Monthly Editorial Consolidation

Content

Operation Green & Flood

This article is based on "A project of slow motion" which was published in The Indian Express on 01/03/2021. It talks about what operation green can learn from the success story of operation flood.

Tags: Agriculture, GS Paper -3, Agricultural Marketing, Food Processing

Recently, the Government of India, while presenting the Union budget 2021, announced that Operation Green (OG) will be expanded beyond tomatoes, onions, and potatoes (TOP) to 22 perishable commodities.

Operation Green was originally launched in 2018. The idea was to build value chains of TOP on the lines of "Operation Flood" (AMUL model) for milk in such a way that will ensure a higher share of consumer's rupee goes to farmers and stabilizes their prices.

There were three basic objectives when OG was launched viz. containing the wide price volatility, building efficient value chains, and reducing the post-harvest losses.

However, a closer examination of the scheme in terms of achieving its objectives reveals that the progress of OG is in slow motion. Therefore, in order to replicate the success story of the White revolution, there is a lot to learn from the operation flood.

Objectives of Operation Green

➢ **Containing Price Volatility:** It should contain the wide price volatility in the three largest vegetables of India (TOP)

  ❍ Tomatoes-onions-potatoes (TOP) are the three basic vegetables that face extreme price volatility and the government often finds itself on the edge in fulfilling its dual objectives of ensuring remunerative prices for farmers and affordable prices for consumers.

  ❍ For price stabilization, NAFED has to intervene in the market wherever prices crashed due to a glut, to procure some excess arrivals from the surplus regions to store them near major consuming centers.

➢ **Building Efficient Value Chains:** It envisages building efficient value chains of these from fresh to value-added products with a view to give a larger share of the consumers' rupee to the farmers.

  ❍ In order to fulfill this target, there is a provision of providing subsidy to the Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO).

➢ **Reducing the Post-Harvest Losses:** It should reduce the post-harvest losses by building modern warehouses, cold storage wherever needed, and food processing clusters.

Issues in Operation Green Replicating Operation Flood

➢ **Heterogenous TOP:** Each commodity under OG has its own specificity, production and consumption cycle, unlike the homogeneity of milk as a single commodity.

  ❍ There are so many varieties of TOP vegetables, grown in different climatic conditions and in different seasons, making marketing intervention (processing and storage) all the more complex.

➢ **APMC Barrier:** Milk does not pass through any APMC, involves no commissions, and farmers normally get 75-80% of the consumer's rupee.

  ❍ However, TOP are mostly traded in APMC markets, with layers of mandi fees and commissions, and farmers get less than one-third of the consumer's rupee.

Way Forward

In contrast to this situation in the horticulture sector, in the milk sector. Operation Flood (OF) transformed India's milk sector, making the country the world's largest milk producer, crossing almost 200 million tonnes of production by now. In order to replicate the success of Operation flood following steps can be taken:

➢ **Separate Regulating Bodies:** There has to be a separate board to strategize and implement the OG scheme, more on the lines of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) for milk, which keeps itself at arm's length from government control.

➢ **Planned Strategy:** First and foremost is that results are not going to come in three to four years. Operation Flood lasted for almost 20 years before milk value chains were put on the track of efficiency and inclusiveness.

  ❍ Thus, the need is to give at least a five-year term, ample resources, and be made accountable for delivering results.

➢ **Increasing Higher Processing-to-Production Share:** Milk is the least volatile because of the higher processing-to-production share.

  ❍ The AMUL model is based on large procurement of milk from farmers' cooperatives, processing, storing of excess milk in skimmed milk powder form during the flush season and using it during the lean season, and distributing milk through an organized retail network.

  ❍ Thus, the government needs to promote the food processing units in horticulture. In this context, the announcement in the budget, to create an additional 10,000 FPOs along with the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund is all promising but needs to be implemented fast.

○ Further, to propagate the use of processed products (tomato puree, onion flakes, powder) among urban and bulk consumers, the government should run campaigns in association with industry organizations, as was done for eggs.

➢ **Need for Market Reforms**: The success of operation flood shows that there is a need for market reforms in APMC, overhauling the infrastructure of existing APMC mandis contract farming, etc.

○ The new farm laws intend to carry out market reforms. However, it needs to take into account the most important stakeholder i.e. farmers in the policy formation process.

Conclusion

The idea behind Operation Greens is to double the income of farmers by the end of 2022. However, the main challenge is to carry out marketing reforms to enable operation green to flourish on the lines of operation flood.

■■■

Restoration of JCPOA

This article is based on "The vital but delicate task of reviving the Iran deal" which was published in The Hindu on 02/03/2021. It talks about the nuclear deal between the US and Iran.

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

Recently, Joe Biden has been sworn as the 46th president of the United States. On the foreign policy front, Biden has promised to move quickly to rejoin the nuclear deal with Iran which is also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

JCPOA was signed in 2015, but former US President Trump has withdrawn from it (in 2018) and embarked on a policy of 'maximum pressure' to coerce Iran back to the negotiating table.

The maximum pressure campaign devastated Iran's economy but failed to push Iran back to the negotiating table or to curtail its involvement in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon.

Joe Biden has reiterated a return to the JCPOA provided Iran returns to full compliance. The return of the US to JCPOA may be a positive step towards regional peace. However, there are many challenges for the US and Iran to return to the negotiating table.

JCPOA: Timeline & Background

➢ The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations

from 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union, or the EU).

➢ It happened, thanks to the backchannel talks between the U.S.(U.S. President Barack Obama) and Iran, quietly brokered by Oman, in an attempt to repair the accumulated mistrust since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

➢ The JCPOA obliged Iran to accept constraints on its enrichment program verified by an intrusive inspection regime in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.

➢ However, faced with a hostile Republican Senate, President Obama was unable to get the nuclear deal ratified but implemented it on the basis of periodic Executive Orders to keep sanction waivers going.

➢ When Donald Trump became president, he withdrew from the deal and called it a "horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made".

➢ The U.S. decision was criticized by all other parties to the JCPOA (including the European allies) because Iran was in compliance with its obligations, as certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

➢ Tensions rose as the U.S. pushed ahead with its unilateral sanctions, widening its scope to cover nearly all Iranian banks connected to the global financial system, industries related to metallurgy, energy, and shipping, individuals related to the defense, intelligence, and nuclear establishments.

➢ For the first year after the U.S. withdrawal, Iran's response was muted as the E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the EU promised to find ways to mitigate the U.S. decision.

○ The E-3's promised relief Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), created in 2019 to facilitate limited trade with Iran.

➢ However, by May 2019, Iran's strategic patience ran out as the anticipated economic relief from the E-3/EU failed to materialize. As the sanctions began to hurt, Tehran shifted to a strategy of 'maximum resistance'.

Iran's Policy of 'Maximum Resistance'

➢ Beginning in May 2019, Iran began to move away from JCPOA's constraints incrementally: exceeding the ceilings of 300kg on low-enriched uranium and 130 MT on heavy-water; raising enrichment levels from 3.67% to 4.5%; stepping up research and development on advanced centrifuges; resuming enrichment at Fordow, and violating limits on the number of centrifuges in use.

➢ In January 2020, following the drone strike on Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Gen. Qasem Soleiman, Iran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA's restraints.

➤ The collapse of the JCPOA drags Iran towards nuclear brinkmanship, like North Korea, which has created major geopolitical instability in the region and beyond.

Roadblocks in Restoration of Deal

➤ **Regional Cold War Between Iran & Saudi Arabia:** Saudi Arabia is the cornerstone of US' Middle East policy. The US has strengthened its relationship with Saudi-Arabia, to act as a counterweight against Iran.

　❍ However, traditional Shia vs Sunni conflict precipitated into a regional cold war between Iran & Suadi Arabia.

　❍ Thus, a major challenge for the US to restore the nuclear deal is to maintain peace between the two regional rivals.

➤ **Iran Gone too Far:** The challenge in resuming the agreement in its present form is that Iran is currently in violation of several of its important commitments, such as the limits on stockpiles of enriched uranium.

　❍ The International Atomic Energy Agency noted that Iran now had more than 2,440 kilograms, which is more than eight times the limit set by the 2015 nuclear deal.

　❍ Further, Iran says it wants the US to pay for the billions of dollars in economic losses it incurred when it pulled the United States out of the Iran deal in 2018 and reinstituted sanctions that it had lifted.

Impacts on India For Restoration of JCPOA

Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:

➤ **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar option, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.

　❍ This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.

　❍ Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.

➤ **Energy Security:** Due to the pressure linked to the US' Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has to bring down oil imports to zero.

　❍ Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

Conclusion

The Iran nuclear deal is a joint effort by several countries. While Trump's decision to withdraw did not kill the deal, it seriously wounded it. Like Trump, Biden would like the deal to be a key part of his administration's vision in the Middle East – but this might be tougher than it is anticipated.

■■■

Participatory Budget

This article is based on "The citizen's budget" which was published in The Indian Express on 03/03/2021. It talks about the idea of the Participatory Budget in India.

> **Tags:** Governance, GS Paper - 2, Government Budgeting, Urbanization

In every government system, allocating budgets is the first step towards getting any piece of work done. Union and various state governments pass their budget every year, but the budgets that matter most to us are city budgets or municipal budgets.

In fact, most of the allocations for cities in the Union and state budgets find their way into municipal budgets, as municipalities implement most of their schemes.

Further, all across the world, there seems to be evidence to suggest that when there is citizen participation in budgeting and closer engagement of citizens in the monitoring of civic works, there are better outcomes and fewer leakages.

Given this, there is a need to strengthen the mechanism of participatory budgeting in India.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

➤ "Participatory Budgeting" is a concept that was pioneered in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the mid-1980s. It is now practiced in one form or other in thousands of cities around the world.

➤ It ensures that the diverse needs and experiences of local communities are understood and a range of voices is heard in local decision-making is essential in this process.

➤ Participatory budgeting (PB) has significant potential to transform the relationships between local communities and the public institutions that serve them.

➤ In India, participatory budgeting in cities was pioneered by Janaagraha in Bengaluru in 2001 but took firmer roots

in Pune, which drew inspiration from the Bengaluru experience and had a more committed leadership.

➢ Presently, a staggering 4,500+ municipalities in which over 300 million people live present their budgets every year during the budget season.

Benefits of Participatory Budgeting

➢ **Voice in Civic Governance:** It makes citizens feel like they have a voice in civic governance and thereby builds trust.

○ Children, women, senior citizens, the differently-abled, and several interest groups would be able to make a case for their causes and aspirations and have them fulfilled.

○ It facilitates a targeted, hyperlocal focus on budgeting and problem-solving.

➢ **Community Ownership:** This would foster far greater ownership in communities for civic assets and amenities, thereby resulting in better maintenance and upkeep.

○ At the local level, it is a win-win for communities, elected councilors, and the city administration.

○ It addresses inefficiencies arising from misplaced prioritization of civic works relative to citizen needs.

➢ **Facilitating Equity:** Actively engaging with communities to advance equality and eliminate inequalities is integral to participatory decision-making and the allocation of public resources.

○ Finally, it improves accountability for civic works at the last mile (as citizens would monitor budget execution).

➢ **Increasing Trust Between Government & People:** Citizens could work with ward-level engineers to use these funds to get their urban commons (street lights fixed, make their footpaths walkable, spruce up their parks, create a new childcare center or public toilet in an urban poor settlement) fixed.

○ This would change the lives of the people and build trust between citizens and governments.

Way Forward

➢ **Need For Greater Degrees of Citizen Engagement:** Budget documents themselves are not easy to read and understand for an average citizen. At present, most municipal laws don't provide for citizen participation in budgets or transparency in civic works and tenders.

○ Thus, there is a need for greater degrees of citizen engagement and media engagement on these budgets for them to become instruments of real change at a street, neighborhood, and ward level.

○ It can be an enabler of grassroots democracy in cities and tangible change for communities particularly children, women, and the urban poor.

➢ **Emulating MyCity MyBudget Campaign:** The campaign was first launched in 2015, and is gathering traction in Bengaluru, Mangaluru and Visakhapatnam, as a collaborative effort between respective city corporations, neighborhood communities and Janaagraha.

○ Across these cities over 85,000 budget inputs have been crowdsourced from over 80,000 citizens on a wide range of civic issues such as "yellow spots" (public urination spots), public toilets, footpaths, garbage dumps, roads, and drains.

○ These inputs will be reviewed and incorporated into the city budget.

Conclusion

Though every year Union and state governments' budgets look very promising, they have a hard time gaining assurance that these schemes and funds result in intended citizen outcomes. Participatory budgeting can help in this regard.

However, the institutional engagement and analysis needed to effectively integrate the requirements of equality legislation into participatory budgeting (PB) processes requires a transformational approach.

■■■

Knowledge Diplomacy

This article is based on "Knowledge and diplomacy" which was published in The Indian Express on 03/03/2021. It talks about the declining role of India in knowledge diplomacy.

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

Recently, the launch of Brazil's Amazonia-1 satellite by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the export of the Covid-19 vaccine to Brazil, as part of its "Vaccine Maitri" diplomacy, reflects how India's knowledge economy can contribute to the diplomatic capital of the country.

Space and pharma sector's global success points to the knowledge industry's diplomatic potential and to India's "soft power."

In the past, India's knowledge sector has helped the country to become a role model for other developing nations to develop into the knowledge economy.

However, in recent times India lost this leadership in the knowledge economy, barring sectors like space, pharma, and information technology.

What is the Knowledge Economy?

➢ The knowledge economy is an economic system in which goods and services are based principally on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to a rapid pace of advancement in technical and scientific innovation.

➢ The key element of value is the greater dependence on human capital and intellectual property for the source of innovative ideas, information and practices.

➢ Knowledge economy features a highly skilled workforce within the microeconomic and macroeconomic environment; institutions and industries create jobs that demand specialized skills to meet global market needs.

➢ In principle, one's primary individual capital is knowledge and the ability to perform to create economic value. Knowledge is viewed as an additional input to labour and capital.

What is Knowledge Diplomacy?

➢ Knowledge diplomacy refers to international higher education, research and innovation, in building and strengthening relations between and among countries.

➢ It presents a new approach to international relations where education, science, technology, and innovation, play an important role in global developmental politics.

➢ Knowledge diplomacy recognizes that many domestic issues are now global issues; and conversely, many global challenges are now domestic challenges.

➢ Knowledge diplomacy recognizes that as the world becomes increasingly globalized, the interconnected and interdependent world presents new issues, threats, and opportunities that one nation cannot address alone.

Examples of India's Knowledge Diplomacy

➢ India's knowledge diplomacy history goes back as early as the 1950s, when many developing countries looked to India to access development-oriented knowledge.

➢ Students from across Asia and Africa sought admission to Indian universities for postgraduate courses.

➢ Indian expertise was sought by global organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

➢ South Korea's government even sent its economists to the Indian Planning Commission till the early 1960s to be trained in long-term planning. By the 1970s, Korea was beginning to overtake India as a modern industrial economy.

➢ Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES), which was also established by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1974, acquired a global profile with business in Africa and Asia.

➢ The development of India's dairy and livestock economy also attracted global interest.

➢ Today, due to self-sufficiency in space and the pharma sector, India can place satellites of several countries into space at globally competitive rates and can supply drugs and vaccines at affordable prices to developing countries.

Challenges to Leadership in Knowledge Diplomacy

➢ **Brain Drain:** In India, the flight of Indian talent began in the 1970s and has since accelerated. Due to the better career prospects, this has sharply increased in recent years.

➢ **Competition From China:** China has emerged as a major competitor offering equally good, if not better quality, S&T products and services at a lower cost.
  ○ While India has maintained its lead in IT software, China has developed competitive capabilities in space, pharma, railways and several other knowledge-based industries.

➢ **Racing South-East Asian Countries:** The Indian familiarity with the English language and the still good quality of teaching in mathematics and statistics have enabled Indian firms to remain competitive in data processing, business process outsourcing, and software services.
  ○ However, the competitive edge is beginning to blunt due to the competition from south-east Asian countries.

➢ **Deteriorating Education Standards:** The biggest setback in India's knowledge economy's global appeal has been in higher education.
  ○ Overseas students were drawn to Indian universities and institutions because they offered good quality education at a fraction of developed country institutions' cost.
  ○ The appeal of education in India for overseas students has waned.

➢ **Deteriorating Social Environment:** Further, Indian institutions attract fewer foreign students not just because the quality of education offered in most institutions is below par, but due to the growing assertion of narrow-minded ideologies, the social environment offered here is no longer as cosmopolitan as it used to be.

Way Forward

➢ **Replicating Space and Pharma Success Story:** If ISRO's global competitiveness is a tribute to public policy and government support, the pharma sector's global success is a tribute to private enterprise and middle-class talent in pharmacology and biotechnology.

  ❍ India's current global diplomacy in the fields of space and pharmaceuticals, engaging several countries around the world, is the fruit of 50 years of sustained state support for "atmanirbharta" in both fields.

  ❍ Thus, there is a need for replicating the success story of Space and Pharma in other knowledge sectors.

➢ **Addressing Brain Drain:** The government and private sector needs to create better career prospects for Indian talent. This can help create a "brain bank" on which India can draw for its own development.

➢ **Raising Education Standards:** India's education sector is in a dire need of education reforms if India wants to make its human resource compete with the global talent.

  ❍ It is not only imperative for leveraging knowledge diplomacy but fulfilling the aspiration of a billion-plus country.

Conclusion

Today, space and pharma are at the apex of a narrow pyramid of India's knowledge diplomacy. However, much more is needed to be done to leverage the full potential of knowledge diplomacy.

∎∎∎

Gender & Sanitation

This article is based on "In sanitation, put women in charge" which was published in The Indian Express on 06/03/2021. It talks about the role of gender in sanitation and hygiene.

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

The sustainable development goals (Target 6.2) require India "by 2030, to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

In this context, the government of India has launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), which envisages the implementation of the infrastructure of water & sanitation and makes India Open defecation free.

Though the SBM is a people's movement for improving health and hygiene, still there are instances that girls and women face a situation where access to sanitation facilities is not easy and even it is unsafe.

As gender is an important notion in sanitation and hygiene, there is no doubt that women can help to drive change and bring about lasting change as the Jan Andolan of swachhta, health, and sanitation gains momentum.

Challenges Involved in Gender and Sanitation

As per the census 2011, more than fifty percent of India's population defecated in the open, and recent data showed that about 60% of rural households and 89% of urban households have access to toilets.

➢ **Marginalized Decision-Making:** In practice, the promoters of swachhta rarely encourage women to participate in water and sanitation committees, which does not guarantee their participation.

  ❍ Further, the age, position in the family, and societal and cultural barriers for females are some of the factors that determine the participation of women in sanitation decision-making.

➢ **Gender-Based Sanitation Insecurity:** There is a disproportionate burden faced by women especially shortage of or the non-availability of sanitation facilities that can be also called "Gender-based sanitation insecurity."

  ❍ The desire for privacy during bathing and defecation is different in the case of girls and women than men.

  ❍ Thus, the non-availability of proper sanitation facilities creates a helpless situation for females and leads to the risk of faucal-orally transmitted diseases, urogenital tract infections, urinary incontinence, and chronic constipation.

➢ **Risks Involved With Open Defecation:** Women face threats to their life and feel unsafe while seeking a toilet facility or while going out for open defecation.

  ❍ This leads to the consumption of less food and water by the women to minimize the need to exit the home to use toilets.

  ❍ The risk involved with feeling unsafe while searching a place to go often to the toilet after dark or early in the morning; and dropping out of school at the onset of menstruation due to a lack of safe and private disposal facilities.

Way Forward

➢ **Ensuring Behaviour Change:** Information, education, and communication, which aims at behavior change of the masses, is key to the success of the Swachhta mission 2.0.

❍ Swachh Bharat Mission 2 .0 speaks of sustained behavioral change while embarking on the newer agendas of sustainable solid waste management and safe disposal of wastewater and reuse.

❍ A proactive SBM messaging that reflects major transformations, attempting to popularise and portray stories of women groups will create the much-needed social ripple that would inspire women to take complete charge.

Positive Case Studies Bringing Behavioral Change

➢ There are spirited instances of women leaders in sanitation: Uttara Thakur, a differently-abled panchayat head from Chhattisgarh, was determined to improve sanitation services in her village.

❍ She went door-to-door to motivate people to use toilets. Her contagious spirit mobilized the whole village to join hands and become open-defecation free.

➢ In Jharkhand, trained women masons built over 15 lakh toilets in one year, and helped the state achieve its open defecation free (rural) target.

➢ Besides the government, the role of non-state actors, including that of institutions like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Unicef, and several NGOs, must be lauded as we pursue sustainable sanitation using a powerful gender lens.

➢ The government has also very effectively used over 8 lakh swachhagrahis, mainly women, who for small honorariums work to push through behavioral change at the community level.

➢ **Linking Sanitation & Hygiene With Livelihood:** The India Sanitation Coalition has helped link micro-finance with self-help groups run by women for sanitation needs.

❍ Such interventions with these groups should be promoted to drive livelihoods and produce income and well-being impact with the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs.

➢ **Tracking Gender Outcomes:** A national monitoring and evaluation system to track and measure gender outcomes in SBM is necessary.

❍ Several researchers in this space have commented that gender analysis frameworks have a long history in development practice.

❍ We can learn from these frameworks to support design, implementation, and measurement that can bridge the gender equality gap in sanitation.

❍ There is a need for effective communications and training programs to build the capacity of stakeholders on gender targeting, both on the supply and demand sides of interventions.

Conclusion

There are no quick solutions other than adopting concerted approaches to ensure the survival and protection of the girl child through good health from sanitation and nutrition, and provision of water to liberate women from collecting water and enabling their education.

■■■

Cyber Security Doctrine

This article is based on "Patching the gaps in India's cybersecurity" which was published in The Hindu on 06/03/2021. It talks about the need for India to have a cybersecurity doctrine.

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

Presently, all across the world, the changes in military doctrines favoring the need to raise cyber commands reflect a shift in strategies, which include building deterrence in cyberspace. Moreover, the area of influence of cybersecurity extends far beyond military domains to cover all aspects of a nation's governance, economy, and welfare.

India ranks 3rd in terms of the highest number of internet users in the world after the USA and China, but still, India's cybersecurity architecture is in a nascent approach.

This can be reflected by a report published in the New York Times that highlighted the possibility that the power outage in Mumbai, 2020, could have been the result of an attack by a Chinese state-sponsored group.

Therefore, given the criticality of cyberspace in the military, governance, and economic domain there is a need for a comprehensive cybersecurity doctrine in India.

Note:

India has been the victim of cyber attacks multiple times in the past.

➢ In 2009, a suspected cyber espionage network dubbed GhostNet was found to be targeting, amongst others, the Tibetan government in exile in India, and many Indian embassies.

➢ By pursuing the leads from that discovery, researchers found what they dubbed the Shadow Network, a vast cyber-espionage operation that extensively targeted Indian strategic entities.

➢ There were a number of subsequent attacks that targeted India, including Stuxnet, which had also taken down nuclear reactors in Iran.

> ➢ Suckfly, which targeted not just government but also private entities including a firm that provided tech support to the National Stock Exchange.
>
> ➢ Dtrack which first targeted Indian banks, and later the Kudankulam nuclear power plant (Tamil Nadu) in 2019.

Challenges in India's Cyber Security Architecture

➢ **False Flag Attacks:** The documents released by WikiLeaks show that groups such as the Central Intelligence Agency's UMBRAGE project have advanced capabilities of misdirecting attribution to another nation-state ("false flag attacks") by leaving behind false "fingerprints" for investigators to find.

  ❍ This makes it difficult for India to launch a counterattack.

➢ **Problems With 'All of Government Approach':** While seeking to create an 'all of government' approach to countering and mitigating cybersecurity threats at the national level, has also resulted in concerns around effective coordination, overlapping responsibilities, and lack of clear institutional boundaries and accountability.

➢ **Capability Asymmetry:** India lacks indigenization in hardware as well as software cybersecurity tools. This makes India's cyberspace vulnerable to cyberattacks motivated by state and non-state actors.

  ❍ India doesn't have an 'active cyber defense' like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or the US' Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data (CLOUD) Act.

➢ **Absence of a Credible Cyber Deterrence Strategy:** Further, the absence of a credible cyber deterrence strategy means that states and non-state actors alike remain incentivized to undertake low-scale cyber operations for a variety of purposes — espionage, cybercrime, and even the disruption of critical information infrastructure.

CyberSecurity Institutions

➢ Over the past two decades, India has made a significant effort at crafting institutional machinery focusing on cyber resilience spanning several government entities.

➢ The Prime Minister's Office includes within it several cyber portfolios. Among these are the National Security Council, usually chaired by the National Security Adviser (NSA), and plays a key role in shaping India's cyber policy ecosystem.

➢ The NSA also chairs the National Information Board, which is meant to be the apex body for cross-ministry coordination on cybersecurity policymaking.

➢ The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre established under the National Technical Research Organisation in January 2014 was mandated to facilitate the protection of critical information infrastructure.

➢ In 2015, the Prime Minister established the office of the National Cyber Security Coordinator who advises the Prime Minister on strategic cybersecurity issues.

➢ India's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), which is the nodal entity responding to various cybersecurity threats to non-critical infrastructure comes under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).

➢ The Ministry of Defence has recently upgraded the Defence Information Assurance and Research Agency to establish the Defence Cyber Agency, a tri-service command of the Indian armed forces to coordinate and control joint cyber operations and craft India's cyber doctrine.

➢ Finally, the Ministry of Home Affairs oversees multiple similarly-named "coordination centres" that focus on law enforcement efforts to address cybercrime, espionage and terrorism, while the Ministry of External Affairs coordinates India's cyber diplomacy push — both bilaterally with other countries, and at international fora like the United Nations.

Way Forward

National Cyber Security Policy 2013 clarified that India needs a National Cyber Security Strategy, but is yet to be released. Therefore, given the criticality of cyberspace, the new strategy should include:

➢ **Doctrine on Cyber Conflicts:** There is a need to clearly articulate a doctrine that holistically captures its approach to cyber conflict, either for conducting offensive cyber operations or the extent and scope of countermeasures against cyber attacks.

➢ **Setting a Global Benchmark:** India should see the National Cyber Security Strategy as a key opportunity to articulate how international law applies to cyberspace.

  ❍ This could also mould the global governance debate to further India's strategic interests and capabilities.

➢ **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** To better detect and counter threats from both state actors and their proxies as well as online criminals, improved coordination is needed between the government and the private sector, as well as within the government itself — and at the national and State levels.

➢ **Specifying Redlines:** National Cyber Security Strategy should include positioning on not just non-binding norms but also legal obligations on 'red lines' with respect to cyberspace-targets, such as health-care systems, electricity grids, water supply, and financial systems.

➢ **Promoting Indigenisation:** There is a need to create opportunities for developing software to safeguard cybersecurity and digital communications.

❍ The Government of India may consider including cybersecurity architecture in its Make In India program.

❍ Also, there is a need to create suitable hardware on a unique Indian pattern that can serve localized needs.

Conclusion

A clear public posture on cyber defense and warfare boosts citizen confidence, helps build trust among allies, and clearly signals intent to potential adversaries, thus enabling a more stable and secure cyber ecosystem.

■■■

Universal Primary Education in India

This article is based on "A Kerala model for universal education" which was published in The Indian Express on 09/03/2021. It talks about the Kerala model of education.

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

Nelson Mandela highlighted that Education is the liberator from the shackles of ignorance, poverty, and social and economic exclusion, through his famous quote "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

The same thought is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Article 26 which held that every individual has the right to education. However, seven decades after the UDHR, 58 million children are out of school globally and more than 100 million children get eliminated from the schooling system before completing primary education.

Ironically, India which once held the position of "Vishwa Guru" (world's teacher), tops the list of countries with out-of-school children. But Kerala has shown a silver lining as it is now all set to be declared the first state in the country to achieve complete primary education.

In this context, other states, especially Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Assam which rank low on the primary education levels in the country, could follow the Kerala Model of Education.

Kerala Model of Education

➢ Kerala that led the way by achieving complete literacy way back in 1991 has once shown that it is possible to achieve complete literacy even at the primary school level.

➢ However, this success story has roots in the historic royal rescript of Rani Gouri Parvati Bai, 1817 which proclaimed education as the "responsibility" of the state.

❍ Simultaneously, it emphasized that "political will" is more important than the political economy to decide the expenditure on education.

➢ Based on the efforts of the successive governments, Kerala is known for its highest literacy rate in the country and one hundred percent primary and secondary education enrollment.

➢ In order to universalize primary education, the Kerala government launched a special scheme Athulyam in October 2014.

➢ Through extensive surveys, people living in panchayats who had not yet completed their primary education or had dropped out of schools were traced. Convincing them to study again and sit for exams was the next step.

➢ They were given five months of training, enabling them to attend the fourth equivalency examination.

➢ Amartya Sen attributes the Kerala economic and social success to the consistency with which school education expanded, based on sustained public policies and action.

Challenges in Universalization of Education

The Constitution of India provides for free and compulsory education for all children up to 14 years of age. In pursuance of this Government of India has enacted the Right to Education Act, 2009. However, the goal of universalization of primary education is still far from our reach. The factors that can be attributed to this are as follows:

➢ **Low Public Spending**: The Incheon Declaration to which India is a signatory, expects member states to spend 4-6% of their GDP on education to achieve SDG4. to this declaration. However, the Union Budget 2021 budget allocates only 2.75 percent of the GDP to education.

➢ **Exclusive Private Sector:** Many reports and available data shows a rise in the privatization of education with a large number of children being eliminated from the system at early stages, cost of education going up due to systemic inefficiencies, and students committing suicide for want of data and laptops.

➢ **Qualitative Issue:** Universalization of compulsory education has failed to catch up to the desired target because quality control of primary education has not been maintained.

○ The successive ASER survey reflects the poor state of learning outcomes in primary education.

➤ **Other Factors:** Factors like ignorance and illiteracy of parents, lack of cooperation between school and local community, and corruption in recruitment of teachers affects the goal of universalization of education.

Way Forward

➤ **Active Role of State:** To make education universal the state must find resources to provide ancillary services such as school health, mid-day meals, free supply of textbooks, writing materials, school uniform, etc.

○ The Kerala model shows that comprehensive interventions pertaining to nutrition, health, sanitation, and early stimulation can help to achieve sustainable growth in human development.

➤ **Social Auditing:** There should be a Village or Mohalla School Committee in each village or urban area.

○ Such a committee would look after the construction and maintenance of buildings, playgrounds, and school gardens, provision for ancillary services, the purchase of equipment, etc.

○ To discharge the duties, the committee will have sufficient funds by way of donations and grants-in-aid from the state government.

○ For example, successive governments in Kerala have increased the capital outlay to education and simultaneously decentralized financing of education through local bodies

➤ **Engaging Civil Society:** The success of Kerala is made possible thanks to the collective efforts of the various departments of the government, officials, volunteers, NGOs, and friendly associations.

Conclusion

The provision for Universal Elementary Education is crucial for spreading mass literacy, which is a basic requirement for economic development, modernization of social structure, and the effective functioning of democratic institutions.

It also represents an indispensable first step towards the provision of equality of opportunity to all citizens. Thus, Indian society as a whole should take necessary steps to achieve universalization of primary education.

■■■

Farmers Producer Organisation

This article is based on "The push small farmers need" which was published in The Indian Express on 11/03/2021.

It talks about the prospects of strengthening the Farmers Producer Organisation for addressing agriculture distress.

Tags: Agriculture, GS Paper - 2, Agricultural Marketing

The government of India has envisaged doubling farmer's income by 2022, but this target is likely to be missed. This is because the efficiency, productivity, and economic viability of Indian agriculture are affected by many factors.

Factors like poor supply chain management, lack of modernization, and the declining average size of farm holdings are some of the reasons for agrarian distress. Moreover, these factors affect the small farmers to a bigger magnitude.

Recognizing the problems of small and marginal farmers in India, the government is actively promoting Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO). The aggregation of small, marginal, and landless farmers in FPOs has helped enhance the farmers' economic strength and market linkages for improving their income.

What are FPOs?

➤ FPOs are voluntary organizations controlled by their farmer-members who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions.

➤ They are open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

➤ FPOs operatives provide education and training for their farmer-members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so that they can contribute effectively to the development of their FPOs.

➤ FPOs in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and some other states have shown encouraging results and have been able to realise higher returns for their produce.

○ For example, tribal women in the Pali district of Rajasthan formed a producer company and they are getting higher prices for custard apples.

Benefits Emanating From FPO

➤ **Delining Average Land Holding Size:** The average farm size declined from 2.3 hectares (ha) in 1970-71 to 1.08 ha in 2015-16. The share of small and marginal farmers increased from 70 per cent in 1980-81 to 86 per cent in 2015-16.

○ FPOs can engage farmers in collective farming and address productivity issues emanating from small farm sizes.

○ Further, this may also result in additional

employment generation due to the increased intensity of farming.

➤ **Negotiating With Corporates:** FPO can help farmers compete with large corporate enterprises in bargaining, as it allows members to negotiate as a group and can help small farmers in both input and output markets.

➤ **Economics of Aggregation**: The FPO can provide low-cost and quality inputs to member farmers. For example, loans for crops, purchase of machinery, input agri-inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) and direct marketing after procurement of agricultural produce.

  ○ This will enable members to save in terms of time, transaction costs, distress sales, price fluctuations, transportation, quality maintenance, etc.

➤ **Social Impact:** Social capital will develop in the form of FPOs, as it may lead to improved gender relations and decision-making of women farmers in FPOs.

  ○ This may reduce social conflicts and improved food and nutritional values in the community.

Way Forward

➤ **Adding More FPOs:** Some studies show that we need more than one lakh FPOs for a large country like India while we currently have less than 10,000.

  ○ In this context, the government has taken several steps to promote FPOs.

➤ **Addressing Structural Issues:** Many FPOs lack technical skills, inadequate professional management, weak financials, inadequate access to credit, lack of risk mitigation mechanism, and inadequate access to market and infrastructure.

  ○ The above issues such as working capital, marketing, infrastructure have to be addressed while scaling up FPOs.

  ○ Getting credit is the biggest problem. Banks must have structured products for lending to FPOs.

  ○ They have to be linked with input companies, technical service providers, marketing/processing companies, retailers, etc.

  ○ They need a lot of data on markets and prices and other information and competency in information technology.

Government's Effort For Promotion of FPO

➤ Since 2011, it has intensively promoted FPOs under the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), NABARD, state governments and NGOs.

➤ The ongoing support for FPOs is mainly in the form of, one, a grant of matching equity (cash infusion of up to Rs 10 lakh) to registered FPOs, and two, a credit guarantee cover to lending institutions

---

(maximum guarantee cover 85 per cent of loans not exceeding Rs 100 lakh).

➤ The budget for 2018-19 announced supporting measures for FPOs including a five-year tax exemption while the budget for 2019-20 talked of setting up 10,000 more FPOs in the next five years.

➤ **One District One Product Cluster:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare on Tuesday reiterated the importance of FPOs which are to be developed in production clusters, wherein agricultural and horticultural produces are grown/cultivated for leveraging economies of scale and improving market access for members.

  ○ "One District One Product" cluster will promote specialisation and better processing, marketing, branding and export.

➤ **Collective Farming:** FPOs can be used to augment the size of the land by focusing on grouping contiguous tracts of land as far as possible.

  ○ More focus should be on creating a supply chain and find new markets. Women farmers will play a major role in collective farming.

Conclusion

In the last decade, the Centre has encouraged farmer producer organizations (FPOs) to help farmers. While incomes will rise because of the benefits flowing from FPOs, they may not still be adequate to give a reasonable income to small and marginal farmers.

■■■

India's Women and the Workforce

This article is based on "India's women and the workforce" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 08/03/2021. It talks about the declining women's employment in India.

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 2, Salient Features of Indian Society, Role of Women

---

Women's education has increased over the last two decades, and fertility rates have fallen — both have contributed to increasing participation of women in the paid labour force in the world. However, this is not the case in India.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2018-19, the female labour force participation rates (LFPR) among women aged above 15 years are as low as 26.4% in rural areas and 20.4% in urban areas in India.

The pandemic is already worsening the deep inequalities facing women and girls, erasing years of progress towards gender equality.

Both supply and demand factors contribute to the low levels of employment among women — especially the burden of domestic responsibilities, including the reproductive roles played by women, coupled with the lack of adequate and appropriate job opportunities.

Reasons for Declining Women's Employment in India

➢ **Societal Pressure:** Generally there is a fear of women being stigmatized by the community that might see their work as a marker of low status, i.e. the inability of the husband, the main breadwinner, to provide for the family.

❍ Further, there is a rise in conservative attitudes that believe a woman's place is inside the home and kitchen, and that if the woman steps outside the socially approved threshold, it would invite a backlash.

➢ **Growing Informalization of Work:** Over the last three decades, there has been a massive decline in agricultural jobs, which has not necessarily been accompanied by an increase in rural non-farm employment or livelihood opportunities.

❍ There has been movement out of agriculture into informal and casual jobs, where the work is sporadic, and often less than 30 days at a stretch.

➢ **Women's Work Not Being Counted As Work:** There is also the problem of much of women's work not being counted as work.

❍ Data indicate that the decline in LFPRs is driven by women moving from paid to unpaid work and hence not getting counted as "workers", even though they might continue to be involved in unpaid economic work in family enterprises (farming, livestock, kirana shops, handmade products for sale and so on).

➢ **Inadequate Social Security Protection:** Even for women who are in the workforce, the nature of their employment is such that most of them are out of the purview of labour laws, including the recently passed Social Security Code.

❍ This automatically leaves out women in self-employment and those in informal jobs, together constituting more than 90% of the female workforce.

❍ Moreover, with land in agriculture continuing to be mostly in the name of men, women are not even recognized as farmers, although a large proportion of them are involved in agricultural work.

❍ This also keeps women away from accessing various schemes and resources such as priority sector loans, income support cash transfers, and so on.

Way Forward

➢ **Bringing Women in Leadership Role:** Subdued gender participation emanates from social-economic issues, which can be treated by bringing behavioural change. This can be changed if more women are given leadership positions.

❍ Thus, there is a need to ensure equal representation– from company boards to parliaments, from higher education to public institutions -- through special measures and quotas.

➢ **Recognizing Invisible Work:** There is a need to invest significantly in the care economy and social protection, and redefine Gross Domestic Product to make work in the home visible and counted.

➢ **Imbibing Gender Equality:** There is a need to remove barriers to women's full inclusion in the economy, including through access to the labor market, property rights and targeted credit and investments.

❍ Women-oriented government initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN) Scheme, represent steps in the right direction.

➢ **Checking Violence Against Women:** India should enact an emergency response plan to address violence against women and girls, and follow through with funding, policies, and political will to end this scourge.

Conclusion

It is clear that Covid-19 has impacted women's employment even more than that for men. Concerted efforts towards ensuring enabling conditions for women to be employed including transport, safety, women's hostels along with social security provisions for all in the form of maternity benefits and child care arrangements are required for providing a level playing field for women entering the labour market.

■■■

Information Technology Rules, 2021

This article is based on **"The new media rules are a tightening noose"** *which was published in The Hindu on 13/03/2021. It talks about the issues related to recently notified Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.*

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

Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has notified Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These new rules broadly deal with the regulation of social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms and digital news.

These rules seek to provide compliance of law and a grievance redressal mechanism for users of social media platforms, messaging applications, streaming services as also digital news publishers.

The government envisages controlling hate speech which gets proliferated through these platforms and threatens national security. However, critics pointed that the question of stricter regulation of digital media will lead to restriction of free speech and undermining of democracy.

Need for Digital Media Regulation

➢ **Ensuring Compliance to Domestic Laws:** Major digital media platforms operating in India are of foreign origin.
  ○ The rules emphasize the need for these social media intermediaries and online content providers, whether for entertainment or informative purposes, to strictly comply with the Constitution and domestic laws of India.
➢ **Setting Accountability:** It extends its approach to instill a sense of accountability against misuse and abuse by social media users and is the first of its kind to bring social media use under the regulatory framework of the Information Technology Act.
➢ **Bringing Uniformity:** There are many laws to combat unlawful content that are already in place. The recent rules envisage bringing their uniform application.
➢ **Social Imperative:** It lays a special emphasis on the protection of women against the progression of sexual offenses on social media. It also envisages checking the proliferation of fake news and hate speech.

Associated Issues with the Rules

➢ **Distortion of the Idea of Self-regulation:** For digital publishers of news and current affairs as well as video streaming services, a three-tier structure for grievance redressal has been mandated.
  ○ With an inter-ministerial committee of government officials in effect becoming an appellate authority over the self-regulatory exercise.
  ○ This would be self-regulation by the media organization and the industry at the government's pleasure.

Three-Tier Redressal Mechanism

The notified rules set out an elaborate time-bound three-tier process whereby each and every such grievance:

➢ First handled at the level of the portal itself by its own grievance officer.
➢ If not satisfactorily settled, it passes on to the self-regulatory body of the sector or industry.
➢ If yet not resolved, moves further up to an inter-ministerial oversight committee of the central government.

➢ **Compliance Burden:** The sheer process of such grievance handling can impede the operations of a relatively smaller digital venture in the news and current affairs space.
  ○ A measure like this, moreover, jeopardizes the very sustenance of the already financially straitened and functionally beleaguered digital news media.
➢ **Potential Misuse:** Apart from imposing a compliance burden on digital publishers, this also opens the floodgates for all kinds of interventions.
  ○ Any criticism of the ruling party or government could trigger an orchestrated avalanche of grievances.
  ○ This is more worrisome in the already vitiated climate of political and religious majoritarianism.
➢ **Arbitrary Powers:** The notification gives the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, ad hoc emergency powers to block any content the government considers problematic even without such token procedure.
  ○ Also, a negative list of content that shall not be published would be encountered under law as reasonable restrictions to free speech.
➢ **Eroding Pillars of Democracy:** The freedom of the press is an implicitly prescribed fundamental right in the Articles 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. It gives every citizen the right to free speech and expression.
  ○ These freedoms have in practice become constitutive and definitive of the fourth estate in the country.
  ○ As any government presence could have a chilling effect on free speech and conversations, these rules weaken the dynamic relationship of checks and balances vis-à-vis the Media and other three pillars: the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary.
➢ **Problems in Tracking the First Originator:** The rules require messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Signal to trace problematic messages to the originator.
  ○ However, it raises uneasy questions about how such apps will be able to adhere to such orders, as their messages are encrypted end-to-end.

Way Forward

➢ **Deliberating with StakeHolders:** The solution to ongoing criticism about these rules is to start afresh with the publication of a white paper.

  ○ The white paper should clearly outline the harms that are sought to be addressed through regulation of online video streaming platforms and meaningful public consultation which is not limited to industry representatives.

➢ **Statutory Backing:** After that, if regulation is still deemed to be necessary, then it must be implemented through legislation that is debated in Parliament instead of relying upon executive rule-making powers under Section 69A of the IT Act.

➢ **Expediting Data Protection Law:** Making platforms share more information could prove counterproductive in a country where the citizens still do not have a data privacy law to guard themselves against excesses committed by any party.

  ○ In this context, there is a need to expedite the passing of the personal data protection bill, 2019.

Conclusion

Regulation has an important place in a liberal democracy. However, given an environment where people are sensitive to content, the regulatory mechanism with a scope of strong government intervention could become an operational nightmare and hamper creativity & freedom of expression.

∎∎∎

QUAD: First Summit

This article is based on "The rationale and future of Quad" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 14/03/2021. It talks about the significance of the recently concluded Quad Summit.

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

Recently, the leaders of the four nations of Quad grouping met digitally for the first-ever virtual summit-level meeting. The outcomes announced by leaders of Quad countries include a vaccine initiative and joint working groups to cooperate on critical technology as well as climate change.

Apart from it, the joint statement of the meeting called for "The Spirit of the Quad" and commitment to an open Indo-Pacific "free from coercion".

In widening the forum's focus away from military security and towards the provision of public goods in the vast Indo-Pacific littoral, the first summit of the Quad has improved its own long-term political prospects.

Therefore, countering any perception that the Quad is merely a "talk-shop", the summit contained both broad substance and deep symbolism.

Significance of Quad Summit

➢ **America is Back Policy:** For the US, the early push for the Quad engagement is part of Joe Biden's promise that "America is back" in terms of global leadership, reaffirming regional alliances, and taking on the growing challenge from China.

  ○ Earlier, Biden at the Munich Security Conference tried to win back European allies such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, by proposing a transatlantic alliance to counter China.

➢ **Maritime Concerns of Japan & Australia:** Due to maritime tensions with China, trade, and telecommunication issues, Australia and Japan are keen on taking the Quad partnership to deeper levels of cooperation.

  ○ Quad partners such as Japan and Australia were unhappy over India's decision to stay out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

  ○ If Quad emerges as an economic powerhouse, it will be beneficial to the entire region.

➢ **Broadening India's Geopolitical Horizons:** For India, the new terms of the Quad will mean more strategic support after a tense year at the LAC with China.

  ○ It will also provide a boost for India's pharmaceutical prowess, opportunities for technology partnerships, and more avenues for regional cooperation on development projects and financing infrastructure.

  ○ India's insistence on an inclusive approach was in keeping with the sentiments of many smaller countries in the region, which may not take an explicit anti-China position.

  ○ This could also pave the way for India to become the manufacturing destination for Quad countries, thus reducing dependence on China.

➢ **New Narrative for the Quad:** Quad member countries took the decision to pool their resources (American technology, Japanese finance, Indian production capacity, and Australia's logistics capability) to produce a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccine for distribution in the Indo-Pacific.

  ○ Further, the Quad countries agreed to ensure emissions reduction based on the Paris accord as well as cooperate on technology supply chains, 5G networks, and biotechnology.

❍ This would help the four countries develop a new narrative for the Quad.

Associated Issues With the Quad

➢ **RECP Operationalization:** For Japan and Australia, China remains the biggest trading partner, a relationship that will only grow once the 15-nation RCEP gets operationalized.

❍ In this context, it would be difficult for Quad members countries like Japan and Australia to strategically align with the US and India.

➢ **India's Reservations:** India, given its own ties with China, sensitivities over ongoing LAC disengagement talks, and its other multilateral commitments at the BRICS and SCO groupings, also displayed caution in the Quad engagement.

➢ **Anti-China Rhetoric:** Since the first steps towards the Quad's construction in 2007, China has sought to define the regional discourse by describing the forum as the "Asian NATO" and the harbinger of a "new Cold War".

❍ The conflation of the Quad with the annual Malabar naval exercises added to the image of the Quad as a military formation and generated much unease across the Indo-Pacific.

Way Forward

➢ **Need For Clear Vision:** The Quad nations need to better explain the Indo-Pacific Vision in an overarching framework with the objective of advancing everyone's economic and security interests.

❍ This will reassure the littoral States that the Quad will be a factor for the regional benefit, and a far cry from Chinese allegations that it is some sort of a military alliance.

➢ **Expanding Quad:** India has many other partners in the Indo-Pacific, therefore India should pitch for countries like Indonesia, Singapore to be invited to join in the future.

➢ **Need for a Maritime Doctrine:** India should develop a comprehensive vision on the Indo-Pacific which would ideate on the current and future maritime challenges, consolidate its military and non-military tools, engage its strategic partners.

➢ **Recalibration Needed From China:** As the Quad summit has done well to shed the image of Anti-China bais, it is up to China now to rethink its current aggressive policies and seek cooperative relations with its Asian neighbors and the US.

Conclusion

The challenges posed by the pandemic presented a perfect setting for the Quad nations to demonstrate their commitment to the broader agenda that is in tune with the urgent requirements of the region.

■■■

Population Stabilization

This article is based on "What India needs for population stabilisation" which was published in the Indian Express on 16/03/2021. It talks about the associated challenges with population stabilization.

Tags: Indian Society, GS Paper - 1, Population and Associated Issues

National Population Policy, 2000 envisaged achieving a stable population for India. One of its immediate objectives is to address the unmet needs for contraception, health care infrastructure, and personnel and provide integrated service delivery for basic reproductive and child health care.

The National Population Policy 2000 affirmed a commitment to achieve replacement levels of fertility (total fertility rate of 2.1) by 2010. Most of the southern states have controlled their population. However, low socio-economic development in northern and central India has led to population explosion in these regions.

The population explosion would irreversibly impact India's environment and natural resource base and limit the next generation's entitlement and progress. Therefore, the government should take measures to control the population in time.

Need for Population Stabilization

➢ According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates, India's population will reach 1.5 billion by 2030 and hit 1.64 billion in 2050. This would make India become the largest populous country, overtaking China.

➢ At present, India hosts 16% of the world's population with only 2.45% of the global surface area and 4% water resources.

➢ Globally, the debate over population explosion has erupted after recent ecosystem assessments pointed to the human population's role in driving other species into extinction and precipitating a resource crunch.

Associated Challenges With the Population Stabilization

➢ **Level of Education:** Lack of education in women results in their early marriages. Not only does early

marriage increase the likelihood of more children, but it also puts the woman's health at risk.

- o Fertility usually declines with an increase in the education levels of women.

➢ **Socio-economic Factors:** The desire for larger families, particularly preference for a male child, also leads to higher birth rates.

- o One of the reasons for this son-preference is the inheritance law favoring women's rights to ancestral property is far from being implemented.
- o China is already facing a demographic catastrophe because its nearly four-decade-long one-child policy resulted in a strong son preference.

➢ **Inadequate Use of Contraceptive**: Women in rural areas of northern states like UP, Bihar are still giving birth to four or more children. This is because the contraceptive prevalence rate is less than 10%.

- o In many districts, women do not use modern family planning methods and rely on traditional contraception methods.

➢ **Emergence of Son of Soil Narrative:** Southern states that have achieved population stabilization now face the issue of the elderly will start outstripping the working-age population.

- o Initially, it was thought that younger people from the Central-Northern states might fill the growing gap in services.
- o However, with the emergence of growing resistance to people from northern states working in southern states, such prospects appear to be increasingly uncertain.

➢ **Politics of Population Stabilization:** The Constitution (84th Amendment) Act 2002, extended the freeze on the state-wise allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to 2026. It was expected to serve as a motivational measure to pursue population stabilization.

- o However, this goal has not been achieved as the population in northern states continued to rise.
- o Now, in the absence of a further extension, it will be politically destabilizing.

Way Forward

➢ **Adopting Women-Centric Approach:** Population stabilization isn't only about controlling population growth but also entails gender parity. A balanced sex ratio is essential to secure social cohesion.

- o Therefore, the state needs a women-centric approach wherein they incentivize later marriages and childbirths, make contraception easy for women and promote women's labor force participation.

➢ **Switching to Modern Contraceptives:** Action to prevent unwanted pregnancies, particularly in northern states is urgently required. The over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception needs to be swiftly replaced with reliable and easy alternatives.

- o In this context, India can learn from its neighborhood. Indonesia and Bangladesh introduced injectable contraceptives right from the late 1980s.
- o Once executed properly, one jab renders protection from pregnancy for three months. ASHA workers can help immensely in this regard.

➢ **Emulating the Success of Southern States:** When fertility reduction in the five southern states succeeded, it overturns the conventional wisdom that literacy, education, and development are prerequisites for populations to stabilize.

- o The simple explanation is that fertility decline was achieved because southern governments proactively urged families to have only two children, followed by sterilization immediately after that.
- o Almost the entire state apparatus was marshaled to achieve this objective. The northern states need to adopt this approach.
- o Further, national and state policies emphasize male vasectomy which is much safer than female sterilization.

Conclusion

The population stabilization difference between the southern and northern states is becoming disproportionately skewed. In such a scenario, demographics will eclipse economic growth and destroy the gains from a young populace.

Thus, the long-term policy requires a stable population consistent with the requirements of sustainable economic growth, social development, and environmental protection.

■■■

Ethical Challenges Posed By AI

This article is based on "Responsible AI — the need for ethical guard rails" which was published in The Hindu on 17/03/2021. It talks about the Ethical challenges associated with Artificial Intelligence.

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

In just the last decade, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved at an unprecedented pace. It has already helped increase crop yields, raised business productivity,

improved access to credit and made disease detection faster and more precise.

More importantly, the more we use AI, the more data we generate, the smarter it gets. And as these systems become more capable, our world becomes more efficient and consequently richer.

It could contribute more than $15 trillion to the world economy by 2030, adding 14% to global GDP. A study published in Nature reviewing the impact of AI on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finds that AI may act as an enabler on 134 — or 79% — of all SDG targets.

However, just as AI has the potential to improve billions of lives, it can also replicate and exacerbate existing problems, and create new ones.

Ethical Challenges Associated with AI

➢ **Risk of Unemployment:** The hierarchy of labour is concerned primarily with automation. Robotics and AI companies are building intelligent machines that perform tasks typically carried out by low-income workers: 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.

➢ **Exacerbating Inequalities:** Using artificial intelligence, a company can drastically cut down on relying on the human workforce, and this means that revenues will go to fewer people.

  ○ Consequently, individuals who have ownership in AI-driven companies will make all the money. Also, AI could compound digital exclusion.

  ○ Further, investment is likely to shift to countries where AI-related work is already established, widening gaps among and within countries.

  ○ Therefore, without clear policies on reskilling workers, the promise of new opportunities will in fact create serious new inequalities.

➢ **Tech Addiction:** Technological addiction is the new frontier of human dependency. AI has already become effective at directing human attention and triggering certain actions.

  ○ When used right, this could evolve into an opportunity to nudge society towards more beneficial behavior.

  ○ However, in the wrong hands, it could prove detrimental.

➢ **Discriminating Robots:** We shouldn't forget that AI systems are created by humans, who can be biased and judgemental.

  ○ It can lead AI facial recognition and surveillance technology to discriminate against people of color and minorities.

➢ **Data Privacy Concerns:** AI also presents serious data privacy concerns. The algorithm's never-ending quest for data has led to our digital footprints being harvested and sold without our knowledge or informed consent.

  ○ The case of Cambridge Analytica, in which such algorithms and big data were used to alter voting decisions, should serve as a potent warning of the individual and societal concerns resulting from current AI business models.

➢ **AI Turning Against Humans:** What if artificial intelligence itself turned against humans?

  ○ Imagine an AI system that is asked to eradicate cancer in the world. After a lot of computing, it spits out a formula that does, in fact, bring about the end of cancer – by killing everyone on the planet.

Way Forward

➢ **Whole of Society Approach:** Many countries, including India, are cognizant of the opportunities and the risks, and are striving to strike the right balance between AI promotion and AI governance — both for the greater public good.

  ○ NITI Aayog's Responsible AI for All strategy, the culmination of a year-long consultative process, is a case in point.

  ○ It recognizes that our digital future cannot be optimized for good without multi-stakeholder governance structures that ensure the dividends are fair, inclusive, and just.

  ○ In this scenario, a "whole of society" approach to AI governance will enable us to develop broad-based ethical principles, cultures, and codes of conduct.

  ○ So that societal trust can be developed for AI to flourish and bring about the extraordinary breakthroughs it promises.

➢ **Whole of World Approach:** Given the global reach of AI, such a "whole of society" approach must rest on a "whole of world" approach.

  ○ The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation is a good starting point.

    • It lays out the need for multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation so AI is used in a manner that is "trustworthy, human rights-based, safe and sustainable, and promotes peace".

  ○ Similarly, UNESCO has developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to the Member States for deliberation and adoption.

Conclusion

Just as electricity allowed us to tame time, enabling us to radically alter virtually every aspect of existence, AI can leapfrog us toward eradicating hunger, poverty and disease — opening up new and hitherto unimaginable pathways for climate change mitigation, education and scientific discovery.

However, without ethical guard rails, AI will widen social and economic schisms, amplifying any innate biases at an irreversible scale and rate and lead to discriminatory outcomes.

■■■

BrahMos' Export

This article is based on "Aligning a missile deal with destination Manila" which was published in The Hindu on 18/03/2021. It talks about the recent India-Philippines deal for the export of BrahMos cruise missiles.

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

Recently, India and the Philippines have signed the "Implementing Arrangement" for "procurement of defense material and equipment procurement". This agreement lays the groundwork for the highly anticipated export of the BrahMos cruise missile, through the government-to-government route.

Apart from this, India is in advanced talks with several countries like Vietnam, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Indonesia, and South Africa to sell them the BrahMos missile system.

Exporting the BrahMos missile system will be of great significance, as it would boost the credibility of India as a defense exporter, help it meet the target of $5 billion in defense exports by 2025, and elevate its stature as a regional superpower. However, there are many challenges that lie ahead.

About BrahMos

➢ Research and development of the BrahMos cruise missile systems began in the late 1990s.

➢ Manufactured by BrahMos Aerospace Limited, a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organisation and Russia's Military Industrial Consortium NPO Mashinostroyenia.

➢ This is the first supersonic cruise missile to enter service.

➢ It is capable of attaining a speed of Mach 2.8 (almost three times the speed of sound), it has a range of at least 290 km (a new version can reach up to 400km).

➢ Traveling with such velocity means that it would be difficult for air defense systems utilizing surface-to-air missiles to intercept the BrahMos.

➢ Early naval and land variants of the BrahMos were inducted into service by the Indian Navy in 2005 and the Indian Army in 2007.

➢ Subsequently, an air-launched variant was successfully tested in November 2017 by the Indian Air Force from its Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jet, giving the missile a dominating presence in all three domains.

➢ Further, efforts to increase the speed and range of the missile in its next iterations are underway, with a goal of achieving hypersonic speeds (at or above Mach 5) and a maximum range of 1,500 km.

➢ These advanced and powerful capabilities of the BrahMos not only augment the strength of the Indian military but make it a highly desirable product for other countries to procure as well.

Significance of the BrahMos' Export

➢ **Stronger Indo-Pacific Presence:** The implications of the Philippines becoming the first country to import the BrahMos would be wide-ranging and consequential in the Indo-Pacific.

○ Also, concluding stronger defense relationships with the U.S., Japan, and ASEAN countries actually put India on a stronger footing in its dealings with China.

➢ **Tackling China's Military Assertiveness:** India's decision to sell the BrahMos missile system to ASEAN countries like the Philippines and Vietnam reflects concerns about China's growing military assertiveness in its neighborhood.

○ Further, India tries to answer China in its own language, as China provides military assistance to India's arch-rival Pakistan and threatens India by docking its submarines in Sri Lanka.

➢ **Expanding India's Geopolitical Horizons:** The BrahMos export will boost India's economic, soft, and hard power profile in the region and provide the Indo-Pacific with a strong and dependable anchor with which they can protect their sovereignty and territory.

➢ **Shift from Importer to Exporter:** Selling the supersonic BrahMos missile would mark a shift for India, which is till now one of the world's biggest arms importer, to establishing itself as a major defense exporter.

○ Further, it will help in making the country 'Atmanirbhar' in the defense manufacturing sector, shore up partners' defenses, and boost revenues.

○ In the present scenario, India accounts for 0.2% of the share of global arms exports during

2016-20, making the country the world's 24th largest exporter of major arms.

Challenges Associated With Export of BrahMos

➢ **CAATSA:** BrahMos export remains hostage to unresolved concerns over the US's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions or CAATSA.

    ❍ The United States, of which India is a major defense partner, has maintained ambiguity over whether it will introduce sanctions over India's acquisition of the S-400, licensed production of the AK-203 assault rifle, and export of the BrahMos.

> **Note:**
> ➢ So far, Turkey and China have been penalized under CAATSA for purchasing the S-400 Triumf air defense systems from Russia.
> ➢ NPO Mashinostroyenia is one of the listed Russian entities.
> ➢ And since 65% of the components, including the ramjet engine and radar seeker used in the BrahMos, are reportedly provided by NPO Mashinostroyenia, the export of the missile systems may attract sanctions.

➢ **Russia-China Defense Cooperation:** Post-Crimea annexation Russia has looked to improve relations with China.

    ❍ Currently, Russia is even helping China develop a missile-attack warning system that only Russia and the US have, among other joint projects of huge strategic significance.

    ❍ Thus, Russia-China strategic relations may come in the way of BrahMos missile export.

➢ **Financing:** Ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries which are interested in the BrahMos would find it difficult to purchase it.

Way Forward

➢ **Engaging With US on CAATSA:** Some analysts believe that CAATSA, which otherwise has had little or no impact on Russia, is being 'leveraged' by the US to 'persuade' India to import additional military equipment from the US.

    ❍ Further, BrahMos export to ASEAN countries can help contain a confrontational China. Thus, India should negotiate with the new US administration to receive a waiver from CAATSA.

➢ **Providing a Line of Credit:** The cost of the systems has been a major hurdle in moving forward to reach a deal with the Philippines. To remedy this, India has offered a $100 million line of credit.

➢ **Indigenous Defense Production:** The joint-venture development of BrahMos may pose issues in its exports.

    ❍ Therefore, if India wants to become a major defense exporter, it should strive to achieve indigenization of defense technology.

Conclusion

With India determined to develop itself as a hub of defense manufacturing, how it handles the sale of the BrahMos would be an important factor in its potential emergence as a net provider of regional security in the Indo-Pacific.

■■■

Lateral Entry Reform

This article is based on "Lateral Entry: A challenging administrative reform" which was published in The Indian Express on 19/03/2021. It talks about the lateral entry of the private sector into administrative positions.

> **Tags:** Governance, GS Paper - 2, Role of Civil Services in a Democracy

Recently, eight professionals were recruited for joint secretary-level positions in various ministries under the lateral entry scheme. Lateral entry means when personnel from the private sector are selected to an administrative post of the government despite them not being selected in or being part of a bureaucratic setup.

Lateral entry is needed because contemporary times require highly skilled and motivated individuals at the helm of administrative affairs, without which public service delivery mechanisms do not work smoothly.

However, the success of lateral entry hinges entirely on how it is designed.

Permanent System of Administrators

➢ In the permanent system, IAS officers get promoted to joint secretary level after 17 years of service and remain at that level for ten years.

➢ Joint Secretaries are at a crucial level of senior management in the Government of India and lead policymaking as well as the implementation of various programs and schemes for the department assigned to them.

➢ The joint secretary-level is usually filled by officers selected through the Civil Services Examination conducted by Union Public Service Commission.

➢ The IAS and permanent system are strictly seniority-bound — nobody gets promoted ahead of time.

➢ That makes the average age of a joint secretary around 45.

Advantages of Lateral Entry

➢ **Need for Specialized Knowledge:** Governance is becoming more and more complex requiring specialized skills. For example, increasing penetration of data dominance in our lives.

○ Generalist officers cannot be always expected to be up-to-date with specialized knowledge.

○ Therefore, people with expertise and specialist domain knowledge are required to navigate the complex needs of present-day administrative challenges.

➢ **Filling The Gap**: According to Department of Personnel and Training data, there is a shortage of about 1500 IAS officers. Lateral entry can help bridge this deficit.

➢ **Bringing a Change in Work Culture**: It will help in bringing change in bureaucratic culture in Government sector culture. This bureaucratic culture is criticized for red-tapism, rule-book bureaucracy, and status-quoist.

○ Lateral Entry helps in bringing the values of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the Government sector. It will help in building a culture of performance within the Government sector.

➢ **Participatory Governance:** Presently, governance is becoming a more participatory and multi-actor endeavor. In this context, the lateral entry provides stakeholders such as the private sector and non-profits an opportunity to participate in the governance process.

Agruments Aginst Lateral Entry

➢ **Outsourcing Expertise:** There is a difference between bringing expertise and being part of the decision-making process.

○ For bringing expertise, the government doesn't strictly need to hire private-sector personnel. Expertise is widely available and used by almost every ministry — expert committees, consultations, think tank engagements, etc.

➢ **Cumbersome Decision-Making Process:** The success of lateral entry requires an understanding of the system and an ability to work with the "permanent" establishment. No training or orientation is provided for this.

○ By the time networks are built, it is time to move on. On past evidence, the lateral entrants who made the biggest impact are those who served in the system for a length of time and at different levels

➢ **Profit Motive vs. Public Service:** Private sector approach is profit-oriented on the other hand motive of the Government is public service.

○ This is also a fundamental transition that a private sector person has to make while working in government.

➢ **Conflict of Interest:** Hiring of the private sector into administrative positions raises issues of potential conflict of interest.

○ This issue requires a stringent code of conduct for entrants from private sectors to ensure conflict of interest is not detrimental to the public good.

Way Forward

➢ **Setting Objective Criteria:** There are several joint secretaries in each ministry who handle different portfolios. If lateral entrants are assigned to an unimportant portfolio, there are chances that they will not be motivated.

○ A cursory look at the portfolios of the eight laterally-hired joint secretaries doesn't suggest that they hold critical portfolios. That's why one entrant has already quit.

○ Thus, what key skills, qualities, and experiences a particular role requires must be objectively decided.

➢ **Relaxing Age Barrier**: To attract the best talent from outside at the joint secretary level, entry requirements need to be relaxed so that persons of 35 years of age are eligible.

○ If one looks at lateral entry in an earlier generation, among economists, there was much greater flexibility.

○ The likes of Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Bimal Jalan and Vijay Kelkar were joint secretaries in their mid-30s and secretaries by their late 40s or by 50.

○ That is one of the reasons they left lucrative assignments abroad.

➢ **Need for the Transparent Process:** The key again to the success of this scheme would lie in selecting the right people in a manner that is manifestly transparent.

○ The constitutional role of UPSC should not be ignored as it will provide legitimacy to the entire process of selection

➢ **Training of Lateral Entrants:** An intensive training program for entrants from the private sector to civil services needs to be formulated which helps them understand the complex nature of work in Government.

Conclusion

Lateral entry, like competition in any sphere, is a good thing. But serious thinking is required on entry requirements, job assignments, number of personnel, and training to make it a force for positive change. Apart from it, reforms of the "permanent" system — particularly its seniority principle — are also a prerequisite for holistic administrative reforms.

■■■

Union vs. Delhi Government

This article is based on "Delhi Bill will sow the seeds of absolutism" which was published in The Indian Express on 22/03/2021. It talks about the issues related to the recently introduced **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021.**

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Co-operative Federalism, Constitutional Amendments

Recently, the Centre government proposed a Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the parliament. According to the central government, the bill seeks to amend the law relating to the running of the National Capital Territory of Delhi and give effect to the interpretation given by the Supreme Court judgments on Delhi's governance structure.

However, many constitutional experts are of the view that the proposed bill is the very antithesis of what the Court has said. They held that the Bill, if it becomes law, will wholly undermine the Court's efforts to strengthen the elected government vis-à-vis the appointed Lieutenant Governor.

Major Amendments Proposed

➢ **Change in Definition of Government:** It defines the term "government" in the context of laws made by the legislative assembly to be the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) of Delhi, not the elected government.

➢ **Expanding Powers of L-G**: It expands L-G's powers by requiring the elected government to seek L-G's opinion on specific matters. Furter, it is left to L-G to define these "matters" through a general or specific order.

➢ **Weakens Legislative Assembly:** It weakens the powers of the assembly by prohibiting it from making rules for its committees on day-to-day administration.

Supreme Court on Delhi Governance Structure

Background: The 69th amendment to the Constitution of India inserted **Article 239AA,** which declared the Union Territory of Delhi to be administered by a L-G who works on 'aid and advice of elected legislative assembly.

➢ However, the 'aid and advice' clause pertains only to matters on which the elected Assembly has powers under the State and Concurrent Lists, but with the exception of **public order, police, and land.**

➢ Further, the Article 239AA also notes that L-G has to either act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, or he is bound to implement the decision taken by the President on a reference being made by him.

➢ Also, Article 239AA, empowers the L-G to refer a difference of opinion on 'any matter' with the Council of Ministers to the President.

➢ Thus, this dual control between L-G and the elected government leads to power tussle, which was referred to the Supreme Court in 2018.

Supreme Court Judgement: The Constitution Bench verdict of July 4, 2018, held that the L-G has not been entrusted with any independent decision-making power.

➢ The Court clarified that the power to refer "any matter" to the President did not mean that "every matter".

➢ In other words, the LG cannot refer any matter to the President; he has to employ "constitutional objectivity" and exercise this power in the rarest of rare situations for sound and valid reasons.

➢ Thus, his concurrence is not needed in every matter, and he can refer matters to the President only in exceptional situations and not in a "routine or mechanical manner".

Note:

➢ Justice Chandrachud in NCT vs UOI case, 2018 mentioned the term **"constitutional objectivity"** as the key to checks and balances between the legislature and executive.

➢ Constitutional objectivity ensures that the two operate within their allotted spheres since "legitimate constitutional trust" is based on distribution and separation of powers with denial of absolute power to anyone functionary being the ultimate goal.

Arguments Against the Bill

➢ **Against the Spirit of Supreme Court Judgement:** The Bill seeks to declare that in the context of legislation passed by the Delhi Assembly, all references to the 'government' would mean the "Lieutenant Governor".

  ○ The guiding principle behind the judgment was that the elected government should not be undermined by the unelected administrator. The Bill takes away almost all the powers of elected representatives.

  ○ Thereby, the bill contradicts the 2018 judgment, which unambiguously clarifies that the council of ministers with the chief minister at its helm is the executive head of the government of Delhi.

➢ **Rollback of Representative Government:** By conflating the government of Delhi with L-G, the bill blurs the distinction between the elected government and L-G.

  ○ Further, by requiring L-G's opinion before the elected government can take executive action, it effectively renders the elected government powerless.

  ○ Moreover, the clause that declares void any rule

that empowers the Assembly or its Committees to discuss any matter of day-to-day administration or conduct enquiries amounts to a rollback of representative government.

➤ **Centralising India's Federal Polity:** Recently, the central government has taken several steps that undermines the spirit of federalism (Three Farmers' laws, Revocation of Article 370, etc.). The bill represents yet another step toward centralizing India's federal polity.

   ❍ A recent report held that such bills could strengthen the international perception of India becoming an electoral autocracy.

Way Forward

➤ **Working Through Constitutional Trust:** The apex court had rightly concluded that the scheme set out in the Constitution and the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 envisages a collaborative structure that can be worked only through constitutional trust.

   ❍ Thus, the Bill should be referred to a select committee and not passed in haste like the Farm Bills.

   ❍ Evolving consensus in such matters would be consistent both with federalism as well as the high principles laid down by the Supreme Court.

➤ **Ensuring Principle of Subsidiarity:** Subsidiarity – the foundational principle of fiscal federalism – necessitates empowered sub-national governments.

   ❍ Thereby, the central government should move towards allocating greater powers to city governments.

   ❍ In this context, India should emulate several large megapolis around the globe, from Jakarta and Seoul to London and Paris, which have had strong sub-national governments.

Conclusion

The fundamental principles of constitutionalism embodies the concept of limited powers as its central idea. To sustain these ethos the highest importance should be given to people who are the real sovereigns and who speak through their elected representatives.

■■■

Unpaid Work

This article is based on "How to treat unpaid work" which was published in The Hindu on 22/03/2021. It talks about the issues related to the high burden of unpaid domestic work and care work in India.

Tags: Social justice, GS Paper - 2, Salient Features of Indian Society, Role of Women

Women bear a disproportionately high burden of unpaid domestic work and care work in India. They carry a disproportionately higher burden of unpaid work, namely, unpaid domestic services as well as unpaid care of children, the old, and the disabled for their respective households.

Women do this job not necessarily because they like it or are efficient in it, but because it is imposed on them by patriarchal norms, which are the roots of all-pervasive gender inequalities.

Though this work contributes to overall well-being at the household level and collectively at the national level, it is invisible in the national database and particularly in national policies. By excluding this work from the economy, macroeconomics shows a clear male bias.

Therefore, in order to adhere to the principle of gender equality and justice, it is imperative to recognize this unpaid work and make provisions to rectify this problem.

Need to Recognise Unpaid Work

➤ **Restricting Opportunities:** The invisible labor that a woman puts into household work is a 24-hour job without remuneration, promotions, or retirement benefits. Further, it restricts opportunities for women in the economy and in life.

   ❍ It is due to this **female labor force participation rate** in India is around 25%.

➤ **Linkage with Economy:** The household produces goods and services for its members, and if GDP is a measure of the total production and consumption of the economy, it has to incorporate this work by accepting the household as a sector of the economy.

   ❍ Unpaid work is a privately produced public good that is critical for the sustenance of the mainstream economy.

➤ **Subsidizes Private Sector:** At the macro level, unpaid work subsidizes the private sector by providing it a generation of workers (human capital) and takes care of the wear and tear of labor who are family members.

➤ **Subsidizes Government:** Similarly, unpaid work also subsidizes the government by taking care of the old, sick, and disabled. The state would have spent huge amounts in the absence of unpaid work.

Challenges in Compensating Unpaid Work

➤ **Implementation Issue:** The Economic Survey 2019 recognizes this unpaid work, is a positive development. However, its implementation may create problems

such as the affordability of the government and calculation of the amounts.

➢ **Endorsing Norm of Women's Work:** Paying monetary benefits carries with it the possible danger of formally endorsing the social norm that domestic and care work is 'women's work', for which they are being paid.

➢ **Master-Servant Relationship:** The term salary, wage, or compensation is indeed problematic as it indicates an employer-employee relationship, i.e., a relationship of subordination with the employer having disciplinary control over the employee.

Way Forward

Public policy should aim at closing the huge gender gap in unpaid domestic and care work through 'recognition, reduction, and redistribution.

➢ **Recognition:** Paying a wage is a formal recognition of the fact that unpaid domestic and care work is no less important than paid market work, as the latter is parasitic on the former.

  ❍ What governments could do is recognize this unpaid work in the national database by a sound time-use survey and use the data in national policies.

➢ **Reduction:** Women's burden of unpaid work can be reduced by:

  ❍ Improving technology (e.g. better fuel for cooking),

  ❍ Better infrastructure (e.g. water at the doorstep),

  ❍ Shifting some unpaid work to the mainstream economy (e.g. childcare, care of the disabled, and care of the chronically sick),

  ❍ Making basic services (e.g. health and transportation) accessible to women.

➢ **Redistribution:** Policy measures should also envisage redistributing the work between men and women by providing different incentives and disincentives to men (e.g. mandatory training of men in housework, childcare, etc.) and financial incentives for sharing housework.

  ❍ These measures will give free time to women and open up new opportunities to them.

  ❍ Further, payment of pension to old women (60+ years) may be a better idea to compensate them for their unpaid work.

Conclusion

In order to reduce women's burden of unpaid work and tap their potential in development, there is an urgent need to expand the purview of economics not only for gender justice but mainly for moving towards realistic economics.

■■■

Pros & Cons of Bad Bank

This article is based on "Bad bank, good move" which was published in The Indian Express on 23/03/2021. It talks about the pros and cons of a bad bank.

Tags: Social justice, GS Paper - 2, Salient Features of Indian Society, Role of Women

For a banking sector-dependent economy like India, the good health of the banks is very important to ensure accessible financial services and flow of credit to support the growing economy. However, for many years, Indian banks have been dealing with the NPA crisis that has created problems for them and the entire economy.

Further, the economic fallout due to the coronavirus crisis has increased the banking sector's stress. Therefore, to restore banks' health, the Budget 2021 has proposed one such measure i.e. the idea of setting up a National bad bank. However, the idea of a bad bank is itself much debatable.

What is a Bad Bank

➢ A bad bank is an entity that acts as an aggregator of bad loans or non-performing assets (NPA's) and purchases them from across the banking sector at a discounted price and then works towards their recovery and resolution.

➢ These loans are classified as non-performing and are at the verge of or already in the state of default. These bad loans negatively impact a bank's balance sheet.

➢ The bad bank is similar to an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), where they absorb these loans from the banks and then manage them to recover as much amount as possible.

Proposed Model for Bad Bank

The budget 2021 proposed an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC)-Asset Management Company (AMC) structure, wherein the ARC will aggregate the debt, while the AMC will act as a resolution manager.

➢ The proposed structure envisages the setting up of a National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARC) to acquire stressed assets in an aggregated manner from lenders, which will be resolved by the National Asset Management Company (NAMC).

➢ A skilled and professional set-up dedicated to Stressed Asset Resolution will be ably supported by attracting institutional funding in stressed assets through strategic investors, AIFs, special situation funds, stressed asset funds, etc for participation in the resolution process.

➢ Further, transferring these stressed assets to bad banks will entail recovery of 15% in cash and 85%

in sovereign guaranteed security receipts. This government guarantees but will carry a zero-risk weight, for a specified period of time.

➤ The net effect of this approach would be to build an open architecture and a vibrant market for stressed assets.

Arguments For Bad Banks

➤ **Providing Lending Leverage to Banks:** The benefits of bad bank include the recovered value, and significant lending leverage because of three factors:

❍ Capital being freed up from less than fully provisioned bad assets.

❍ Capital freed up from security receipts because of a sovereign guarantee.

❍ Cash receipts that come back to the banks and can be leveraged for lending, also freeing up provisions from the balance sheet.

➤ **International Precedent:** There are several international success stories of a bad bank accomplishing its mission and there is no reason to believe why India cannot accomplish its objective.

❍ The US implemented the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) after the 2008 financial crisis, which helped the US economy after the subprime crisis.

❍ It was modeled around the idea of a bad bank.

➤ **Revival of Credit Flow Post-Covid:** Some experts believe that a bad bank can help free capital of over ₹5 lakh crore that is locked in by banks as provisions against the bad loans.

Arguments Against a Bad Bank

➤ **Not a Panacea:** It is argued that creating a bad bank is just shifting the problem from one place to another.

❍ Without fundamental reforms to solve the NPA problem, the bad bank is likely to become a warehouse for bad loans without any recovery taking place.

➤ **Tight Fiscal Position:** Furthermore, an important concern is regarding mobilizing capital for the bad bank. In an economy hit by the pandemic, it is hard to find buyers for distressed assets and the Government is also in a tight fiscal position.

➤ **No Clear Procedure:** Also, there is no clear procedure to determine at what price and which loans should be transferred to the bad bank. This may create political challenges for the Government.

➤ **Moral Hazard:** Former Governor of the reserve bank, Raghuram Rajan believes that setting a bad bank may also create moral hazard problems among the banks that would enable them to continue with their reckless lending practices, further exacerbating the NPA problem.

Conclusion

So long as Public sector banks managements remain beholden to politicians and bureaucrats, their deficit in professionalism will remain and subsequently, prudential norms in lending will continue to suffer.

Therefore, a bad bank is a good idea, but the main challenge lies with tackling the underlying structural problems in the banking system and making reforms to improve the public sector banks.

■■■

Road Ahead For India's Climate Politics

This article is based on "Proposing a new climate agenda for India" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 23/03/2021. It talks about the road ahead for India in achieving the net-zero emissions target.

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

The year 2021 is an important year for global climate change negotiations, as Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will release its report this year, updated national pledges on emission limits are expected at a climate Conference of Parties in the United Kingdom (UK), and Joe Biden-led United States (US) has promised to rejoin Paris climate deal.

Also, India has recently pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This pledge will earn India diplomatic credit by assuming climate leadership. However, these diplomatic gains could come at the cost of domestic developmental objectives.

This is because without dramatic changes in policy and technology, India, at least, needs the option of increasing emissions to develop. Therefore, the trick for India is to focus on squeezing more development out of less carbon.

Challenges For India At Global Climate Politics

➤ **More Likely To Miss Target:** Analysis by the International Energy Agency illustrates the scale of change — an immediate and dramatic shift is required to shift Indian emissions from stated policies to sustainable development.

❍ Further, this dramatic shift would still only get us to net-zero by 2065; 2050 would be even harder.

○ Also, net-zero emissions targets may not be able to meet, because they rely on future promises rather than current action, and on uncertain technologies to remove greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere.

➢ **Silo-Based Climate Decisions:** India's climate governance structure is designed for silo-based decisions, whereas the climate crisis requires cross-sectoral collaboration.

○ For example, electricity decisions may be tied to decisions on urban policy, transport systems, and building design. However, cross-sectional collaboration is still lacking in India's policymaking.

➢ **Fossil-Fuels Needed for Development:** If India wants to achieve the net-zero target, its emissions would have to decline to start now, and never again reach levels achieved in 2019.

○ However, India's greenhouse gas emissions are growing, and, because complex energy and economic systems take time to turn around, will grow for some time.

○ Further, limiting emissions from industry is a longer-term prospect because technologies are nascent, and will require international collaboration for new technology and approaches.

Way Forward

➢ **Sectoral Transition Plans:** Rather than a broad ambitious target, there is a need to identify and build a future pledge around sectoral transition plans for key areas of the economy.

○ Attention to sectoral transitions likely sends a clearer and more direct signal to the private sector on the need to shift investment patterns than does a broad and diffuse economy-wide net-zero target.

○ For example, to accelerate the electricity sector transition requires fixing distribution companies, transitioning from coal while protecting coal communities, and enhancing investment in renewable energy investments.

➢ **Strengthening Climate Governance:** India needs to build and strengthen its domestic institutions for climate governance. This will require identifying linkages between development needs and low carbon opportunities. In this context, a climate law can be useful.

➢ **Reaffirming CBDR**: In this upcoming climate change negotiations, India needs to reaffirm the long-standing principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" (CBDR) that requires richer countries to lead and argue against any pledge that risks prematurely limiting Indian energy use for development.

Conclusion

The Indian road to leadership should be based on specific near-term actions, institutional strengthening, and a combination of mid-and long-term targets. Longer-term targets, including net-zero, can, and should, be clarified and strengthened as we learn by doing overtime, as part of our transition to a low carbon future.

■■■

Electoral Bonds & Its Issues

This article is based on "Here is why the electoral bonds scheme must go" which was published in The Hindu on 26/03/2021. It talks about the associated issues with the electoral bonds.

Tags: Governance, GS Paper - 2, Representation of People's Act, Judiciary

In less than three years of their introduction, by virtue of the anonymity they offer to donors, electoral bonds have become the most popular route of political donation.

However, many political experts are of the opinion that electoral bonds in their design and operation, allow for limitless and anonymous corporate donations to political parties. This violates the basic tenets of India's democracy by keeping the knowledge of the 'right to know' from citizens and voters.

Due to this, in the wake of the upcoming State elections, the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) has filed a petition in the Supreme Court, seeking a stay in the electoral bond. The Supreme Court has reserved orders on the question of whether or not to stay the electoral bond scheme.

Associated Challenges With The Electoral Bonds

➢ **A Blow to Democracy:** Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the Union government has exempted political parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds.

○ This means the voters will not know which individual, company, or organization has funded which party, and to what extent.

○ However, in a representative democracy, citizens cast their votes for the people who will represent them in Parliament and have the right to do so on the basis of full and complete information.

➢ **Compromising Right To Know:** The Indian Supreme Court has long held that the "right to know", especially in the context of elections, is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression under the Indian Constitution.

○ By keeping this knowledge from citizens and voters, the electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy.

➤ **Against Free & Fair Elections:** While electoral bonds provide no details to the citizens, the said anonymity does not apply to the government of the day, which can always access the donor details by demanding the data from the State Bank of India (SBI).

○ This implies that the government in power can leverage this information and disrupt free and fair elections.

➤ **Opposition by Election Commission of India:** The Election Commission, in May 2017, objected to the amendments in the Representation of the People (RP) Act, which exempt political parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds.

○ It described the move as a "retrograde step".

➤ **Institutionalizing Corruption:** The electoral bonds scheme removes all pre-existing limits on political donations and effectively allows well-resourced corporations to fund elections and subsequently paving the way for crony capitalism.

○ Further, as the electoral bonds scheme allows even foreign donations to political parties (which can often be made through shell companies) the prospects of institutional corruption increase with the electoral bonds scheme, instead of decreasing.

Way Forward

➤ **Transparency in Elections Funding:** 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.

➤ **Judiciary Acting as an Umpire:** One of the most critical functions of an independent judiciary in a functioning democracy is to referee the fundamentals of the democratic process.

○ Electoral bonds have raised questions on the electoral legitimacy of the government and thus the whole electoral process has become questionable.

○ In this context, the courts should act as an umpire and enforce the ground rules of democracy.

➤ **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

It is essential that if democracy is to thrive, the role of money in influencing politics ought to be limited. Thus, it is imperative that the scheme of the electoral bonds should be revised.

■■■

Parliamentary Committees

This article is based on "Restoring the broken oversight mechanisms of Parliament" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 26/03/2021. It talks about the significance of the parliamentary committees.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Parliament, Indian Constitution

India's Parliament recently passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which significantly alters the way the government in New Delhi functions. Despite the nature of the sweeping changes this bill proposed, it was not sent to a parliamentary committee.

In a parliamentary democracy, the bills of such significance are sent to parliamentary committees for closer scrutiny. However, 71% of the bills went to parliamentary committees between 2009 and 2014, and this dipped to only 25% between 2014 and 2019.

Sidelining parliamentary committees is increasingly becoming the norm in India. But, given the significance of the parliamentary committee system in democracy, it needs to be strengthened rather than rendered defunct.

Significance of the Parliamentary Committees

➤ **Provides Legislative Expertise:** Most MPs are not subject matter experts on the topics being discussed — they are generalists who understand the pulse of the people but rely on advice from experts and stakeholders before making decisions.

○ Parliamentary committees are meant to help MPs seek expertise and give them time to think about issues in detail.

➤ **Acting as a Mini-Parliament:** These committees act as a mini-parliament, as they have MPs representing different parties are elected into them through a system of the single transferable vote, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament.

➤ **Instrument for Detailed Scrutiny:** When bills are referred to these committees, they are examined

closely and inputs are sought from various external stakeholders, including the public.

➤ **Provides a Check on the Government:** Although committee recommendations are not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations that took place and put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.

   ○ By virtue of being closed-door and away from the public eye, discussions in committee meetings are also more collaborative, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.

Sidelining of Parliamentary Committee: Issues

➤ **Weakening of Parliamentary System Government:** A parliamentary democracy works on the doctrine of fusion of powers between parliament and the executive, but the Parliament is supposed to maintain oversight of the government and keep its power in check.

   ○ Thus, by circumventing the Parliamentary committees in the passing of significant legislation, there is a risk of weakening democracy.

➤ **Enforcing Brute Majority:** In the Indian system, it is not mandatory for bills to be sent to committees. It's left to the discretion of the Chair — the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and Chairperson in the Rajya Sabha.

   ○ By giving discretionary power to the Chair, the system has been specially rendered weak in a Lok Sabha where the ruling party has a brute majority.

Way Forward

➤ **Making Discussion Mandatory:** In countries such as Sweden and Finland, all bills are sent to committees. In Australia, a selection of bills committee, which includes members from the Opposition, is tasked with identifying the bills that should go to committees.

   ○ It is perhaps time for India to mandate a similar requirement to avail the benefits of the committee system that have been taken for granted so far.

   ○ This would require amending the rules of procedure in both Lok Sabha and Rajya sabha.

➤ **Periodic Review:** According to the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), DRSCs should be periodically reviewed so that the committees which have outlived their utility can be replaced with new ones. For example:

   ○ Standing Committee on National Economy to provide analysis of the national economy with resources for advisory expertise, data gathering, and research facilities.

   ○ Standing Constitution Committee to scrutinize Constitutional Amendment Bills before they are introduced in Parliament.

Conclusion

Mandating scrutiny for the significant bills passed is by no means a hurdle to the legislative process, rather it is necessary to uphold the quality of legislation, and by extension, the quality of governance. Thus, a strong parliamentary committee system is required to ensure Parliament's sanctity in the law-making process.

■■■

Suez Canal Blockade

This article is based on "Suez crisis and the fragility of global trade" which was published in The Hindustan Times on 28/03/2021. It talks about the issues emanating out of the blockade of Suez canal.

Tags: Indian Polity, GS Paper - 2, Parliament, Indian Constitution

Recently, the **Suez Canal,** one of the world's most critical transit routes, got blocked due to a large container vessel, the MV Ever Given. This has caused enormous disruption to global shipping.

This temporary closure has been very expensive for global trade, as it is estimated that the loss per hour is almost $400 million. The negative impact on the intricate and delicately balanced global supply-chain and oil prices will impose additional costs on the customer globally.

Suez canal closure leads to a cascading downstream disruption of trade and economic consequences. This aspect points to the fragility of global trade and needs to strengthen them.

Suez Canal: Background

➤ The origins of the Suez Canal go back to the ancient period and the first waterway was dug during the reign of Senusret III Pharaoh of Egypt (1874 BC).

   ○ However, this rudimentary canal was abandoned due to silting and reopened several times in the intervening centuries.

➤ The modern Suez was built in the mid-19th century through efforts by the French and opened for navigation on November 17, 1869.

➤ In 1858, the Universal Suez Ship Canal Company was tasked to construct and operate the canal for 99 years, after which rights would be handed to the Egyptian government.

➤ Located in Egypt, the artificial sea-level waterway was built between 1859 and 1869 linking the **Mediterranean Sea** and the **Red Sea**.

➤ The Suez Canal is pivotal in connecting Europe and Asia, as it negates the need to navigate around the

Cape of Good Hope in Africa and thus cutting distances by up to 7,000 km.

➢ The Suez Canal put Egypt at a strategic junction between Asia and Europe. In the wave of assertion by colonies and quasi-colonies, Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the canal in 1956.

  ❍ In order to protect the corporate interests that hinged on the Canal, Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt. This war was termed the Suez **Crisis 1956.**

Significance of the Suez Canal

➢ **Enabler for Colonisation:** The construction of the Suez Canal was a **tectonic development** for global maritime connectivity and impacted colonial history in a definitive manner.

  ❍ The rise of the British Empire was enabled considerably by this canal.

➢ **Life-line of Global Trade:** The canal continues to be the lifeline for all trade between the West and East as 10% of the global trade passes through it every year.

  ❍ The value of goods shipped through the canal is estimated to be $9.5 billion daily and the canal generates a major share of the revenue for the Egyptian government.

➢ **One of Global Choke Points:** The Suez along, with the **Panama canal** (that links the Pacific and Atlantic oceans), are the two most critical canals in the global maritime domain along with the Volga-Don and the Grand Canal (China).

Impact of Suez Closure

➢ The Suez situation could compound issues for a supply chain already under pressure from the pandemic and a surge in buying.

➢ The closure could affect shipments of oil and natural gas from the Mideast to Europe.

Conclusion

It turns out, that while much has changed from 1869 and 1956 - **"data is the new oil"**, after all a large part of the global economy still runs on the very real grooves left by history.

Given the scale of the consequences of both fiscal and supply-chain disruption — the need to objectively review existing procedures and protocols specific to the Suez merits the highest priority.

Alternative route for shipping while Suez Canal blocked

— Using Suez Canal
10,000 nautical miles
(18,520km)

25.5 days*

— Around Cape of Good Hope
13,500 nautical miles
(25,002km)

34 days*

*Based on ship's average speed of 16.43 knots

Rotterdam, Netherlands

Suez Canal

Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Cape of Good Hope

Source: Vessels Value   BBC

■■■