereas the provinces had substantial autonomy.

➢ However, the Partition and the violence of 1947 in Kashmir forced the Constituent Assembly to revise its approach and it was resolved in favour of a strong Centre.

➢ Due to this, the possibility of the secession of States from the Union weighed on the minds of the drafters of the Constitution and ensured that the Indian Union was "indestructible".

➢ Thus, Article 1 of Indian constitution states that "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States".

Difference Between Union & Centre

➢ According to constitution expert Subash Kashyap, from the point of the usage of the words, 'centre' indicates a point in the middle of a circle, whereas 'Union' is the whole circle.

➤ In India, the relationship between the so-called 'Centre' and States, as per the Constitution, is actually a relationship between the whole and its parts.

➤ The sharing of powers between the Union and the States is not restricted to the executive organ of the government, it extends to other organs of government also.

➤ For instance, the judiciary is designed in the Constitution to ensure that the Supreme Court, the tallest court in the country, has no superintendence over the High Court.

  ○ Though the Supreme Court has appellate jurisdiction — not only over High Courts but also over other courts and tribunals — they are not declared to be subordinate to it.

  ○ In fact, the High Courts have wider powers to issue prerogative writs despite having the power of superintendence over the district and subordinate courts.

➤ Parliament and Assemblies identify their boundaries and are circumspect to not cross their boundaries when it comes to the subject matter on which laws are made.

Associated Issues
With the Term Central Government

➤ **Discarded By Constituent Assembly:** The word 'Centre' is not used in the Constitution; the makers of the Constitution specifically discarded it and instead used the word 'Union'.

  ○ BR Ambedkar clarified that " Both the Union and the States are created by the Constitution, both derive their respective authority from the Constitution.

  ○ According to him, the one is not subordinate to the other in its own field and the authority of one is to coordinate with that of the other".

➤ **Colonial Legacy: '**Centre' is a hangover from the colonial period because the bureaucracy in the the Secretariat, New Delhi), who are used to using the word 'Central Laws,' 'Central legislature,' etc, and so everyone else, including the media, started using the word.

➤ **Conflict With Idea of Federalism:** India is a federal government. The power to govern is divided between a government for the whole country, which is responsible for subjects of common national interest, and the states, which look after the detailed day-to-day governing of the state.

  ○ According to Subash Kashyap, using the term 'Centre' or 'central government' would mean state governments are subservient to it.

Conclusion

The members of the Constituent Assembly were very cautious of not using the word 'Centre' or 'Central government' in the Constitution as they intended to keep away the tendency of centralising of powers in one unit. The 'Union government' or the 'Government of India' has a unifying effect as the message sought to be given is that the government is of all.

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Right To Be Forgotten

This article is based on "The fine line that separates judicial transparency and the right to be forgotten" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 24/06/2021. It talks about the issues involved with the right to be forgotten.

Tags: Indian polity, GS Paper - 2, Fundamental Rights

Recently, the Delhi high court has granted relief to a petitioner seeking to exercise 'right to be forgotten (RTBF). The petitioner, who was earlier acquitted in a narcotics case, had come before the high court praying for the removal of the judgment of his acquittal from online platforms.

The court's order assumes significance by removing it from online platforms to protect an individual's right to privacy and the need to balance it with the right to information of the public and maintenance of transparency in judicial records.

The Right To Be Forgotten

➤ The 'right to be forgotten' is the right to have publicly available personal information removed from the internet, search, databases, websites or any other public platforms, once the personal information in question is no longer necessary, or relevant.

➤ RTBF gained currency after the 2014 decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union ("CJEU") in the Google Spain case.

➤ RTBF has been recognised as a statutory right in the European Union under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and has been upheld by a number of courts in the United Kingdom, and in Europe.

➤ In India, there is no law that specifically provides for the right to be forgotten. However, the Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 recognised this right.

RTBF in India & Need

➤ In India, RTBF doesn't have legislative sanction yet. However, in the Puttaswamy judgment, the Supreme court held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right.

Google Spain Case

➤ In this case, the CJEU ruled in favour of a Spanish national who had requested Google to remove two links to newspaper articles about him.

➤ It held that personal information found to be inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive in relation to the purposes of the processing should be erased, even if it was published lawfully.

➤ In the Puttaswamy judgment, the Supreme Court observed that the "right of an individual to exercise control over his personal data and to be able to control his/her own life would also encompass his right to control his existence on the Internet".

➤ Currently, many High courts have expressly recognised the right to be forgotten in their judgments, taking note of international jurisprudence on this right.

➤ With deeper integration of technology and the digitisation of data, a simple Google search can yield a plethora of information about an individual, which may hurt a person's reputation & dignity guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution.

➤ At a time when the judiciary is entering Phase III of its ambitious eCourts project, rights such as RTBF will have to be coded into any technology solution that is developed for judicial data storage and management.

Challenges Associated With Right to Be Forgotten

➤ **Legal Challenge:** Right to be forgotten may get into conflict with matters involving public records.
  ○ For instance, judgments have always been treated as public records and fall within the definition of a public document according to Section 74 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
  ○ According to a report by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, RTBF cannot be extended to official public records, especially judicial records as that would undermine public faith in the judicial system in the long run.

➤ **Information in the Public Domain is Like Toothpaste:** Like once toothpaste is out of the tube one can't get it back in and once the information is in the public domain, in the digital era, it will never go away.

➤ **Individual vs Society:** Right to be forgotten creates a dilemma between the right to privacy of individuals and the right to information of society and freedom of press.

Way Forward

➤ **Making Privacy as Reasonable Restriction:** In order to implement the right to be forgotten, privacy needs to be added as a ground for reasonable restriction under Article 19 (2) by a major amendment to the Constitution.

➤ **Balancing Privacy & Information:** There is need for development of framework, the right to be forgotten can be restricted. For example:
  ○ In exercising the right of freedom of expression and information;
  ○ Compliance with legal obligations;
  ○ The performance of a task carried out in public interest, or public health;
  ○ Archiving purposes in the public interest;
  ○ Scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes; or
  ○ The establishment, exercise or defence of legal claims.

Conclusion

Given that the Personal Data Protection Bill 2019 is already tabled in parliament, there needs to be a comprehensive debate. So as to minimize the conflict between the two fundamental rights that form the crucial part of the golden trinity (Art. 14, 19 and 21) of the Indian constitution.

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Role of Religion & Patriarchy

This article is based on "Challenging patriarchy in religion" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 25/06/2021. It talks about the role of religion in furtherance of Patriarchy.

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

At Durga temple Madurai, a woman staked her claim to be the full-time pujari (priest-a hereditary position at that temple) in 2006. Agreeing with her claim, the Madras high court has recently ruled that "the altars of the God must be free from gender bias."

After the Sabarimala judgment, this judgment can be seen as a positive step towards the furtherance of gender equality.

In many religions all across the world, patriarchal notions have seeped into religion which prohibit women into some religious activities. For example, prohibitions on women were based during their menstruation.

Therefore, in order to ensure opportunities for women to participate in every sphere of life, whether spiritual or material, the link between religion and patriarchy needs to be thoroughly discussed.

Linkage Between Religion & Patriarchy

There are several ways in which religion can promote patriarchy:

➢ **Through Religious Scripture / Teachings:** In many religious teachings across a wide range of religions, women are given the role of nurturing, caring and giving birth.

  ○ While these roles are presented positively and as essential, they reinforce the gender norms in society and the patriarchal power structures.

  ○ If women choose not to conform to gender stereotypes, they are not only deviating from gender norms and family expectations, but deviating from God's will too.

  ○ Men have been dominant as recipients, interpreters and transmitters of divine messages, while women have largely remained passive receivers of teachings and ardent practitioners of religious rituals.

➢ **Through Religious Practices:** In many religions both menstruation and pregnancy are treated as impure or ungodly.

  ○ For example, in Islam women who are menstruating are not allowed to touch the Koran. Similarly, in Hinduism, menstruating women are not allowed to enter temples.

  ○ The practice of Sati, or self-immolation by widows on the funeral-pyres of their husbands, thrived for centuries because it was rooted in the belief of the futility of a woman's existence without her husband.

➢ **Through the Structure of Religious Organisations:** Although some religious organisations do have women in senior positions, they are certainly the exception rather than the rule.

  ○ This exclusion of women from the priesthood or leader of a religious group exemplified women's marginalisation in religious and social life.

➢ **Through Monotheistic Religions:** The development of monotheistic religions, with their all-powerful male Gods (such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism) which imbued religion with a patriarchal and sexist core.

Patriarchy & Religion and Its Impact on Women

➢ **Acting as Cause & Effect:** If patriarchy is the social normal, it is largely because it derives its legitimacy from religion, the most important rule book pertaining to societal do's-and-don'ts in any community.

➢ **Women as Inferior Being:** Due to patriarchal notions in religion, women are painted as physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually inferior to men.

➢ **Impacting Men As It Hurts Women:** Patriarchy penetrates into every single sphere of a person's life, and it hurts men as much as it impacts women.

➢ **Politics & Religion:** Politics uses religion as a tool to manipulate the masses, women bear the brunt of the consequences of cultural attitudes.

Way Forward

➢ **Demystifying True Essence of Religion:** Many religions in the world don't explicitly suppress the role of women in religion. Thus, there is a need to unravel the true essence of religion.

  ○ For example, the Rig-Veda expounded the idea of feminine energy behind the creation of the universe.

➢ **Implementing Uniform Civil Code:** Article 44 of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the citizens throughout the territory of India.

  ○ Implementing UCC will be a step in the right direction in extending the narrative of gender equality.

➢ **Codification of Personal Laws:** Need of the hour is the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution.

Conclusion

The Durga temple example is not just a social engineering experiment, there are also good religious grounds for opening all ritual functions to women.

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Marginalisation of Sexual Minorities

This article is based on "On the margins with full equality still out of reach" which was published in The Hindu on 28/06/2021. It talks about the associated issues with the LGBTQ+ community.

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 1, Salient Features of Indian Society, Issues Related to Transgenders

During 1970s homosexuality was treated as a mental disorder. But, after the 1970s, with the efforts of several activists like Dr. Frank Kameny, the global LGBTQ+ community marched ahead for their rights and equal status.

However, in India, the queer community is still a stigmatised and invisible minority. Further, whatever gains that the queer community won have been granted by the judiciary; not by legislatures.

Despite judicial verdicts, India's sexual minorities face discrimination in employment, health issues and personal rights. This makes it incompatible with the country's living, liberal and inclusive Constitution.

Role of Judiciary in Welfare of LGBTQ+

In the tug of war between the demands of the traditional conception of society and the rights of individuals to their identity and dignity, the higher judiciary has come down firmly in favour of individuals. This can be depicted in following examples:

➢ **Naz Foundation vs Government of NCT of Delhi Case 2009:** The Delhi High Court's verdict held that Section 377 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) offended the guarantee of equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution, because it creates an unreasonable classification and targets homosexuals as a class.

➢ **National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India Case 2014:** In this case, the Supreme Court of India declared transgender people to be a 'third gender'.

➢ **Navtej Singh Johar & Ors. vs Union of India Case 2018:** The Supreme Court of India's ruling in thi scase held that, the criminalization of consensual homosexual behaviour between adults (under Section 377 of the IPC), was "unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary".

  ❍ This judgment has provided a launch pad for the LGBTQ+ jurisprudence and queer liberation movement in India.

Discrimnation Faced By LGBTQ+

➢ **Full Equality is Still a Pie in the Sky:** Despite the various judgments of the higher judiciary, the queer community in India still faces discrimination in matters of employment, health and personal relationship.

➢ **Legal Sanction Opposed:** The Union of India has recently opposed any move to accord legal sanction to same-sex marriages in India.

  ❍ The government stated that the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code does not automatically translate into a fundamental right for same sex couples to marry.

➢ **Heteronormativity:** Heteronormativity is the root cause of hetero-sexism and homophobia.

  ❍ Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation.

  ❍ It assumes the gender binary (i.e., that there are only two distinct, opposite genders) and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of opposite sex.

➢ **Issues With the Transgender Act:** The Parliament has passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which had been framed for the welfare of transgender persons.

  ❍ However, the LGBTQ+ community protested against the act on account issues like one-size fits all approach, absence of reservation, etc.

Way Forward

➢ **Marriage, A Human Right:** Justice Anthony Kennedy of the U.S. Supreme Court, in Obergefell vs Hodges (2015) underscored the emotional and social value of the institution of marriage.

  ❍ He asserted that the universal human right of marriage should not be denied to a same-sex couple.

  ❍ As of 2021, same-sex marriage is legally performed and recognised in 29 countries.

  ❍ Thus, Indian society and the state should synchronise themselves with changing trends.

➢ **Amending Article 15:** Article 15 is the cornerstone of the concept that equality is the antithesis of discrimination.

  ❍ It secures the citizens from every sort of discrimination by the state, on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth or any of them.

  ❍ In order tp prevent discrimination against sexual minorities, the grounds of non-discrimination should be expanded by including gender and sexual orientation.

➢ **Inducing Behavioural Change:** Justice Rohinton F. Nariman had directed in Navtej Singh Johar case, the Government to sensitise the general public and officials, including police officials, to reduce and finally eliminate the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ community through the mass media and the official channel.

  ❍ School and university students too should be sensitised about the diversity of sexuality to deconstruct the myth of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

The Constitution was conceived by India's founding fathers as a beacon of fundamental rights. However, LGBTQ+ is still one of the most marginalised segments of the citizenry.

Therefore, it is time for change; but the burden should not be left to the powers that be. The onus remains with the civil society, the citizenry concerned and the LGBTQ+ community itself.

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Controlling Population: A Double Edged Sword

This article is based on "The cautionary tale behind population control" which was published in the hindustan times on 28/06/2021. it talks about the associated issues with population control in india

> **Tags:** Indian Society, GS Paper - 1, Salient Features of Indian Society, Population and Associated Issues

Recently, two Indian state governments – Uttar Pradesh and Assam – have advocated aggressive population control measures. This proposal pertains to pursuing a two-child policy for entitlement to state government benefits.

With ongoing trends, India will overtake China as the most populous country by 2025 or perhaps sooner. The overwhelming population burden is causing a resource crunch on resources like hospitals, food grains, houses, or employment.

However, population control, grounded in classic economic theories, has been a double-edged sword. It has both advantages and costs.

Status of Population Growth in the India & World

- In over half of the world's nations, the rate of population growth is falling behind replacement rates, and, perhaps for the first time, the growth rate in the world's population is projected to be zero by the end of the century, according to United Nations (UN) data.
- Further, the Covid-19 pandemic may have fast-tracked the oncoming peak of a global population decline by at least a decade, according to a recent Bloomberg report.
    - The pandemic has slowed the already slowing global birth rates, from the United States (US) to China, experts estimate.
- According to the United Nations population projections, India's population will increase by a multiple of 1.09 between 2021 and 2031.
    - From 2060 onwards, India's population will start falling, which happens when fertility rate falls below replacement levels.

Population Control Theories

- **Malthusian Theory:** Malthus in his work, Principle of Population (1798) had predicted that the world's population would grow at a faster rate than the rate of food production.
    - According to him, the population tends to grow exponentially (geometric growth), he argued, but food supply grew in a slower arithmetic ratio.
    - However, Malthus was ultimately proved wrong as breakthroughs in agricultural technology made countries, such as India, net food surplus.
- **Big-Push Theory:** Harvard economist Harvey Leibenstein has demonstrated how population growth tends to erode incomes.
    - The main economic argument behind this theory was that if per capita income is low, then people are too poor to save.
    - Since investment is taken to be equal to savings, low savings would mean the economy doesn't grow.

Associated Issues With Population Control In India

While these theories increased our understanding of population economics, many of these theories were later found to have many flaws. This can be reflected in the following arguments.

- **High Population is Not Always Bad Economics:** A high population is not necessarily a bad thing for the economy. Population controlling measures will result in:
    - There would simply not be enough people to work for the economy,
    - A large non-productive aging population to support and the government may not have enough resources to support pensions
    - This would lead to de-industrialisation.
- **Distributional Aspects of Population: In** 1937, John Maynard Keynes gave a lecture on "Some Economic Consequences of a Declining Population".
    - His key worry was poor demand for investment in places where companies encounter a falling population of consumers.
- **China's Model:** China enforced a one-child norm in the 1980s, but with an increasing share of older people in its population (due to one-child policy), China abandoned the old policy and encouraged couples to have more children.
- **Religious Factor in India:** What makes population control an even more vexed issue in India is the religious polarisation around it.
    - The bogey of population explosion is often used (directly or indirectly) to target a particular minority in India. The population controlling measure will impact social harmony.
- **Impacting the Poor:** Total fertility rates (TFR) are higher among the poor and they come down as incomes increase.

○ Thus, entitlement based population control policy will end up hurting the poor, who need such help the most.

➤ **Patriarchy:** Patriarchy driven preference for a male child is an important driver of higher fertility rates.

○ Restricting to two child policy, is believed to have had an adverse effect on the sex ratio of the population through practices such as female foeticide etc.

Way Forward

➤ **Focus on Demographic Dividend:** India needs to focus on exploiting its demographic dividend rather than worry about it.

○ India is poised at a unique moment in history, where it can exploit its demographic advantage to realise its economic goals.

○ According to the government's population projections, 53.6% of India's population in 2021 is under the age of 29. More than a quarter of India's population is 14 years or younger.

○ Our policy makers will do well to focus on exploiting India's demographic dividend rather than worrying about it

➤ **Upgrading the Skill Set:** Presently, India is nowhere close to guaranteeing the best possible opportunities to young Indians.

○ For Instance, according to All India Survey on Higher Education data found that India's higher education sector is mired in deep structural inequalities.

○ This young population can become extremely productive or unproductive depending on the skill sets it acquires.

➤ **Focusing on Women:** Education of women also plays a role, both in case of fertility rates as well as age of mother at the time of birth of first child. Education helps in bringing down fertility and early birth among women

Conclusion

India is at a stage of demographic transition where mortality rates are declining and fertility rates would decline in the next two to three decades or so. This leads to a scope to cut population growth because India still has a positive growth rate, but our population policy should keep in mind the larger consequences of zero population growth.

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Ed-Tech

This article is based on "The future of learning in India is ed-tech" which was published in the Indian Express on 30/06/2021. It talks about the need & challenges associated with the use of technology in education or Ed-Tech.

Tags: Science & Technology, GS Paper - 2, Education, Government Policies & Interventions, Issues Relating to Development

India's school education landscape is facing daunting challenges. The country was reeling under an acute learning crisis, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, as reflected by successive ASER surveys.

The pandemic threatens to exacerbate this crisis, especially because of the physical closure of 15.5 lakh schools that has affected more than 248 million students for over a year.

Combined with this learning crisis, the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has made it imperative to reimagine education and align it with the unprecedented technological transformation.

Need & Opportunities For Ed-Tech

➤ **Intended Benefits of Ed-Tech:** Technology holds promise and has incredible potential in:

○ Enabling greater personalisation of education

○ Enhancing educational productivity by improving rates of learning,

○ Reducing costs of instructional material and service delivery at scale

○ Better utilisation of teacher/instructor time.

➤ **Need Induced By Pandemic:** Further, as traditional brick-and-mortar service delivery models are being disrupted across sectors, the pandemic offers a critical, yet stark, reminder of the impending need to weave technology into education.

➤ **National Education Policy 2020:** India's new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is responsive to the clarion call to integrate technology at every level of instruction.

○ It envisions the establishment of an autonomous body, the National Education Technology Forum (NETF), to spearhead efforts towards providing a strategic thrust to the deployment and use of technology.

➤ **Promise of Ed-Tech:** The Indian ed-tech ecosystem has a lot of potential for innovation. With over 4,500 start-ups and a current valuation of around $700 million, the market is geared for exponential growth — estimates project an astounding market size of $30 billion in the next 10 years

- ➢ **Steps Taken by the Government:** India is well-poised to take this leap forward with increasing access to tech-based infrastructure, electricity, and affordable internet connectivity, fueled by flagship programmes such as Digital India and DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for School Education).
  - ○ Government of India's Aspirational Districts Programme on tech-enabled monitoring and implementation that emphasises citizen engagement, partnerships and effective service delivery.

Several examples of grassroots innovation in Ed-Tech.

- ➢ The Hamara Vidhyalaya in Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, is fostering tech-based performance assessments;
- ➢ Assam's online career guidance portal is strengthening school-to-work and higher-education transition for students in grades 9 to 12;
- ➢ Samarth in Gujarat is facilitating the online professional development of lakhs of teachers in collaboration with IIM-Ahmedabad;
- ➢ Jharkhand's DigiSATH is spearheading behaviour change by establishing stronger parent-teacher-student linkages;
- ➢ Himachal Pradesh's HarGhar Pathshala is providing digital education for children with special needs;
- ➢ Uttarakhand's community radio is promoting early reading through byte-size broadcasts;
- ➢ Madhya Pradesh's DigiLEP is delivering content for learning enhancement through a well-structured mechanism with over 50,000 WhatsApp groups covering all clusters and secondary schools;
- ➢ Kerala's Aksharavriksham initiative is focusing on digital `edutainment" to support learning and skill development via games and activities.

Associated Issues With Ed-Tech

- ➢ **Lack of Technology Access:** Not everyone who can afford to go to school can afford to have phones, computers, or even a quality internet connection for attending classes online.
  - ○ According to National Sample Survey data for 2017-18, only 42 percent of urban and 15 percent of rural households had internet access.
  - ○ In this case, Ed-tech can increase the already existing digital divide.
- ➢ **In Contradiction with Right to Education:** Technology is not affordable to all, shifting towards online education completely is like taking away the Right to Education of those who cannot access the technology.

- ○ Moreover, the National Education Policy 2020 that talks about the digitization of education is also in contradiction with the right to education.

Way Forward

- ➢ **Comprehensive Ed-tech Policy:** A comprehensive Ed-tech policy architecture must focus on four key elements —
  - ○ Providing access to learning, especially to disadvantaged groups;
  - ○ Enabling processes of teaching, learning, and evaluation;
  - ○ Facilitating teacher training and continuous professional development;
  - ○ Improving governance systems including planning, management, and monitoring processes.
- ➢ **Technology is a Tool, Not a Panacea:** Public educational institutions play an exemplary role in social inclusion and relative equality.
  - ○ It is the place where people of all genders, classes, castes, and communities can meet without one group being forced to bow to others.
  - ○ Therefore, technology cannot substitute schools or replace teachers. Thus, it should not be "teachers versus technology" rather "teachers and technology".
- ➢ **Providing Infrastructure for Ed-Tech:** In the immediate term, there must be a mechanism to thoroughly map the ed-tech landscape, especially their scale, reach, and impact.
  - ○ The focus should be on access, equity, infrastructure, governance, and quality-related outcomes and challenges for teachers and students.
  - ○ Special attention must be paid to address the digital divide at two levels — access and skills to effectively use technology and leverage its benefits.
- ➢ **Cross-Platform Integration:** In the short to medium-term, the policy formulation and planning process must strive to enable convergence across schemes (education, skills, digital governance, and finance)
  - ○ There is also a need to foster integration of solutions through public-private partnerships, factor in voices of all stakeholders, and bolster cooperative federalism across all levels of government.
- ➢ **Replicating Success Models:** In the longer term, as policy translates to practice at local levels and technology-based solutions become ubiquitous, a repository of the best-in-class technology solutions, good practices and lessons from successful implementation must be curated.

○ The NITI Aayog's India Knowledge Hub and the Ministry of Education's DIKSHA and Sha-Gun platforms can facilitate and amplify such learning.

Conclusion

The journey from a holistic strategy to its successful application will, no doubt, be a long one. It requires careful planning, sustained implementation, and calculated course corrections. With NEP 2020 having set the ball rolling, a transformative ed-tech policy architecture is the need of the hour to effectively maximise student learning.

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