Liberalisation of the Geo-Spatial Sector

drishtiias.com/printpdf/liberalisation-of-the-geo-spatial-sector

Why in News

Recently, the Ministry of Science and Technology released **new guidelines for the Geo-Spatial Sector** in India, which deregulates existing protocol and **liberalises the sector** to a more competitive field.

Key Points

- **Geo-Spacial Data:**
  - Geospatial data is data about **objects, events, or phenomena that have a location on the surface of the earth.**
    - The location may be static in the short-term, like the **location of a road,** an **earthquake** event, **malnutrition** among children, or dynamic like a **moving vehicle** or pedestrian, the **spread of an infectious disease.**
  - It combines Information on:
    - **Location,**
    - **Attribute** (the characteristics of the object, event, or phenomena concerned),
    - **Temporal or time.**
  - The past decade has seen an increase in the use of geo-spatial data in daily life with various apps such as **food delivery, e-commerce or even weather apps.**

- **Current State of the Geo-Spatial Sector:**
  - **Strict Restriction:**
    There are **strict restrictions on the collection, storage, use, sale, dissemination** of geo-spatial data and mapping under the current regime.
  - **Renewal:**
    The policy had not been renewed in decades and has been driven by **internal as well as external security concerns.**
  - **Dominated by Government:**
    The sector so far is dominated by the Indian government as well as government-run agencies such as the **Survey of India** and **private companies need to navigate a system of permissions** from different departments of the government (depending on the kind of data to be created) as well as the defence and Home Ministries, to be able to collect, create or disseminate geo-spatial data.
- **New Policy:**
  - **Open Access:**
    Open access to its geospatial data and services, including maps, for all Indian entities, with the **exception of sensitive defence or security-related data.**
  - **Restrictions Removed:**
    Indian corporations and innovators are **no longer subject to restrictions nor do they require prior approvals** before they collect, generate, prepare, disseminate, store, publish, update digital geospatial data and maps within the territory of India.
    There shall be **no requirement for security clearance, licence** or any other restrictions.

- **Reason for Deregulation of Geo-Spacial Data:**
  - **Delayed Projects:**
    - System of acquiring licenses or permission, and the **red tape involved, took months, delaying projects,** especially those that are in mission mode – for both Indian companies as well as government agencies.
    - The deregulation eliminates the requirement of permissions as well as scrutiny, even for security concerns. **Indian companies now can self-attest, conforming to government guidelines** without actually having to be monitored by a government agency- these guidelines therefore place a great deal of trust in Indian entities.
  - **Lack of Data:**
    - There is also a huge lack of data in the country which **impedes planning for infrastructure, development and businesses** which are data-based.
    - The mapping of the entire country, that too with high accuracy, by the Indian government alone could take decades.
    - The government therefore felt an urgent **need to incentivise** the geo-spatial sector for Indian companies and increased investment from private players in the sector.
  - **Changing Needs:**
    - For decades, geo-spatial data has been a priority for strategic reasons and for internal and external security concerns, this priority has seen a shift in the past 15 years.
    - Initially conceptualised as a matter solely concerned with security, geo-spatial data collection was the prerogative of the defence forces and the government.
        - **Geographic Information System (GIS)** mapping was also rudimentary, with the government investing heavily in it after the **Kargil war** highlighted the dependence on foreign data and the need for indigenous sources of data..
    - Geo-spatial data has now become imperative for the government in **planning for infrastructure, development, social development, natural calamities as well as the economy,** with more and more sectors such as agriculture, environment protection, power, water, transportation, communication, health (tracking of diseases, patients, hospitals etc) relying heavily on this data
  - **Global Push:**
    - There has also been a global push for open access to geo-spatial as it affects the lives of ordinary citizens.
    - Large amounts of **geo-spatial data are also available on global platforms,** which makes the regulation of data that is freely available in other countries, untenable.

- **Impact of Deregulation:**
  - **Increased Competitiveness:**
    By liberalising the system, the government will **ensure more players in the field, competitiveness of Indian companies in the global market,** and more accurate data available to both the government to formulate plans and administer, but also for individual Indians.
  - **New Employment:**
    - Startups and businesses can now also use this data in setting up their concerns, especially in the sector of e-commerce or geo-spatial based apps – which in turn will **increase employment in these sectors.**
    - Indian companies will be able to develop indigenous apps.
  - **Increased Public-Private Partnership:**
    There is also likely to be an increase in public-private partnerships with the opening of this sector with data collection companies working with the Indian government on various sectoral projects.
  - **Increased Investment:**
    The government also expects an increase in investment in the geo-spatial sector by companies, and also an increase in export of data to foreign companies and countries, which in turn **will boost the economy.**

Source:TH